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



North Italian 16th Century (Possibly Gian Paolo Pace)
North Italian 16th Century

Gian Paolo Pace
Italian, 1528 - 1560

Alessandro Alberti with a Page

possibly 1544/1545

oil on canvas
overall: 124.2 x 102.7 cm (48 7/8 x 40 7/16 in.)
framed: 163.5 x 141.9 x 8.6 cm (64 3/8 x 55 7/8 x 3 3/8 in.)
Inscription: center left on folded paper: Alessandro Alberti l'anno XXX / della sua eta ... / s [or l] ritrasse nel 15 ... / In Venetia. (Alessandro Alberti the thirtieth year of his age...portrayed in 15...In Venice)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.80

ENTRY

Despite the circumstantial information provided by the inscription, the attribution of the portrait remains problematic. To the difficulty of identifying the artist on grounds of style is added the fact that the second half of the second line, which was almost certainly originally inscribed with the painter's name and the date, has been completely effaced—perhaps deliberately, to make way for the false signature "Paolo Cagliari [Paolo Veronese] 1557" that had been inserted by 1856. [1] Nevertheless, from the authentic parts of the inscription, it is safe to infer the following: that the name of the sitter was Alessandro Alberti; that the portrait was painted when he was 30; and that it was painted in Venice.

On this basis, Ettore Camesasca connected the portrait with a letter written by Pietro Aretino to Alessandro Alberti in 1548, in which the author mentions that Alberti, in common with the Venetian patricians Niccolò Tiepolo and Daniele Barbaro, had had his portrait painted by Gian Paolo Pace. [2] This somewhat obscure artist was unfortunately confused by Camesasca, followed by other scholars, with Gian Paolo Lolmo, who is documented in the area of Bergamo between 1581 and 1595, with whose style the present work has nothing in common. [3] More recently, however, the biography of Pace has been clarified, with new documentary information, by Mattia Biffis, the essentials of which may be

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summarized as follows. [4] The painter was first recorded in Venice in 1528, but by the 1530s he was active in Padua, where he seems to have remained based for the rest of his life. In 1543 he made a brief trip across the Alps to Augsburg, apparently following a recommendation by Aretino to the Fugger family that he was an able portraitist. Probably soon afterward he painted the portraits of Tiepolo, Barbaro, and Alberti, and in 1545, at the time of Titian's visit to Rome, Pace painted a posthumous portrait of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere (Uffizi, Florence), father of Cosimo de' Medici, duke of Florence, as a pendant to Titian's portrait of Aretino (Pitti, Florence), likewise intended as a diplomatic gift to the duke. In 1553, still in his capacity as a painter of courtly portraits, Pace sent an unspecified number from Padua to Alfonso Gonzaga, lord of a little court at Novellara, in Emilia. In about 1558 he began, but did not apparently complete, the pair of portraits of Irene and Emilia di Spilimbergo, now also in the National Gallery of Art. By this date, however, he had secured for himself a valuable ecclesiastical benefice that seems to have liberated him from having to earn his living as a full-time painter.

In his 2012 article, Biffis also established for the first time the identity of Alessandro Alberti. It was already clear from Aretino's correspondence that a gentleman of this name was the recipient of nine letters from him between November 1544 and October 1550, and Alberti is mentioned in a further four letters to other correspondents. From these it emerges that he was a "creato"—in other words, a member of the entourage—of Giovanni della Casa, apostolic legate to Venice during this period of six years. [5] Aretino addresses him affectionately, even paternally, calling him "il mio caro" and "figliuolo," and offers him personal advice. But Biffis has now also shown that Alessandro was a member of the same Florentine noble family as the celebrated architect and humanist Leon Battista Alberti, that he was born in 1514 and died in 1554, that he belonged to a fiercely republican branch of the family, and that he lived mainly in Rome as an exile from ducal Florence. If he is, indeed, the subject of the Gallery's portrait, it must have been painted between his arrival in Venice and his 31st birthday—in other words, between October 1544 and March 1545. Although the whereabouts of the portrait are mysterious for three centuries after it was painted, it is probably no accident that it should have reemerged in modern times in Florence.

For Biffis the circumstantial evidence surrounding the presence of Alberti in Venice fit the Gallery's portrait perfectly, and he fully endorsed Camesasca's identification of Pace as its author. He further plausibly argued that the falsified name of "Paolo Cagliari" on the sheet of paper was inspired by the original signature "Gian Paolo

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Pace," which was probably effaced by some unscrupulous dealer in the 19th century, with the probable purpose of transferring the authorship of the portrait from a minor, unknown artist to one of the most famous of Venetian painters. A problem, however, with accepting Pace's authorship is that the other three surviving paintings by him—the *Giovanni dalle Bande Nere* and the pair of Spilimbergo portraits—bear very little stylistic resemblance to that of the *Alessandro Alberti*. These other portraits are much closer in style to Titian, whereas on the purely visual evidence, the *Alberti* has been variously thought to be Flemish, [6] Emilian, [7] or Lombard. [8] Indeed, the sharp, factual precision of the handling of the costume is far from typically Venetian, and the physiognomical type of the subsidiary figure bears some resemblance, as was recognized by Fern Rusk Shapley, to works by Parmese painters, such as Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli. [9] Yet as pointed out by Biffis, Pace was never, contrary to what is usually thought, an assistant in Titian's workshop, but practiced rather as a portrait painter in Padua; and while the Titianesque style of the *Giovanni dalle Bande Nere* and the Spilimbergo portraits may be interpreted as a response to the needs of particular commissions, it can be argued that Pace's own character as a portrait painter is more faithfully reflected by the *Alessandro Alberti*. It may certainly be imagined that the rich costume and self-conscious elegance of the portrait give a good idea of his lost portraits for the Fuggers and for the court at Novellara. The courtly aspect of the image is further emphasized by the subsidiary figure of the page, who is occupied in lacing Alberti's breeches to his doublet. Biffis has pointed to similar figures in Titian's *Alfonso d'Avalos* of circa 1533 (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles) and Beccaruzzi's *Ball-Player* of circa 1540 (Staatliche Museen, Berlin); a later example is Paris Bordone's *Portrait of a Man in Armor with Two Pages* of circa 1555 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

For many scholars it may still be difficult to accept that the *Alessandro Alberti*, on the one hand, and the *Giovanni dalle Bande Nere* and the Spilimbergo portraits, on the other, are by the same artist. Further, it cannot be excluded that the purportedly apocryphal date of "1557," now removed, in fact recorded a correct date—especially since it can be argued that the costume worn by the sitter corresponds better to the fashions of the later 1550s than to 1544/1545. [10] Yet to reject the attribution to Pace would be to conclude that the sitter represents an unidentified, quite different Alessandro Alberti from the one who was present in Venice in the entourage of the papal legate between 1544 and 1550, and who died in 1554; and it would also be to draw the improbable conclusion that this namesake, who also happened to be aged 30 when he visited Venice a decade

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later, likewise had his portrait painted there by a painter whose style did not belong to local tradition.

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NOTES

[1] See Provenance and also Otto Mündler, "The Travel Diaries of Otto Mündler 1855–1858," ed. Carol Togneri Dowd, *Walpole Society* 51 (1985): 131–132, 327; Elvira Grifi, *Saunterings in Florence: A New Artistic and Practical Handbook for English and American Tourists* (Florence, 1896), 385, as "*Paolo Veronese*, Portrait (1557)"; Wilhelm von Bode, *The Art Collection of Mr. Alfred Beit* (Berlin, 1904), 5–6, 55 (recording the falsification of the signature).

[2] For Aretino's letter, see Ettore Camesasca, ed., *Lettere sull'arte di Pietro Aretino, commentate da Fidenzio Pertile* (Milan, 1957), 2:220–221; Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Rome, 2000), 4:319–320, no. 521. For other mentions of Pace in Aretino's correspondence, see Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Procaccioli (1999), 3:332–334, no. 377; 354, no. 405; 375–376, no. 441; 468–469, no. 615. For the attribution to Pace, see Camesasca, *Lettere sull'arte di Pietro Aretino* (1960), 3:396–397. It was accepted by Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano* (Florence, 1969), 1:221, 223, but was rejected by Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XVI–XVIII Century* (London, 1973), 26–27 (see also Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* [Washington, DC, 1979], 1:355–357); Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo, "La 'bottega' di Tiziano: Sistema solare e buco nero," *Studi Tizianeschi* 4 (2006): 80–81; and by Bernard Aikema and John Martin, in *Le botteghe di Tiziano* (Florence, 2009), 346.

[3] Burton Fredericksen and Federico Zeri, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 152, 509, 647; Maria Grazia Ciardi Duprè, "Gian Paolo Lolmo," in *I pittori bergamaschi*, vol. 4, *Il Cinquecento* (Bergamo, 1975), 34.

[4] Mattia Biffis, "Di Zuan Paolo Pace, chierico e laico," *Studi Tizianeschi* 7 (2012): 48–67. See also Giulio Zavatta, "Alfonso Gonzaga di Novellara committente di Giovanni Paolo Pace, e il tentative di acquisto di un dipinto di Tiziano tramite il miniature Antonio Bernieri da Correggio," *Studi Tizianeschi* 8 (2012): 99–109.

[5] Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, 6 vols. (Rome, 1997–2002), 3:129, no. 111; 4:96, no. 134, 105, no. 152, 135, no. 195, 212, no. 339, 261, no.

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419, 306–307, no. 494, 314–315, no. 509, 319–320, no. 521, 357–358, no. 558, 363–364, no. 594; 5:374–375, no. 471, 466, no. 592; 6:146–147, no. 148.

[6] Ferdinando Bologna, "Un doppio ritratto di Tiziano, inedito," *Arte Veneta* 11 (1957): 70 n. 3, attributed the portrait to the Bruges painter Pieter Pourbus (c. 1523/1524–1584), by comparison with a signed *Allegory of Love* in the Wallace Collection, London (no. 531). But the stylistic relationship is only very general, and Pourbus is not known to have visited Italy.

[7] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XVI–XVIII Century* (London, 1973), 26–27 (also Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* [Washington, DC, 1979], 1:355–357), who lists a number of other inconclusive attributions proposed by earlier scholars, labeled the portrait "Parmese School." She suggested that a point of departure both for the style and the composition is provided by the *Portrait of Camilla Gonzaga, Countess of San Secondo and Her Three Sons* (Prado, Madrid), begun by Parmigianino in the late 1530s and completed after his death by a follower; it is true that the *Alessandro Alberti* resembles the Prado portrait in the three-quarter-length format, with the boy placed in intimate proximity to the adult, and in the precise description of the elaborate courtly costume. David Brown (letter to Peter Humfrey of Feb. 8, 2001) has also pointed out that the pose of the page appears to derive from that of Christ in Correggio's *Madonna della Scodella* of 1530 (Galleria Nazionale, Parma). Further, in type this figure closely resembles the sitter in Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli's *Parma Embracing Alessandro Farnese* of c. 1555 (Galleria Nazionale, Parma). Yet Shapley was certainly right to exclude Bedoli, whose work retains the sinuous rhythms of Parmigianino combined with a certain softness of surface, as the author of the Gallery's portrait; and the supposed Parmese connection ignores the fact that the *Alessandro Alberti* was painted in Venice.

[8] Bernard Aikema and John Martin, in *Le botteghe di Tiziano* (Florence, 2009), 346, considered it to be in the style of Bergamo.

[9] See note 7 above.

[10] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XVI–XVIII Century* (London, 1973), 26–27; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:356; and letter from Jane Bridgeman to Peter Humfrey, Sept. 11, 2000.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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The support consists of a single piece of fabric. Although the tacking margins have been cut, cusping is visible along the edges, indicating the present dimensions are probably close to the original. The imprimatura is a warm dark brown in color and lies on top of a white gesso ground. The x-radiographs suggest that the first sketching was applied with paint containing lead white. The upper layers were applied opaquely and brought to a meticulous finish, unlike most Venetian paintings of the period; similarly un-Venetian is the way in which the background color neatly abuts the outline of the figures. Surprisingly, the x-radiographs exhibit bold and vigorous strokes executed with a wide brush in the background, the page's costume, and the tablecloth, all of which contrast with the meticulous finish of the rest of the surface. Many compositional changes are evident. Most notable are the two pairs of eyes and two ears for the page, indicating that his head was first sketched in more to the right of the present viewing position. His body position also appears to have been changed, and Alberti's proper left pant leg was painted in with detail before it was covered with the page's torso. Alberti's arms were originally sketched in straighter and his proper right arm was closer to his body. His red mantle originally extended more outward on both sides at the bottom. In addition, a number of alterations of detail were made, as in the white book ties, which were once longer. Examination of the inscription shows that all the surviving letters are original, since a craquelure of the same age traverses the brown paint of the inscription and the original paint layer below; there is not enough information, however, to reconstruct any of the removed letters, which presumably gave the artist's name and the date. Despite a certain amount of retouching, the general condition of the painting is good. Stephen Pichetto lined the painting in 1948, and Mario Modestini inpainted it and applied a varnish two years later.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination report by Susanna Griswold

March 21, 2019

PROVENANCE

Marchese Torrigiani, Palazzo Torrigiani, Florence, by 1856;[1] his heirs, until 1895/1896;[2] possibly Stefano Bardini [1836-1922], Florence.[3] Alfred Beit [1853-1906], London, and Tewin Water, near Welwyn, Hertfordshire, by 1904;[4] by inheritance to his brother, Sir Otto John Beit, 1st bt. [1865-1930], London and Tewin

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Water;[5] by inheritance to his daughter, Mrs. Arthur Clifford Howie Bull [1899-1982, née Alice Angela Beit], Tewin Water, and Bryndewen, Gwent, Wales; (Bull sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 25 October 1946, no. 49, as by Veronese, "possibly by a painter connected with Parmigianino"); (William Sabin, London). (Count Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, Florence); sold July 1948 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[6] gift 1952 to NGA.

[1] Otto Mündler recorded seeing the painting in September 1856; see "The Travel Diaries of Otto Mündler 1855-1858," ed. Carol Togneri Dowd, *Walpole Society* 51 (1985): 131-132, 327. He described it as "A singular picture...with a letter, on which the name of Paolo Cagliari and 1557 is lisible[*sic*]." Mündler spelled the family name Torreggiani.

[2] Elvira Grifi, *Saunterings in Florence: A New Artistic and Practical Handbook for English and American Tourists*, Florence, 1896: 385, no. 12, as by Veronese.

[3] According to Everett Fahy, *L'Archivio Storico Fotografico di Stefano Bardini: Dipinti, Disegni, Miniature, Stampe*, Florence, 2000: 28, no. 81, Bardini acquired the painting from Torrigiani's heirs by 1895, but he provides no documentation for this date, and the introduction to the book states that the fact of Bardini owning a photographic negative did not always mean he owned the work of art.

[4] Wilhelm von Bode, *The Art Collection of Mr. Alfred Beit*, Berlin, 1904: 5-6, 52, as by Veronese(?).

[5] Wilhelm von Bode, *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures and Bronzes in the Collection of Mr. Otto Beit*, London, 1913: 47-48, 100, questioning the validity of the signature and the subsequent attribution to Veronese.

[6] The Kress Foundation made an offer to Contini-Bonacossi on 7 June 1948 for a group of twenty-eight paintings, including Lotto's "Gentleman with a Page;" the offer was accepted on 11 July 1948 (see copies of correspondence in NGA curatorial files).

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