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Jacopo Tintoretto

(Venice, 1518–1594, Venice)

Portrait of Tommaso Rangone
(1493–1577)

c.(?)1555–6

oil on canvas

108 x 94.6 cm; 42 ½ x 37 ¼ in

Provenance

Probably, the collection of Tommaso Rangone (1493–1577), Venice, and perhaps listed in his will, drawn up a month before he died in September 1577, as 'imago mea Tintoreti tyanea' (see E. Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas: Gelehrter, Wohltäter and Mäzen', in *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, 9, 1974, p. 52);

Count Melzi d'Eril;

Marchese Zaccaria, Milan;

With Jacob M. Heimann, New York, by 1940;

Anne R. and Amy Putnam, San Diego;

By whom gifted to the Fine Arts Gallery, San Diego, 1950 (inv. no. 1950.113);

By whom sold, Sotheby's, New York, 11 June 2020, lot 1 (as attributed to Tintoretto and workshop), where acquired by the present owner.

Literature

A. Venturi, 'Per il Tintoretto', *L'Arte*, 40, October 1937, pp. 322–3;

H. Tietze, *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting*, exh. cat., Toledo, 1940, cat. no. 58;

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E. P. Richardson, *Masterpieces of Art from European and American Collections*, exh. cat., Detroit, 1941, p. 21, cat. no. 56;
A. Millier, 'San Diego Re-opens Fine Art Academy in Beautiful Balboa Park', *Art Digest*, 22.7, 1 January 1948, p. 9;
J. D. Morse, *Old Masters in America*, New York, 1955, p. 160;
The Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego Catalogue, San Diego, 1960, p. 69;
B. B. Fredericksen, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth Century Italian Paintings*, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 201, 520, 632 (as follower of Jacopo Tintoretto);
E. Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas: Gelehrter, Wohltäter and Mäzen', in *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, 9, 1974, pp. 7–76 (p. 52);
J. Marciari, *Italian, Spanish, and French Paintings before 1850 in the San Diego Museum of Art*, San Diego, 2015, pp. 187–9, no. 37, reproduced (dated c.1577, as a late workshop follower of Tintoretto).

Exhibited

New York, Corona Park, *World's Fair*, 1939–40;
Toledo, Toledo Museum of Art, *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting*, March 1940, no. 58 (as a portrait of Tommaso Rangone);
Detroit, The Detroit Institute of Arts, *Masterpieces of Art from European and American Collections*, 1 April–31 May 1941, no. 56.

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This striking but little-known portrait belonged until recently to the San Diego Museum of Art (inv. 50.113). It was published in 1937, shortly before it left Italy for the United States, by Adolfo Venturi, as a superb example of the work of Tintoretto, 'scintillating with life and intelligence'.¹ More recent verdicts have been less favourable, and at the San Diego Museum it was downgraded to the status of 'Follower of Tintoretto' before being sent for sale at Sotheby's, New York, in 2020.² Since then, however, it has been cleaned and conserved, with results that not only vindicate the enthusiasm expressed by Venturi, but confirm the identification of the sitter as the eminent physician Tommaso Rangone (1493–1577).

Before cleaning, it had been noted that the canvas support had been cut – surprisingly, not at the top or bottom, but at both sides, indicating that the already unusually wide format was originally even wider (although perhaps not by much).³ Conservation involved the removal not only of yellowed varnish, making the image much more legible, but also of disfiguring, later overpaint. This was probably applied with the purpose of bringing the costume to the same level of finish as the head, and it included an awkward attempt to give the crimson robe the texture of brocade. It now appears that the thin and sketchy handling of the costume and background was deliberate on the part of the painter, as a way of lending special emphasis to the more powerfully modelled head and to the finely executed hairs of the moustache and beard. With time, the thinly applied areas have suffered abrasion and in parts have become transparent, so that wipes of the painter's brushes have now become visible at the top right. In addition, the x-radiograph (fig. 1) made during conservation shows that during the course of execution the artist shifted the position of the head from a frontal gaze towards the spectator to the present, more active look to the right. The line of the cheek and the visibility of the neck in the radiograph also suggest that the work was begun as a portrait of a different, much younger sitter, or perhaps of a woman. This re-use of an existing canvas was a frequent practice by Tintoretto, as well as by Titian and other Venetian painters.

Compositionally, the portrait is both typical and atypical of Tintoretto.⁴ In common with some of his finest contributions to the genre is the neutral background, from which the strongly lit figure emerges from a surrounding darkness. There is a minimum of accessories, and

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attention is focused on the powerfully modelled face and hands. More commonly, however, Tintoretto's sitters look outwards at the viewer and fill a vertical field more completely. Also unusual is the effect of incipient movement: shown in three-quarter length, his left arm resting on the arm of his chair, the sitter turns his head to the right and seems about to stand up, as though to greet an arriving visitor. The effect of immediacy is heightened by the unusual and informal detail of the placing of the sitter's spectacles on top of his right ear. This is an unsparingly realistic portrayal of a middle-aged or elderly man, with wrinkled skin above his deep-set eyes, and wispy white hair and beard. But his expression, enquiring and responsive, perfectly complements the vigorous alertness of his pose and communicates a vivid sense of personality.

In 1940, soon after the arrival of the portrait in the United States, it was exhibited with the title *Portrait of Tommaso Rangone*.⁵ An important patron of the architect Jacopo Sansovino (1486–1570) and the sculptor Alessandro Vittoria (1525–1608), as well as of the painter Tintoretto, Rangone was one of the most colourful personalities in Venetian society in the middle of the sixteenth century, and the identification of him as the sitter obviously added considerably to the interest of the portrait. Such identifications can be hazardous, since one elderly, bearded sitter wearing official robes can look often much like another; and the San Diego Museum and the sale catalogue of 2020 were perhaps wise to be cautious in accepting the idea too readily. Yet Rangone's features are exceptionally well documented in the various works of art he commissioned, from medals to busts (fig. 2), and from a full-length statue (fig. 3) to painted donor portraits (fig. 4). All of these consistently show him, as here, with a middle-length, squarish beard and a bulbous nose. The red gown, or toga, is somewhat less distinctive. With its large, open, fur-lined sleeves, known as *manege dogali*, it is of a type worn by the highest patrician officials in the Venetian government; but its use was not governed by strict rules, and Rangone would have been just one of many wealthy and prominent members of the citizen class who adopted it. Somewhat more telling is the prominent display on the sitter's left hand of two large gold rings inset with precious stones. Rangone is known to have had a particular passion for jewels, and in his will he specified that his body on his funeral bier should be displayed wearing no less than five such rings.⁶ But clinching evidence that the sitter in the present portrait is indeed Rangone is provided by

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another item of jewellery: the gold pendant shown hanging from a chain round his neck. Although executed very sketchily, this clearly shows a cross above a winged Lion of Saint Mark, the emblem of the Scuola di San Marco. The same emblem, with the wings spread out like a fan, appears on the carved wooden ceiling of the Scuola's Chapter Hall (fig. 5), a room for which Rangone commissioned Tintoretto to paint three large-scale narrative paintings during his year in office as Guardian Grande (presiding officer) of the Scuola in 1562.

Rangone was born Tommaso Giannotti in 1493 in Ravenna, a city not part of the Venetian mainland empire but of the papal states.⁷ Although from a modest social background, he was from the beginning highly ambitious and studied classics and philosophy before graduating in medicine from the University of Bologna in 1516. During the 1520s, he was employed in Modena both as a physician and as an astrologer by Count Guido Rangone, in whose honour he adopted his official surname. In 1532, he moved to Venice, where he became very wealthy as a medical practitioner, advising prominent individuals as well as such institutions as the Venetian navy. He also raised his public profile by taking advantage of the Venetian printing press to publish numerous treatises on such subjects as the treatment of syphilis and, more generally, on how to maintain a healthy life through diet, exercise and fresh air. He made himself much in demand for his expertise on herbal remedies, particularly those derived from exotic plants imported from the New World. His achievements were officially recognised by the Venetian government in 1562, when he was created a Knight of Saint Mark, and in 1572 by the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, who created him a count palatine. Presumably, his remedies were considered to be effective; certainly, he himself lived a long life, and he died in Venice in 1577, at the age of eighty-four.

In his adoptive city, Rangone was highly active as a philanthropist and in public service. In 1552, he founded a college in Padua for thirty-two students from poor backgrounds to enable them to achieve a university education. He served as lay procurator for several Venetian parish churches and convents, acting as their legal representative and helping to manage their financial affairs.⁸ In the case of two of the parish churches, San Geminiano (situated very close to his house in Piazza San Marco) and San Giuliano (situated nearby, in the Mercerie, on the way from the Piazza to Rialto), he undertook to pay from his own

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pocket the entire cost of having new classicising façades erected to designs by Sansovino.⁹ The chancel of San Giuliano also became the site of his burial chapel. He served three terms as Guardian Grande of two of the great devotional confraternities – the Scuola Grande di San Marco, in 1562 and again in 1568, and the Scuola Grande di San Teodoro in 1563 – an office that carried major financial and philanthropic responsibilities, as well as high social prestige. At the Scuola di San Marco, he similarly made the exceptionally generous gesture of funding the three large-scale narrative paintings by Tintoretto. In 1548, the Scuola had employed the painter to embark on an extensive cycle depicting posthumous miracles performed by its patron saint, beginning with the *Miracle of the Slave* (now Accademia, Venice). But, as so often happened with Scuola commissions, progress on the larger project was delayed by inadequate institutional funds, and when Rangone was elected in 1562, the *Miracle of the Slave* was still the only canvas in place. Now, in the space of just two or three years, Tintoretto added three more canvases to the cycle.

Rangone's benefactions came, however, with a certain cost to their recipients. All of his commissions show an obsessive concern with self-promotion by having portraits of himself displayed in some of the most prominent sites in the city. Traditionally, Venetians were suspicious of any attempt at self-promotion by individuals, and the government encouraged a corporate ethos, according to which all the members of a particular social class were equal. During the course of the sixteenth century, this ethos was gradually eroded, as some families – not only from the patrician but especially also from the citizen class – chose increasingly ostentatious forms of art patronage. But now Rangone, who was neither a patrician nor even a native Venetian, sought to test convention to the limit. When offering to fund the new façade of San Geminiano in 1552, he attempted to have a statue of himself placed there. This attempt was foiled by the Senate, which could not accept the placing of the statue of an individual at the very heart of the Republic, in the Piazza, directly opposite the venerable basilica of San Marco. A year later, however, he succeeded in gaining permission to have his statue placed on an only slightly less prominent site, the façade of San Giuliano; and in 1559, the full-length bronze by Vittoria (fig. 3), cast in 1557, was put in place above the main portal.¹⁰ Seated like a gowned professor in his chair, Rangone is shown holding a large tome in one hand and a branch of a medicinal plant in the other,

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surrounded by more books, a celestial and a terrestrial globe and other objects of learning. But Rangone never abandoned his desire to commemorate himself in his own parish church, and in 1571 he was given permission to have another bronze by Vittoria, in bust format with all its connotations of antique Rome (fig. 2), placed above the side door of the church.¹¹

When elected Guardian Grande of the Scuola di San Marco in 1562, Rangone once again tried to have a statue of himself placed on the exterior of the confraternity building, and once more he was rebuffed. The governing board could not, however, resist his offer to commission from Tintoretto the three scenes of miracles of Saint Mark, respectively the *Removal of the Body from the Pyre* (fig. 4), the *Finding of the Body* (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan), and *Saint Mark Rescuing a Saracen from Shipwreck* (Accademia, Venice).¹² All three are treated in terms of high drama, with the tempestuous movement of the figures complemented by spectacular effects both of perspective and of lighting. Yet in all three, at the very centre of the action, Tintoretto places the anachronistic figure of Rangone, wearing his rich ceremonial robes and actively assisting the historical actors, or passionately responding to the miraculous events. It was perfectly traditional for the narrative cycles painted for lay confraternities to include portraits of the officers who had commissioned them; but in such cases, there were usually several of these anachronistic figures, as if to express their corporate responsibility, and they were placed to the side, as passive witnesses. The prominence given here to a single donor was completely unprecedented, and it was clearly the result of Rangone's insistence, as a just acknowledgement of his funding of the three canvases. It is true that, as portrayed by Tintoretto, it is possible to interpret the figure of the donor as an inspiring model of piety for contemporary viewers to imitate. In the *Removal*, for example, Rangone is shown tenderly cradling the head of the martyred saint, providing Mark with a sort of counterpart of Joseph of Arimathea in scenes of Christ's Deposition.¹³ At the same time, it is not difficult to imagine that not all of the members of the confraternity felt equally inspired, and that many of them found the prominence of Rangone unpleasantly obtrusive. In 1573, in fact, after he had left office, the governing board had the three canvases removed from the Chapter Hall and sent to his house. He immediately returned them, whereupon they were sent instead to the artist, so that he could eliminate the offending figure. This would obviously have been to the detriment

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of his compositions, and, in the end, the canvases were reinstated in the Chapter Hall without alteration. But Rangone naturally took deep offence at the ingratitude of his confrères, and the episode marks the end of his association with the Scuola.

There is plenty of evidence that, in addition to these portraits incorporated into narrative scenes, Tintoretto and his associates painted a number of autonomous portraits of Rangone. Several survive, while three more are mentioned in his long and detailed will, drawn up just a month before he died in September 1577.¹⁴ Two of these cannot be identical with the present portrait, since one of them showed him wearing the golden gown of a Knight of Saint Mark, and another was not by Tintoretto himself but by his follower Domenico Molino.¹⁵ The third, however, is described as ‘*imago mea Tintoreti tyanea*’ – in other words, Tintoretto portrayed him wearing, as here, the colour described by the Venetians as *pavonazzo*, the wine-red of crimson (as opposed to scarlet), adopted by many senators and other high-ranking officials, and it may well correspond to the present work. This, in any case, may now be regarded as easily the finest of the autonomous portraits, and while it successfully conveys the sitter’s social dignity, it also communicates a strong sense of the close and warm personal relationship that must have existed between patron and painter. Here, in fact, there is little suggestion of Rangone’s self-promoting vanity; rather, he comes across as the kindly philanthropist that he also was.

Tintoretto’s portraits are often difficult to date on internal stylistic grounds, and this is especially true of the present portrait, which, as has been seen, is in many respects unusual in his activity as a portraitist. Around 1562–4, when he must also have made a number of sketches for Rangone’s portrait in the narrative canvases, might seem a likely date; yet Rangone appears somewhat younger in the present work, and it is equally possible that it dates from a few years earlier, perhaps around the time that Vittoria was preparing his wax model for the bronze statue on the exterior of San Giuliano in 1556 (fig. 3). In pose, in fact, the statue is rather similar to the painted portrait: seated, the head turned slightly to his left, his left arm resting on the arm of his chair. The similarity raises the further possibility that Tintoretto produced the painted portrait primarily as a guide for the sculptor – a circumstance that might also account for the concentration on the head at the expense of the costume.¹⁶

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At any rate, the mid-1550s is a plausible date for the present work by stylistic analogy with other portraits by Tintoretto datable to this phase, such as *Portrait of a Man with a White Beard* in Vienna (fig. 6).¹⁷

This *Portrait of Tommaso Rangone* is not mentioned by Tintoretto's seventeenth-century biographer, Carlo Ridolfi, and its modern history goes back only as far as the middle of the nineteenth century. According to the records of the San Diego Museum, before the painting arrived in the United States in 1939/40 it was owned by a 'Marchese Zaccaria' of Milan, and before him, a 'Count Melzi d'Eril'.¹⁸ When publishing it in 1937, Venturi described it simply as belonging to a 'Private Collection', perhaps still referring to Zaccaria or, more probably, to an intermediary dealer. This Milanese marquis must be the Marchese Guiscardo Zaccaria (born in 1887), whose mother, Carolina, was the daughter of Count Giacomo Melzi d'Eril (1827–1875). From this it may be deduced that Zaccaria inherited the portrait from his maternal grandfather. Count Giacomo was a direct descendant of the very distinguished eighteenth-century collector Count Francesco Saverio Melzi (1699–1776), and it is possible that the portrait formed part of his collection. However, several other members of the Melzi clan were likewise keen collectors, including perhaps Count Giacomo, and, for the time being, this provenance must remain no more than a hypothesis.

Professor Peter Humfrey

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Figure 1. X-radiograph of Jacopo Tintoretto's *Portrait of Tommaso Rangone (1493–1577)*.

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Figure 2. Alessandro Vittoria, *Portrait Bust of Tommaso Rangone (1493–1577)*.
Bronze, c.1575. Ateneo Veneto, Venice
© Cameraphoto Atre, Venice

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Figure 3. Alessandro Vittoria, *Statue of Tommaso Rangone (1493–1577)*.

Bronze, 1555–7. Façade of San Giuliano, Venice

© Cameraphoto Atre, Venice

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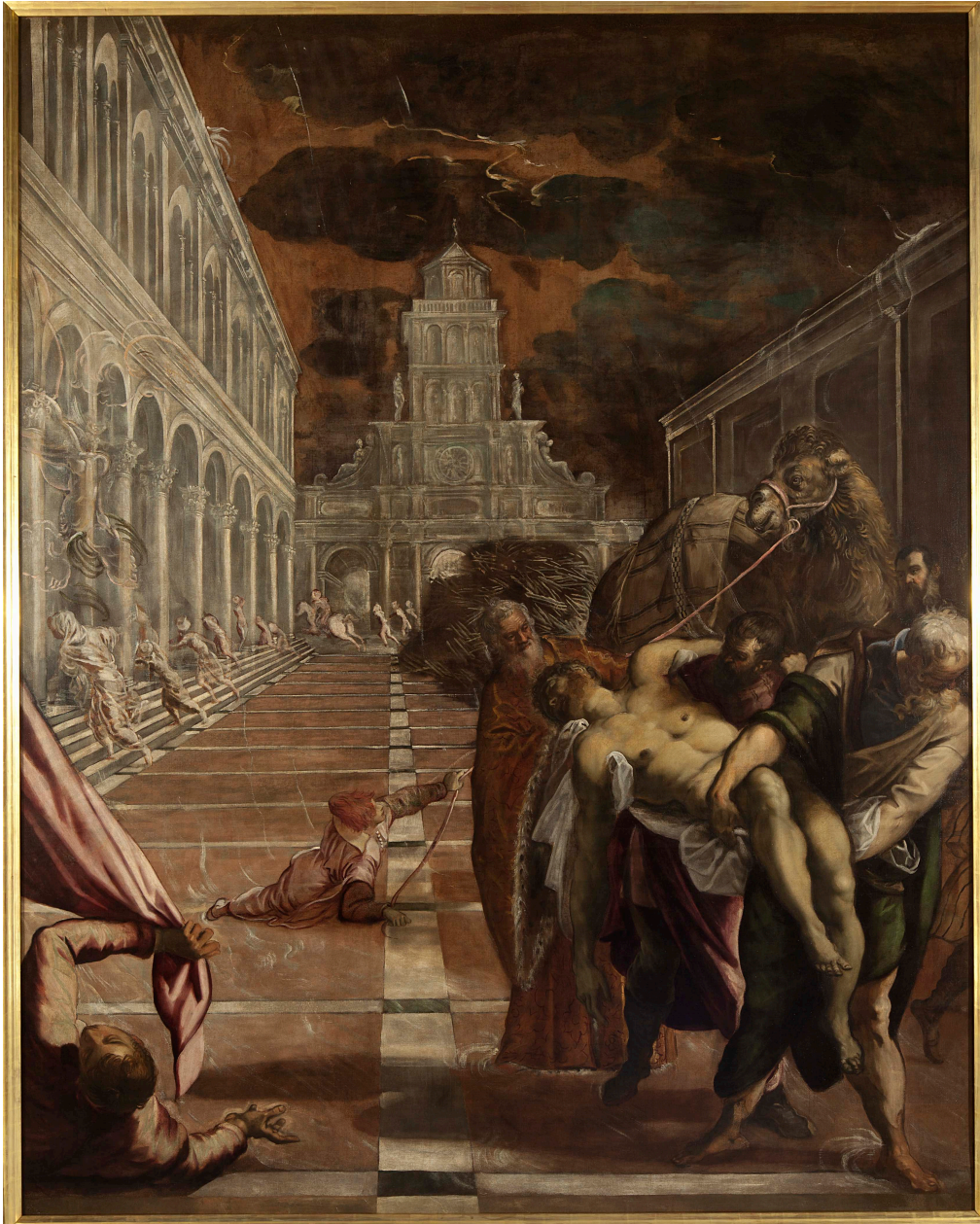


Figure 4. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Removal of the Body of Saint Mark from the Funeral Pyre*.
Oil on canvas, 1562–6. © Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice - Ministry of Culture

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Figure 5. Vettor da Feltre, *Lion of Saint Mark*.

Gilt and polychrome wood, 1519. From the ceiling of the Chapter Hall, Scuola Grande di San Marco, Venice

© Cameraphoto Atre, Venice

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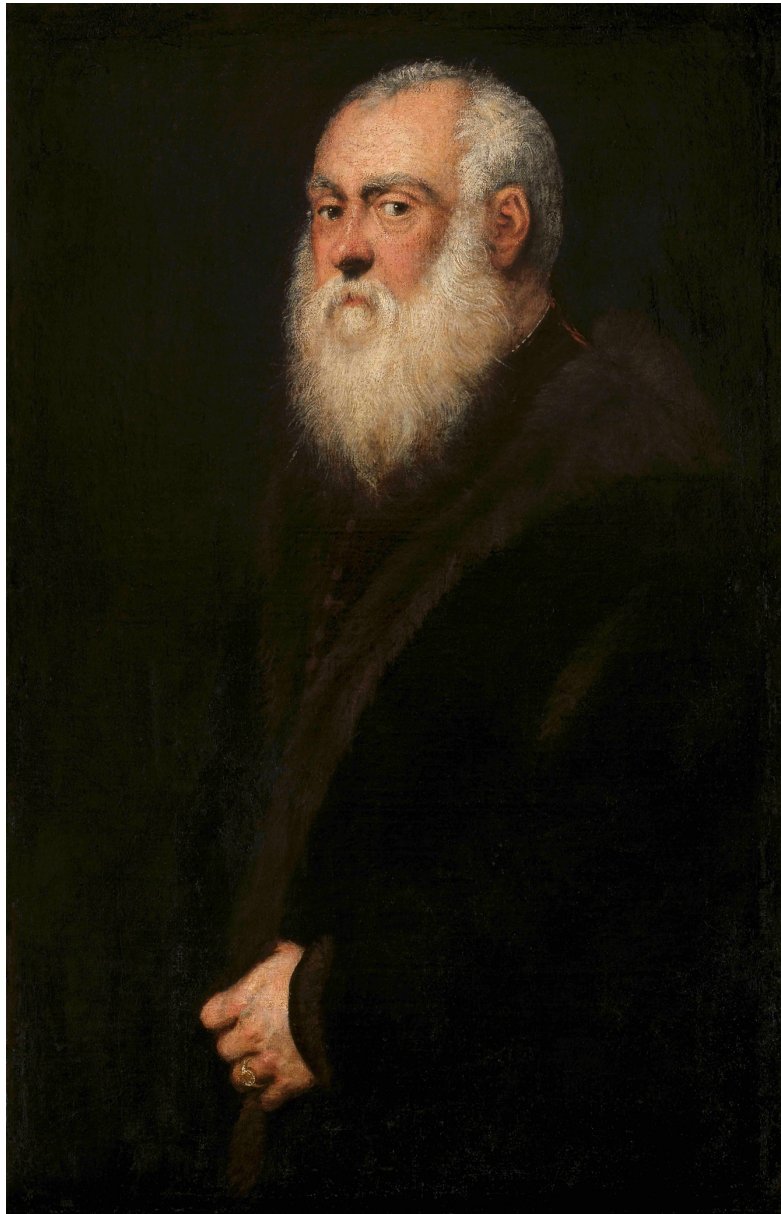


Figure 6. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a Man with a White Beard*.
Oil on canvas, c.1555. © Kunshistorisches Museum, Vienna

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Footnotes

¹ A. Venturi, 'Per il Tintoretto', *L'Arte*, 40, October 1937, pp. 322–3.

² B. B. Fredericksen and F. Zeri, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, pp. 201, 520, 632; E. Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas: Gelehrter, Wohltäter and Mäzen', *Saggi e Memorie di Storia dell'Arte*, 9, 1974, pp. 7–76 (p. 52); J. Marciari, *Italian, Spanish and French Paintings before 1850 in the San Diego Museum of Art*, San Diego, 2015, pp. 187–9; Sotheby's, New York, 11 June 2020, lot 1. It was not included in the standard catalogue of Tintoretto's portraits: Paola Rossi, *Jacopo Tintoretto: I Ritratti*, Milan 1982.

³ Marciari, *Italian, Spanish and French Paintings before 1850*.

⁴ For a recent discussion of Tintoretto as a portrait painter, see R. Echols and F. Ilchman, 'Portraitist', in R. Echols and F. Ilchman (eds), *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, exh. cat., Washington, D.C., 2018–19, pp. 144–69.

⁵ H. Tietze, *Four Centuries of Venetian Painting*, Toledo, 1940, no. 58.

⁶ Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas', pp. 54–5.

⁷ The fundamental account of Rangone's life is in Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas', pp. 7–76. See also, most recently, S. Minuzzi, 'Tommaso Giannotti Rangone: A Life Modeled on Books and (not just medical) Art', in *Art, Faith and Medicine in Tintoretto's Venice*, ed. G. Matino and C. Klestinec, Venice, 2018, pp. 42–57.

⁸ For Rangone as a lay Procurator, see A. Sherman, "'Soli Deo honor et gloria'? Lay Procurator Patronage and the Art of Identity Formation in Renaissance Venice', in N. Avcioglu and E. Jones (eds), *Architecture, Art and Identity in Venice and its Territories, 1450–1750*, Farnham and Burlington, Vt., 2013, pp. 15–32 (pp. 20–25).

⁹ For Rangone as a patron of Sansovino, see D. Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven and London, 1975, pp. 81, 84–6.

¹⁰ B. Boucher, *The Sculpture of Jacopo Sansovino*, New Haven and London, 1991, pp. 113–19, 338–9; T. Martin, *Alessandro Vittoria and the Portrait Bust in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford, 1998, pp. 39–42; M. Gaier, *Facciate sacre a scopo profano*, Venice, 2002, pp. 207–36.

¹¹ Martin, *Alessandro Vittoria and the Portrait Bust*, pp. 123–4.

¹² T. Nichols, *Tintoretto: Tradition and Identity*, London, 1999, pp. 137–45; A. Corneloup, 'Le Corps de Saint Marc et celui de Rangone: Ou le principe d'imitation selon Tintoret', *Studiolo*, 2, 2003, pp. 107–37.

¹³ Corneloup, 'Le Corps de Saint Marc', pp. 123–8.

¹⁴ Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas', pp. 51–2.

¹⁵ Weddigen, 'Thomas Philologus Ravennas', p. 52, tentatively identified this portrait by Molino with the present work, but on the basis of a photograph of it in its overpainted state.

¹⁶ This and other helpful suggestions were generously made to me by Roland Krischel. For a comparable instance within the Tintoretto workshop of the use of an unfinished sketch as a model for a sculptor, see R. Krischel, 'Porträt eines Diplomaten: Jacopo Tintoretto's Bildnis des Paolo Tiepolo', *Wallraf-Richarz-Jahrbuch*, 73, 2012, pp. 107–58 (pp. 134–6).

¹⁷ Echols and Ilchman, 'Portraitist', p. 148.

¹⁸ Marciari, *Italian, Spanish and French Paintings before 1850*, p. 187; Sotheby's sale catalogue, 2020.