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A detailed oil painting of a man with a full, dark beard and mustache, wearing a dark cap and a dark, heavy coat with a thick, brown fur collar. The man is looking slightly to the right of the viewer. The background is dark and indistinct.

Jacopo Robusti, called Tintoretto,
Portrait of a Man, c. 1549-1550

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JACOPO ROBUSTI, called TINTORETTO
(Venice 1518 - 1594)

PORTRAIT OF A MAN, c. 1549-1550

Oil on canvas.
63 x 49 cm.; 24 3/4 x 19 1/4 in

Provenance

From the 1920s, private collection, Lyon;
Thence by descent.



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We are grateful to Dr Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo for the scholarly identification of this rediscovered portrait by Jacopo Tintoretto.

The portrait presented here, unpublished and recently discovered, stands among the most compelling examples of male portraiture by Jacopo Tintoretto to survive. In the absence of early provenance, the attribution rests on stylistic, technical and comparative evidence which convincingly identify the work as autograph and support a date of *circa* 1549-50. Until recently, the painting's legibility was compromised by old restorations: extensive repainting in the background altered the profile of the sitter's hat, while layers of oxidised varnish distorted the original chromatic balance. The removal of these interventions has revealed a surface whose quality now leaves no doubt as to the authorship.

Technical examination of the work has proved to be very revealing. X-radiography (conducted by Thierry Radelet) disclosed the reuse of the canvas and the presence beneath the visible image of a female head inclined downwards (Fig. 1). Further analysis shows alterations in the profile of the nose, the absence of a hat and indications of a different costume (Fig. 2). Such *pentimenti* are entirely consistent with Tintoretto's practice, in which supports were frequently repurposed and figures rethought during execution. This working method is also observed in a portrait from the same period, now in a private collection in New York, also recently published by Dal Pozzolo¹ (Fig. 3).

Along with the New York picture, the present work is very comparable to the *Portrait of a Man* in Christ Church, Oxford (Fig. 4) - all three date to the later 1540s and belong to the moment of Tintoretto's most intense engagement with Titian (particularly in the years 1545-50). Titian's portraits of *Daniele Barbaro* (c. 1544-45, Prado Museum, Madrid), *Pietro Aretino* (1545, Palazzo Pitti, Florence), *Niccolò Zen* (1545-50, Kingston Lacy, England) and *Antonio Anselmi* (Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid) stand as immediate models for compositional gravity, controlled illumination and psychological authority. In these works, the sitter is brought forward with imposing clarity, the background reduced to a neutral field so that attention falls entirely on the architecture of the head and the exchange of glances. Tintoretto adopts this concentration of means, but translates it into a language of greater urgency: contours tighten, the modelling becomes more abrupt, and the sense of a mind at work behind the features grows more palpable. The present painting belongs squarely within this moment of competitive emulation, when the younger master sought not merely to follow Titian, but to rival him on his own terrain.

¹ E.M. Dal Pozzolo, F. Corberi, *The Fascinating Story of a Hidden Masterpiece by Tintoretto*, London 2023.

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Shown half-length against a dark ground, the sitter, probably in his forties, wears clothing of evident quality without overt display, consistent with an individual of elevated social standing. Character is conveyed through restraint: the tightened mouth, the steady gaze, the alert intelligence. Tintoretto animates the physiognomy through subtle tonal contrasts, setting the dark mass of hair, beard and lashes against a luminous flesh. The turn of the head, held in three-quarters, creates a compact block of form that presses forward into the viewer's space, while the rapid transitions from highlight to shadow give the features a tensile energy. Nothing is superfluous; every touch contributes to the impression of concentrated presence. The painting thus achieves an intensity that stands apart from Tintoretto's earlier, more exploratory likenesses and from the broader, more summary handling that would soon characterise parts of his later production. The classification of Tintoretto's portraits was first attempted by Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi in their catalogue raisonné of the master's portraits (published in 1974 and reissued in 1990); the fundamental inadequacy of the results of that catalogue have now been acknowledged, and the reconstruction of the corpus of portraits has recently been reestablished on new foundations. In particular, it has become clear that from the mid-1540s onwards, Tintoretto progressively measured himself against Titian, moving away from the brilliant, rapid manner cultivated in his close relationship with Andrea Schiavone and toward a mode of portraiture defined by structural authority and psychological depth.

A sequence of dated paintings clarifies this development. Between the portrait of *Niccolò Doria* (private collection, 1545) and the *Portrait of a Twenty-five-year-old Man* (Royal Collection, London) painted that same year, through to two portraits in Otterlo and Stuttgart (painted in 1547 and 1548 respectively), Tintoretto draws ever closer to Titian's authority (Figs. 5-8). The Oxford, New York and present portraits, though undated, are more concentrated in handling and must follow these examples, while preceding the freer execution of the early 1550s, visible in his portrait of *Jacopo Soranzo* (Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice) and the *Portrait of a Thirty-five-year-old Man* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Figs. 9, 10).

Taken together, the portraits in New York and Oxford, along with the present work, define a moment of extraordinary concentration in Tintoretto's activity around the end of the 1540s. Within this small sequence, the painter refines his response to Titian with increasing assurance, moving from experiment toward mastery. Dal Pozzolo places the present canvas at the culmination of this trajectory and proposes a date of *circa* 1549-50. Here the dialogue with Titian is no longer tentative but fully internalised - the structure is firmer, the psychology more compressed, and the execution at once daring and controlled.

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Fig. 1. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a man*, X-ray image, graphic elaboration with the layer of the female figure in evidence.



Fig. 2. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a man*, X-ray image, graphic elaboration with the layer of the portrait in evidence

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Fig. 3. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a man*, oil on canvas.
New York, private collection.

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Fig. 4. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a man*, oil on canvas.
Oxford, Christ Church.

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Fig. 5. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of Nicolò Doria*, 1545, oil on canvas. Private collection.

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Fig. 6. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a Twenty-five-year-old Man*, 1545, oil on canvas. London, Royal Collection.

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Fig. 7. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a Twenty-six-year-old Man*, 1547, oil on canvas. Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum.

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Fig. 8. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a Twenty-eight-year-old Man*, 1548, oil on canvas. Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie.

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Fig. 9. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of Jacopo Soranzo*, 1550, oil on canvas. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia.

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Fig. 10. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a Thirty-five-year-old Man (Lorenzo Sorano)*, 1553, oil on canvas. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

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