

eScholarship

California Italian Studies

Title

Solving the Mystery of the Sitter in Bartolomeo Veneto's Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4rm4q96j>

Journal

California Italian Studies, 6(1)

Author

Sizonenko, Tatiana

Publication Date

2016

DOI

10.5070/C361028658

Copyright Information

Copyright 2016 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Solving the Mystery of the Sitter in Bartolomeo Veneto's *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*

Tatiana Sizonenko



Fig. 1. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*, 1530, The Timken Museum of Art, San Diego. Source: Wiki Art online, public domain, <http://www.wikiart.org/en/bartolomeo-veneto/portrait-of-a-lady-in-a-green-dress-1530>, consulted June 30, 2016.

Introduction

Portraits of individuals were ubiquitous in Italy and Northern Europe in the Renaissance. By 1500, portraits were used in a wide range of public and private contexts to celebrate individual likenesses, feature idealized exemplary types, and fashion and project specific social identities of their subjects. Displayed to attract public interest and curiosity, portraits were frequently commissioned as a means to show dynastic pride and often came alive through spoken discourse—a vital component of their public presentation, recognition, and reception.¹ Despite

¹ Joanna Woods-Marsden, “Ritratto al Naturale”: Questions of Realism and Idealism in Early Renaissance Portraits,” *Art Journal* 46 (1987): 209–216. Patricia Simons, “Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous

the genre's popularity, the great majority of portraits do not include the name, crest, or other explicit evidence of the sitter's identity. Although recent scholarship has discouraged attempts to attach biographies to unknown sitters,² when a portrait can be linked to a specific historical context, it helps advance our understanding of the function of portraiture in the Renaissance and explore the fixity and flexibility of individual likenesses. Bartolomeo Veneto's *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress* (fig. 1) at the Timken Museum of Art is one such spectacular example. The lady presents herself vividly and magnificently. Her commanding gaze and sumptuous attire have long captivated viewers, but up until now we have known nothing about the woman herself. This article proposes for the first time an identification of the sitter, by linking the lady's exclusive hairstyle, costume and accessories, and the painting's date with a particular historical context—a noble court intrigue involving a marriage and premature death. The article will also demonstrate how portraits contributed to a complex identity game played by powerful people intent on manipulating and displaying the symbolic values of the age for their own purposes.

The *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress* is the touchstone for understanding Bartolomeo Veneto's oeuvre. Thanks to the artist's signature and date on a *trompe l'oeil* scroll "1530 / bartolo / mei / veneti, F," this painting opened the way to the reconstruction of Bartolomeo's artistic career. The Timken portrait became known to scholars when it went on view in Venice's Manfrin Gallery in the nineteenth century.³ Count Guglielmo Lochis (1789–1859), a prominent collector in Bergamo, who owned another painting by Bartolomeo, drew attention to the importance of the artist and what is now the Timken portrait in the 1846 catalogue of his own collection.⁴ Similarly, the historian Francesco Zanotto, in his 1856 guide to Venice, singled out Bartolomeo's painting as a "precious picture, bearing the name of a painter unknown to

Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women," in Alison Brown, ed., *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 263–311.

² See my footnote n. 63 and later discussion in the essay.

³ The gallery was founded by Girolamo Manfrin (1742–1802), a wealthy tobacco merchant. Through his "Balzacian energy and talent," he achieved a high position in society and acquired an enormous fortune after securing a monopoly on the tobacco plantations in Dalmatia in 1769. By 1787, Mafrin bought the palace of the ancient family of Priuli-Venier in Cannaregio and established himself as one of the most important collectors and patrons in Venice. Drawing on the expertise of his advisors Pietro Edwards and Sig. Gio. Battista Mingardi, Manfrin assembled a huge collection of over 400 masterworks, with the purpose of giving a general overview of the history of Italian and, to some extent, Flemish painting. The gallery was open to the public and long remained one of the finest in Venice, widely known for its strength in sixteenth-century Venetian art, including Giorgione, Titian, and Veronese, with Giorgione's *Tempesta* among the masterpieces on view. Upon Manfrin's death, the collection was passed to his son Pietro, from whom it went to Marchesa Giulia-Giovanna Manfrin Plattis. Upon her death in 1849, the collection was divided between her children, the Marchesa Bortolina Plattis and the Marchese Antonio Maria Plattis. The Marchesa's collection remained in the Palazzo Manfrin until 1897, and the Marchese's collection of paintings was sold in 1871. See: Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 379–381. Linda Borean, "Il caso Manfrin," in Linda Borean and Stefania Mason Rinaldi, *Il Collezionismo d'arte a Venezia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 193–216.

⁴ "Vidi altro quadro rapresentante una mezza figura al naturale di donna dipinta ed abbigliata alla Giogionesca nella Galleria Manfrini a Venezia avente la stessa sottoscrizione, il che mi confermerebbe nell' opinione che il Bartolomeo Veneto, autore di questi due quadri, sia un pittore di gran vaglia, diverso dal Montagna e dal Vivarini, ora, non saprei per qual ragione, poco conosciuto nell'istoria pittorica, e quindi dimenticato negli abbe cedari." See: Guglielmo Lochis, *La pinacoteca e la villa lochis alla crocetta di mozzo presso bergamo con notizie biografiche degli autori dei quadri* (Milan: Tip. V. Guglielmini, 1846), 59.

history.”⁵ After the dispersion of the Manfrin Gallery at the end of the nineteenth century, the Timken painting entered the renowned collection of the fifth earl of Rosebery (Mentmore); from there it came to San Diego in 1979.⁶ In recent years, scholars, including Cecil Gould, Creighton Gilbert, and Laura Pagnotta greatly expanded our knowledge of Bartolomeo’s work and assigned the Timken portrait a prominent place in the master’s artistic career.⁷ However, there is no documentary evidence about the portrait’s intended purpose or its provenance prior to the Manfrin Collection.

Given that Bartolomeo disappears from public record not long after the date inscribed on it,⁸ the Timken painting is quite possibly the final portrait by the Renaissance master and certainly one of his finest and best-preserved works. Bartolomeo was active in the region between Venice, Ferrara, and Milan in the first three decades of the 16th century, but his career as a portraitist of noble and fashionable subjects is scarcely documented, except by occasional names and dates inscribed on his works. Signed portraits of nobility such as Bernardino da Lesmo (c.1527), chamberlain to Girolamo Morone, advisor and later councilor under the reign of Francesco II Sforza, and Ludovico Martinegro (1530), a member of an important family in Brescia, confirm that the artist was working near Milan and in the outlying Lombard areas from the mid-1520s.⁹

Since the mid-19th century, audiences have been captivated by certain features of the Timken portrait: for instance, the sitter’s startlingly direct gaze; the opulent style of her costume; and especially her elaborate coiffure, the origins of which have long puzzled scholars. Building on the innovations introduced by Antonello da Messina, Leonardo da Vinci, Giorgione, and Lorenzo Lotto, Bartolomeo fashioned a hauntingly communicative image that expertly captures nuances of the sitter’s personality. Depicted from a slightly elevated vantage point against a rich dark-red velvet curtain, the sitter is presented as a real person, rather than an allegorical beauty. Endowed with a rare sense of immediacy, the lady is rendered in an almost frontal position. Her pose is animated by the motion of her head turned to three-quarters, as if her attention were attracted by an unseen interlocutor. The lady’s direct and sharply angled gaze, which cuts against her three-quarter view, particularizes her expression and emphasizes her striking physical and psychological presence. Every square inch of the painting, save the background, is shot through with the type of gorgeous, lushly lit detail that we could call “proto-photorealistic.” The sitter’s vivid presence is further achieved through a powerful light directed from the left, illuminating her un-idealized features and sculpting them with deep shadows.

The sitter’s air of authority and near-regal magnificence is further accentuated by the monumentality of her stately three-quarter-length appearance, which is clearly derived from the model for the amplified courtly portrait type introduced by Titian. The life-size sitter’s sumptuous dress of green silk underscores the lady’s high social rank and status. The ample and puffy sleeves are punctuated below the elbows with long cuts, through which appear tufts of a rich lining of white undersleeves, marvelously embroidered in black, according to the latest

⁵ “Ritratto di nobile matrona di Bartolommeo Veneziano, col nome e l’anno 1530. È questo un dipinto prezioso, che ricorda il nome di un pittore ignoto alla storia.” Francesco Zanotto, *Nuovissima guida di venezia e delle isole della sua laguna* (Venice, 1856), 342.

⁶ Laura Pagnotta, *The Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto* (San Diego: Timken Museum of Art, 2002), 32–33.

⁷ For the complete bibliography and *fortuna critica*, see Laura Pagnotta, *Bartolomeo Veneto: L’opera completa* (Florence: Centro Di, 1997), 13–19.

⁸ According to Pagnotta, the artist’s death “is confirmed by the documents as shortly before December 12, 1531 [...] no other known paintings by Bartolomeo can be securely dated later than 1531 on stylistic grounds.” Pagnotta, *The Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, 28.

⁹ Pagnotta, *The Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, 28–29.

fashion among most powerful ruling houses in North Italy.¹⁰ The lady wears an Eastern-style, shimmering golden shoulder-covering (*bavero*) with a deep neckline, made from silk damask embroidered with a royal pomegranate motif. A long necklace of blue lapis that matches the color of her eyes, a violet-colored sash with a large ribbon decorating her waist, and brown falconing gloves complete an elaborate dress well-suited to a high-born princess.



Fig. 2. Titian, *Portrait of Isabella d'Este*, 1534–36, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tizian_056.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

¹⁰ Padded and ample sleeves became a vehicle for showing social standing in the early sixteenth century. Wide and slashed sleeves involved a great deal of extra time in the workrooms for the cutting and decorative furnishings and were thus extraordinarily costly. See Stella Mary Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians, 1495–1525* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1988), 63.

One important clue that has been overlooked in the Timken portrait is the sitter's exotic and richly decorated hairstyle. Parted in the center and drawn back smoothly over her temples, the styling shows off the natural hair in front, allowing a couple of curls to frame the forehead. The rest of the hair is tucked under an elaborate hairpiece that creates a crown of curls. Adorned with blue and gold ribbons and a large white cockade in the center with a jeweled pin, this hairpiece looks like an elaborate wig. The well-defined shape suggests a rigid wire mesh underneath. The exclusive style of the Timken lady's hair stands out among similar hairstyles and headdresses of the period.¹¹ However, it is curiously reminiscent of the hairdo made fashionable by Isabella d'Este of Mantua and immortalized by Titian in the *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* (c.1534–1536) in Vienna (fig. 2). Did the Timken lady simply imitate Isabella's fashion? Or could she have belonged to a more intimate circle of the celebrated Marchesa? Further investigation of this clue will help us reveal the sitter's identity.

Isabella d'Este's Princely Hairdos

Widely considered “the First Lady of the Renaissance,” Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), Marchesa of Mantua, was the paragon of fashion and notorious for her vanity. Her network of courtiers radiated her influence from Mantua to Ferrara, Milan, and Urbino, and beyond Italy to France, England, and Poland. Titian's portrait immortalized her in a striking hairdo that set Isabella off from other aristocratic women of the period. This headdress complements her natural chestnut curly hair in the front and looks like a high brim of light tan curls crowning the head. A costly golden ornament of pearls and precious stones is placed strategically at the center of the turban-like hairdo. The artfulness of the design, its rich texture, and an extravagant selection of jewels and precious ornaments undoubtedly endowed Isabella with a special dignity and majesty befitting her high social rank.

It is generally accepted that Titian's portrait was painted between 1534 and 1536, when Isabella d'Este had already turned sixty-two.¹² We can't be certain why the Marchesa commissioned a retrospective portrait, but it presents a compelling likeness of a younger Isabella at the height of her political influence and patronage. It is well-documented that Titian used as a model a portrait executed by Francesco Francia in 1511 and now lost.¹³ Isabella arranged for this earlier portrait to be lent by the collector Giovanni Francesco Zaninello and delivered to Titian's workshop in Venice. However, Francia's painting, made under the guidance of Lucrezia Bentivoglio, who knew the Marchesa well and commissioned a portrait of her in Bologna, was

¹¹ For consistency, I will be applying throughout the paper the following terms to describe hairdos: hairstyle refers to a style of cutting, arranging, or combing the hair, can be used interchangeably with hairdo or coiffure; hairdo will be used to describe a more elaborate hair arrangement than a simple cutting or styling; hairpiece refers to a hairdo when an arrangement of hair also includes a bunch of human or artificial hair used to give a shape to a coiffure or conceal baldness; headdress describes a highly ornamental covering or band for the head, especially one worn on ceremonial occasions.

¹² Harold E. Wetley, *The Paintings of Titian: Complete Edition*, vol. II, *Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1971), 95–96; Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 185–190.

¹³ Recent attempts to identify a portrait of a woman as the long-lost Francia portrait of Isabella d'Este by Emilio Negro and Nicosetta Roio have not been convincing. See: Sally Hickson, “‘To See Ourselves as Others See Us’: Giovanni Francesco Zaninello of Ferrara and the Portrait of Isabella d'Este by Francesco Francia,” *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 3 (2009): 287–310, at 297.

also based on an earlier work, a lost cartoon by another artist.¹⁴ One plausible theory is that this other work was one of the replicas of the famous cartoon of Isabella d’Este by Leonardo da Vinci, made in 1499 when she was twenty-five, which is now in the Louvre. The Marchesa, who famously complained of the boredom of sitting for painters, had ordered copies of Leonardo da Vinci’s cartoon, which she circulated among her friends.¹⁵ While making generous allowance for flattery, Titian’s portrait agrees with earlier likenesses of Isabella, as seen in Gian Cristoforo Romano’s medals (fig. 3) and Leonardo’s cartoon (fig. 4). But what of her courtly dress and hairdo? To what degree does Isabella’s costume in Titian’s portrait reflect her contemporary and/or retrospective fashions?



Fig. 3. Gian Cristoforo Romano, *Bronze Medal of Isabella d’Este*, 1498, British Museum, London. Source: British Museum collection online, <http://culturalinstitute.britishmuseum.org/asset-viewer/cast-bronze-medal-of-isabella-d-este-marchioness-of-mantua-by-gian-cristoforo-romano/SwF8Y9ePJyAZGQ?hl=en>, consulted June 30, 2016.



Gian Cristoforo Romano, *Gold Medal of Isabella d’Este*, 1498, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Source: Wikipedia Commons online, public domain, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gian-cristoforo-romano-portrait-medal-of-isabella-deste.jpg>, consulted June 30, 2016.

¹⁴ There is no scholarly consensus about what portrait was used by Francia. Although some have supported Berenson’s suggestion that Lorenzo Costa’s *Portrait of a Young Woman with a Lap Dog* (c.1500), now in Her Majesty the Queen’s Collection in England, might be the portrait of Isabella d’Este and was used by Francia, this attribution has been seriously doubted. See: David Chambers and Jane Martineau, eds., *Splendours of the Gonzaga: Catalogue. Exhibition, 4 November 1981–31 January 1982, Victoria & Albert Museum, London* (London: The Museum, 1981), 162–163. Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries*, 185.

¹⁵ Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, 159.



Fig. 4. Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Isabella d'Este*, c.1500, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Isabella_d%27este.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

There are good reasons to believe that the dress and hairdo in Titian's portrait replicate contemporary garments and fashions of the Marchesa, whether they were added to the earlier Francia's likeness on the basis of verbal descriptions or even accessories sent from Mantua. It is well known that Titian successfully worked from descriptions and frequently incorporated specific costume details to fashion convincing likenesses and identities of his sitters. For instance, Titian painted the portrait of Giulia Varano, Duchess of Urbino and wife of Guidobaldo II della Rovere, in 1545 (now in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence) from her husband's verbal description and by inspecting articles of her clothing sent from Urbino at the artist's request.¹⁶ Furthermore, the inclusion of recognizable garments and fashion accessories was a prerequisite for a successful courtly portrait. According to anthropologists and fashion historians, bodily display, especially complex headdresses, beards and hair, jewelry, and exclusive costume accessories, was essential for representation of dynastic status and social position. As Evelyn Welch has recently demonstrated, Isabella d'Este and her aristocratic peers invested much time and effort in fashioning and displaying unique hairstyles that created and circulated very public social identities "emphasizing their status and displaying their connections to other women."¹⁷ As well, Janet Cox-Rearcick's thorough research on the costume styles of Spanish consorts

¹⁶ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries*, 144.

¹⁷ Evelyn Welch, "Art on the Edge: Hair and Hands in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 3 (2008): 241–268.

Eléonore d’Autriche and Eleonora di Toledo underscores not only the phenomenon of power-dressing in French and Italian courts but also the importance placed on hairstyles, dress, and accessories for fashioning a ruler’s political identity through public appearances.¹⁸ Considering that Isabella made consistent efforts to create her public persona by the deliberate invention of her hairstyles, it is most likely that she provided Titian with specific instructions about her hairdo and garments that reflected her contemporary style. We cannot totally exclude the possibility that Isabella’s hairdo in the portrait was retrospective, but, as will be shown, her look finds direct parallels to other extant examples from the 1530s. Most likely, the style was still in use when Titian painted his portrait of Isabella, even if it also had a retrospective value that befitted the portrait commission.

Indeed, historical documents confirm that elaborate hairstyles were central to Isabella’s public image and identity. According to diplomatic correspondence published by Alessandro Luzio, the Marchesa’s uniquely designed headdresses, called *scuffiotti*,¹⁹ were regarded as a specialty of Mantua in the 1520s, so much so that they were protected by “copyright.” In 1526, the Marchesa enacted a special decree prohibiting their reproduction and imitation without her formal approval.²⁰ Titian’s portrait and contemporary correspondence suggest that Isabella’s *scuffiotti* were exquisitely woven from hair, silk, gold, and silver thread, usually lavishly decorated with jewels, ribbons, and precious ornaments, and were distinguished by their voluminous appearance and rich texture that resembled a kind of oversized curly toupee. Letters addressed to Isabella show that Mantuan *scuffiotti* were a type of elaborate wig or hairpiece, which had a well-defined round shape formed by a rigid wire mesh underneath, and could be worn for practical reasons to conceal baldness.²¹ It is not clear exactly when Isabella invented

¹⁸ Janet Cox-Rearick, “Power-Dressing at the Courts of Cosmío de’ Medici and François I: The ‘moda alla spagnola’ of Spanish Consorts Eléonore d’Autriche and Eleonora di Toledo,” *Arbitus et Historiae* 30, no. 60 (2009): 39–69.

¹⁹ *Scufie, scuffie, or cuffie* (with many variants of the spelling) typically referred to caps or bonnets that women wore especially in Northern Italy. Achille Vitali explains that *scuffie* greatly varied in appearance and size from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, and were made of various materials, including cotton, silk, linen, velvet, and gold and silver threads, as well as decorated with pearl and other precious stones. In general, *scuffie* that were particularly voluminous were also called *scufioni* and *scuffiotti*. See: Achille Vitali, *La moda a Venezia attraverso i secoli: lessico ragionato* (Venice: Filippi Editore: 1992), 159–160.

²⁰ As Alessandro Luzio established, “I beretti e gli scuffiotti, da uomo a da donna, erano quasi una specialità mantovana, o per meno venivano fabbricati a Mantova con squisitezza di lavoro.” Luzio cites the document that indicates the existence of a special law that prohibited reproduction and imitation of Mantua’s *scuffiotti*: “V’ha una grida del 12 luglio 1526, in cui il marchese, sentendo che ‘per il decreto altra volta concesso alla arte di biretari che persona alcuna non potesse fullare nè far fullare birette in alcun altro loco excetto al fullo fatto per ditta arte sotto certa pena, molti mercadanti restano di mandare a fullare al fullo erecto per la Illustrissima Madama nostra. Matre del p.to S., fuori di Porto, da po’ la concessione predicta, il che cede in gravissimo danno di sua Ex. Et di non poco incommode a molti mercadanti.” As Luzio explains: “La follatura dei beretti era stata messa in Mantova sotto la tutela di apposite disposizioni di legge, e Isabella medesima fece costruire un *fullo* per proprio conto.” A. Luzio, “Il Lusso di Isabella d’Este, Marchesa di Mantova,” *Nuova antologia* LXV (1896): 261–286, 666–688; 264.

²¹ Most likely, Isabella started experimenting with *scuffiotti* or wigs by the early 1510s. For example, in a letter from 1509, Eleonora Ruscha asks Isabella to make a wig from silk and hair for her, as she has lost her hair: “Ill.ma Ex.ma patrona [...] Ritrovandomi a Locharno, ho presentito essere stà portato a Milano da certe zentildone una nova fogia de zazare de seta provenute da notabile *inventione* de la prefata V.S.; et per retrovarmi al presente quasi senza capelli, cum sumo desiderio prego quella me voglia fare essere degna de una; la qual cossa per me non saria altramente domandata per non essere notate presumtuosa, se quella mia ardentissima fede como è dicto non me havesse al tutto excitata e spinta a questo, et anchora per essere sta mandato a Milano repute la S.V. non farne gran capituli, che quando fusse per sua particolarità servata non haveria ardito fare altra richiesta. Et cusi prego la prefata V. Ill. Ma S.a che essendoli qualche conziatura de testa avanzata e che più non sia a lo uso de la S.V. ma più presto

these turban-style large hairpieces and how much their design changed in time, but it is certain that they were much in vogue at the time of the portrait's date.

Although turban-like head coverings were widely diffused in the courts of Northern Italy in the 1520s through the 1550s, Isabella's *scuffiotti* markedly differed from other headdresses in their ample size and extravagant, jeweled decoration.²² A typical Italian turban-like *scuffia* from this period was either much smaller in size, made from fabric, and shaped like a soft cap²³ or fashioned as a round turban, a kind of an enormous stuffed roll, that was made with more economical materials due to regulations forbidding the use of expensive materials, especially pearls and other jewels, in city-states such as Venice and Florence.²⁴ The first kind of *scuffia* is found in many portraits from this period, as can be seen in Titian's *Portrait of Eleonora Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino* (1536–1538) in the Uffizi (fig. 5); Bronzino's *Portrait of a Lady* (c.1550) in Turin (fig. 6); and Lorenzo Lotto's *Portrait of Messer Marsiglio Cassotti and His Wife Faustina* (1523) in the Prado (fig. 7). These *scuffie* appear rather flat and “set far back on the head as to be hardly visible from the front”²⁵ or arranged as a soft bag-like cap or net, falling droopingly over the ears, the crown, and the nape. The second type of *scuffia*, shaped in the form of a larger round turban or a stuffed roll, can be seen in many portraits from the 1520–1530s. Bernardo Luini's *Portrait of a Lady* (1520–25) in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, Lorenzo Lotto's *Portrait of a Married Couple* (c.1524–25) in the State Hermitage Museum, Callisto Piazza's *Musical Group* (c. 1525) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Paris Bordone's *Portrait of a Lady with Her Son* (c.1530) in the State Hermitage Museum, Lorenzo Lotto's, *Portrait of a Woman Inspired by Lucrezia* (c.1530–32) in the National Gallery of Art in London, Parmigianino's *Turkish Slave* (c.1533) in Parma, and Bernardino Licinio's *Portrait of a Woman in Red* (1533) in Dresden, all depict women wearing elegant *scuffie* in the form of woven turbans, made of silk with some golden and silver threads, sometimes decorated with ribbons, and most likely held in place by a wire mesh.²⁶ (figs. 8–14) These examples confirm that the second type of *scuffia* was extremely fashionable. We do not know if some of these were imitations of Isabella's fashion that the Marchesa tried to discourage by putting a “copyright” on her *scuffiotti*. However, these *scuffie* differ from those of Isabella in that they look like turbans or stuffed rolls rather than a curly hair toupee, and so do not produce the same sense of having been “sculpted” from actual hair; nor do they seem to incorporate pearls and other precious stones that were, I believe, an essential element in defining Isabella's headpiece in Titian's portrait. Opulent jewelry carried a political message that signaled the identity of princesses and empresses, as Janet Cox-Rearick observes,²⁷ and Isabella was clearly engaged in power-dressing throughout her life. Therefore, the presence of a jeweled centerpiece most likely has greatly contributed to the style that constituted an “Estense scuffiotto.”

demissa, me ne voglia far partecipevole ancio anchora io non para sia forra del numero de le fidelissime de epsa V. Ill.ma S. ecc.” Luzio, “Il Lusso di Isabella d'Este, Marchesa di Mantova,” 261–286, 666–688; 667–668.

²² See footnote 19 on the difference between *scuffie* and *scuffiotti*.

²³ Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians, 1495–1525*, 67.

²⁴ Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. I (London: National Gallery Company, 2004), 87–88. As Nicholas Penny explains, *scuffie* were not always an item of a luxury dress, but were often made of more economical materials, including cloth and cotton, and decorated with false gems.

²⁵ Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians, 1495–1525*, 67.

²⁶ Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. I, 88.

²⁷ Cox-Rearick, “Power-Dressing at the Courts of Cosmo de' Medici and Francois I: The ‘moda alla spagnola’ of Spanish Consorts Eléonore d'Autriche and Eleonora di Toledo,” 40, 47.



Fig. 5. Titian, *Portrait of Eleonora Gonzaga*, 1536–38, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tizian_055.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 6. Bronzino, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1550, Galleria Sabauda, Turin. Source: Wikipedia Commons online, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angelo_Bronzino_-_Portrait_of_a_Lady_-_WGA03269.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 7. Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of Messer Marsiglio Cassotti and His Wife Faustina*, 1523, Museo del Prado, Madrid. Source: Wikimedia Commons online, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lorenzo_Lotto_044.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

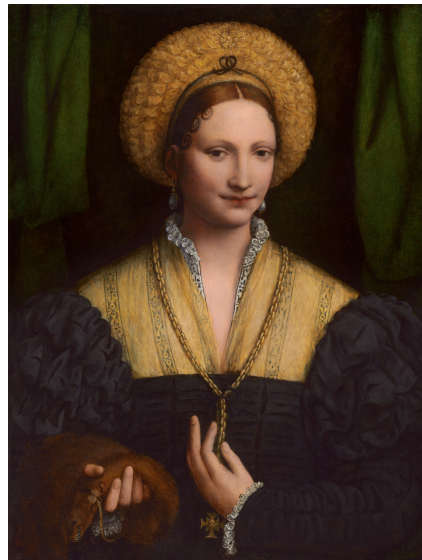


Fig. 8. Bernardino Luini, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1520/25, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Source: Wikipedia Commons online, public domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bernardino_Luini_Lady_with_a_Flea_Fur.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 9. Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of a Married Couple*, c.1524/25, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Source: Wikiart online, public domain, <http://www.wikiart.org/en/lorenzo-lotto/husband-and-wife-1523>, consulted, June 30, 2016.



Fig. 10. Callisto Piazza, *Musical Group*, c.1525, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Source: Wikimedia Commons online, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Callisto_Piazza_\(Calisto_de_la_Piazza_da_Lodi\),_Italian_\(active_Lodi_and_Brescia\),_first_documented_1524,_died_1561_-_Musical_Group_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Callisto_Piazza_(Calisto_de_la_Piazza_da_Lodi),_Italian_(active_Lodi_and_Brescia),_first_documented_1524,_died_1561_-_Musical_Group_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg), consulted June 30, 2016



Fig. 11. Paris Bordone, *Portrait of a Woman with Her Son*, c.1530, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paris_Bordone_010.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 12. Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of a Woman Inspired by Lucrezia*, c.1530–32, National Gallery of Art, London. Source: Wikimedia Commons online, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lorenzo_Lotto_046.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 13. Parmigianino, *Turkish Slave*, c.1533, Galleria Nazionale, Parma. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parmigianino - La schiava turca.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parmigianino_-_La_schiava_turca.jpg), consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 14. Bernardino Licinio, *Portrait of a Woman in Red*, 1533, Dresden State Art Collections. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bernardino_Licinio_002.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

Isabella promoted her fame assiduously through commissioned portraits and successfully managed her public image by updating on a regular basis her exquisite hair arrangements and their inventive ornaments.²⁸ Then and now, Titian's portrait models the public image and identity that she wanted in the last decade of her life, when her elaborate wigs (imitating a high brim of curls) were in vogue. This likeness is a clear departure from well-known portraits of the younger Isabella. Earlier profile portraits show her without a veil, with her long hair either elegantly knotted at the nape of her neck, as can be seen in Gian Cristoforo Romano's medals (c.1490s) (fig. 3), or completely loose as in Leonardo da Vinci's cartoon (1499) (fig. 4). Isabella's hairdos were most likely inspired by hair arrangements on Roman imperial coins and cameos that she appreciated and collected.²⁹ Her swirling knotted hairstyle on medals is especially reminiscent of that of Augustus' wife Livia (late first century BC), who was typically portrayed with her hair brushed off the forehead and gracefully gathered in a knot at the nape of her neck (fig. 15). The most prominent woman of the Augustan age, Livia wielded much influence, not only upon her husband but also upon her son Tiberius, her grandson Claudius, and her great-grandson Caligula. Empress Livia was revered as a model of feminine virtue and moral rectitude and thus would have been a perfect role model for the young and ambitious Isabella. In fact, it is well known that the Marchesa's precious gold medal portrait in profile, set in a frame of diamonds and enamels made by Gian Cristoforo Romano in 1498, was kept in the same cupboard as an antique cameo

²⁸ Evelyn Welch underscores the importance of such costume accessories as hairstyles, hats, headdresses, veils, fans, shoes, stockings, and handkerchiefs in the early modern wardrobe. She argues that hair coverings and other small-scale personal items were central to the costume innovations and could be rapidly modified and disseminated across geographic and social boundaries, as "the majority of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century" fabrics and dresses "were often too costly to allow for substantial adaptation." Isabella was also known to be a leader of fashion in designing and modifying such costume accessories, such as gloves, fans, stockings, shoes, and handkerchiefs. See: Welch, "Art on the Edge: Hair and Hands in Renaissance Italy," 242–243.

²⁹ Keith Christiansen and Stefan Weppelmann, eds., *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini* (New Haven and London: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Yale University Press, 2011), 239–241.

(now in Vienna) of Caesar and Livia.³⁰ Considering Isabella’s ongoing fascination with antiquities, it is highly probable that her latest hairdo as depicted by Titian was also informed by Roman prototypes and helped fashion and broadcast the political aspirations and identity of the aging Marchesa, not excluding a more practical purpose to enhance her overall appearance while also concealing her aging.



Fig. 15. *Roman Marble Portrait of Livia, the Wife of Augustus*, early 1st century AD, Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen (Left and Center). Source: Wikimedia Commons, photo by Carole Roddato, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Livia_Drusilla,_wife_of_Emperor_Augustus,_from_Fayum_\(Egypt\),_copy_from_AD_4_or_later_after_original_from_27-23_BC,_Ny_Carlsberg_Glyptotek,_Copenhagen_\(12949093165\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Livia_Drusilla,_wife_of_Emperor_Augustus,_from_Fayum_(Egypt),_copy_from_AD_4_or_later_after_original_from_27-23_BC,_Ny_Carlsberg_Glyptotek,_Copenhagen_(12949093165).jpg), consulted June 30, 2016. *Portrait of Livia*, Onyx Cameo, late 1st century AD, Rijksmuseum, Leiden (Right). Source: Rijksmuseum collection online, <http://www.rmo.nl/english/collection/acquisitions/engraved-gems/livia-cameo>, consulted June 30, 2016.

Portraits and hairdos of Flavian and Antonine imperial women may have inspired Isabella’s celebrated *scuffiotti*. She owned the second-century AD marble bust of the most influential woman from the Antonine family, Faustina the Elder, which she acquired from Andrea Mantegna in 1506 shortly before his death and displayed in her grotto among her collections of antiquities (fig. 16).³¹

Faustina was wife to the emperor Antonius Pius (c.138–161 AD), with whom she shared imperial honors, being given the formal title of “Augusta.” Upon her premature death, she was widely commemorated through marble portraits and thousands of coins as an ideal of feminine virtue. Faustina’s hairdo, parted in the center with wavy locks drawn to the sides and a nest-like bun on the crown of her head, became the standard hairstyle for women of her period. Isabella’s hair at the front in Titian’s portrait appears arranged in a style similar to that of Faustina: elegant strands parted in the center and drawn back over the temples, allowed to loosen a little into a wavy line. The difference is that Isabella’s hair is tucked under a more elaborate bun that looks like a curly toupee and marvelously frames her face. In turn, the toupee seems another clever reference to portraits of the Flavian imperial women Julia Tati and Domitia Longina, who fashioned their distinct public identities and ensured their fame for posterity through yet another striking coiffure.³² Their bust portraits and bronze coins feature high crests of curls that make a splendid frame to the face (fig. 17). Isabella’s hairdo, as seen in Titian’s portrait, looks like an

³⁰ Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, cat. no. 109, 160.

³¹ Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, cat. no. 122, 170.

³² Eve D’Ambra, “Mode and Model in the Flavian Female Portrait,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 114, no. 4 (October 2013): 511–525.

inventive evocation of both Roman imperial hairstyles. In her quest for fame and recognition, the Marchesa was well positioned to take full advantage of Roman classical references through her long-standing friendship with humanists such as Niccolò da Correggio (1450–1508), Battista Fiera (c.1465–1538), and Paride da Ceresara (1466–1532),³³ who advised her on costume, choice of Latin inscriptions, and the mythological and allegorical fantasies that decorated her apartments. In all, it may be plausible that the first renderings of Isabella's *scuffiotti* were conceived in the early 1510s, when they began to be consistently mentioned in her correspondence, and then took their final shape as we see in the Titian portrait.



Fig. 16. *Portrait of Faustina the Elder*, second half of the 2nd century, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum (Left). Source: Mount Holyoke College Art Museum collection online, <https://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu/node/938>, consulted June 30, 2016.

Bust of Faustina the Elder, 2nd century AD, Museo del Palazzo Ducale, Mantua (Right). It belonged to Andrea Mantegna. Source: Lombardia Beni Culturali collection online, <http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/fotografie/schede/IMM-2s010-0000933/>, consulted June 30, 2016.

³³ Isabella enjoyed friendship with the humanist Battista Fiera who acted as her costume advisor on Roman dress. See: Jane Martineau, ed., *Andrea Mantegna: Exhibition Catalogue* (New York and London: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Olivetti/Electa, 1992), 23.



Fig. 17. *Young Flavian Woman*, c.120 AD, Museo Capitolino, Rome, Italy (Left). Source: Wikimedia Commons, photo by Carole Raddato, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_a_woman_from_the_Flavian_period,_between_AD_69_and_AD_96,_Musei_Capitolini,_Rome_\(12972527964\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_a_woman_from_the_Flavian_period,_between_AD_69_and_AD_96,_Musei_Capitolini,_Rome_(12972527964).jpg), consulted June 30, 2016.

Domitia Longina, with Flavian Hairstyle, c.90 AD, Musée du Louvre, Paris (Right). Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Domitia.JPG>, consulted June 30, 2016.

Roman-inspired *scuffiotti* or silk-and-hair headdresses may have opened the door for Isabella to create a reputation that brought her much desired political influence as the paragon of the loveliest hair fashions in Italy. She began to successfully manage her public image through the circulation of her *scuffiotti* by way of gift exchange with influential ruling peers, of which one example is her special gift to Bona Sforza (1494–1557), Queen of Poland.³⁴ More often the *scuffiotti* were given to female members of her immediate family as wedding presents. From Isabella’s extensive correspondence between 1517 and 1534, it is known that she gifted Estense *scuffiotti* to at least four ladies: 1) Maria Paleologo from Monferrato, on the occasion of her engagement to Isabella’s son Federico II Gonzaga in March 1518;³⁵ 2) Margherita Paleologo, the

³⁴ Isabella’s sister, Beatrice d’Este, was married to the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, uncle of Bono Sforza’s father, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who was married to Isabella of Naples. In a letter from 1523, Bona Sforza thanks Isabella for her *scuffiotti*, made from silk and gold, and of a new shape: “Salutem et prosperos ad vota successus [...] et per essa sei scuffiotti de seta et de oro de nova foggia, et hanno satisfacto et piaciuto oltramodo, et tanto più quanto che da V.S. con affecto non vulgare ne so’ stati transmessi.” Quoted from Luzio, “Il Lusso di Isabella d’Este, Marchesa di Mantova,” 261–286, 267.

³⁵ Luzio, “Il Lusso di Isabella d’Este, Marchesa di Mantova,” 266. For example, Luzio quotes a letter which states that the Marchesa sent a cap of Mantuan cut when Maria became her daughter-in-law: “Isabella ne provvedeva di

younger sister of Maria, when Margherita became engaged to Federico after Maria's premature death in 1531;³⁶ 3) Renée de France, Ercole II d'Este's wife, who was reported wearing it in 1531;³⁷ and 4) Giulia Varano, the heiress of Camerino, who married Guidobaldo II della Rovere, Isabella's grandson in 1534.³⁸

It is likely that Marchesa used the gifts of *scuffiotti* not only to welcome her daughters-in-law into the family but as a way of establishing a visual collective identity for d'Este brides which marked them as her followers and members of her intimate circle. Evelyn Welch argues effectively that noble women of Isabella's rank frequently employed hairstyles both to fashion unique social identities and to make political allegiances visible.³⁹ As the historian and biographer of Isabella d'Este, Julia M. Cartwright Ady, suggests, the Marchesa was always on friendly terms with the brides of her sons, nephews, and grandsons. She was especially active in the selection of the bride for her son Federico and grew greatly attached to both her son's chosen brides—first Maria and then Margherita Paleologo.⁴⁰ Immediately after the engagement of eight-year-old Maria Paleologo, eldest daughter of Gulielmo, Marchese of Monferrato, and Anna Alençon, Isabella affectionately refers to Maria in letters to Anna “as our common daughter Maria,” recommending a favorite music master for her education; she also went out of her way to visit Maria personally.⁴¹ Similarly, the Marchesa fondly writes to Anna about Margherita, the younger sister of Maria, when Margherita became engaged to Federico in 1531 after Maria's premature death in 1530: “I discover that I have acquired a daughter who in her beauties, excellence, and comportment, is after my wishes and desire.”⁴²

Considering the Marchesa's well-documented concern with the preparation of bridal trousseaus in her immediate family, it appears that Isabella took care to personally provide her specialty—the gold-embroidered caps made from her patterns in Mantua—to all of the new brides of the Este-Gonzaga house.⁴³ In fact, Margherita Paleologo, her future daughter-in-law, is reported wearing the *scuffia* sent by Isabella just before her marriage ceremony to Federico II Gonzaga at Casale in Monferrato, in October 1531:

Today the Duchess wore a dress of white satin embroidered all over with gold thread, and slashed at the front, but in some places the under-dress of blue satin, also embroidered with gold thread, could be seen through the large slashes. She

buon grado alle ragguardevoli dame che ne mostravano desiderio. Nel maggio del 1518 ne inviò a Maria di Monferrato, che doveva divenirle nuora.”

³⁶ Federico's secretary, in a letter to Isabella, describes Margherita's dress and her *scuffia*, which was sent to her by Isabella on the occasion of the wedding. See note no. 20 for citation, also in Stefano Davari, “Federico Gonzaga e la famiglia Paleologa del Monferrato,” *Giornale linguistico di archeologia* 18 (1891): 40–67, at 65.

³⁷ “A week afterwards, Renée appeared in the park at Belfiore, wearing a black satin robe in the French style, but a golden cap of Mantuan cut, which, not being a French fashion, greatly exercised the tongues of her guests.” Quoted from Julia Mary Cartwright Ady, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance* (London: J. Murray, 1903), 359.

³⁸ Preparation of Giulia Varano's wedding trousseau is discussed in: Ady, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 366.

³⁹ Welch, “Art on the Edge: Hair and Hands in Renaissance Italy,” 251.

⁴⁰ Ady, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 135, 345.

⁴¹ Ady, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 135.

⁴² Quoted from Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, 161. Original text quoted from Davari, “Federico Gonzaga e la famiglia Paleologa del Monferrato,” 67: “mi trovo haver fatto acquisto d'una figliuola, che di bellezze, di virtù et de' costume è secondo il proprio mio volere et desiderio.”

⁴³ Ady, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 366.

wore a beautiful diamonds around her neck, and in her head one of the turbans Your Excellency sent, and at her side Your Excellency's lapis rosary. She always wears the stockings which Your Excellency sent.⁴⁴

Fortunately, a painting by Giulio Romano of a lady wearing the Mantuan cap (fig. 18), now in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen of England, was recently identified as the wedding portrait of Margherita Paleologo.⁴⁵



Fig. 18. Giulio Romano, *Portrait of a Lady, Margherita Paleologo* (?), c.1531 (?), Royal Collection, Windsor.

Source: Wikimedia Commons online, public domain,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_believed_to_depict_Margherita_Paleologo_by_Giulio_Romano.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

⁴⁴ Quoted from Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga* 161. The original text is: “Hogi la S.ra Duchessa haveva una veste de raso bianco rechamata tutta de cordoni d’oro, e perchè è schiapata dinanti, ma schiapata in qualche loco, per li taiij che erano grandi si vedeva la sottana di raso torchino rechamata pur di cordoni d’oro. Una croce haveva de bellissimi diamante al collo; in testa una delle schuffie che li ha mandato V.Ex.ta, e dal lato la corona de lapis de V.Ex.ta.” Quoted from Davari, “Federico Gonzaga e la famiglia Paleologa del Monferrato,” 65.

⁴⁵ For instance, Giulio Romano’s *Portrait of a Lady* (c.1531) for long time was thought to depict Isabella d’Este. See: Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries*, 118.

Renaissance scholar Jane Martineau convincingly argues that Giulio Romano's portrait was made on the occasion of Margherita Paleologo's marriage to Federico in 1531, refuting the previous identification of the sitter as Isabella d'Este.⁴⁶ As she shows, the sitter's costume closely parallels the description of the dress Margherita wore prior to her marriage to Federico at Casale in October 1531.⁴⁷ The sitter's expensive and elaborate dress, with large slashes through which a white under-dress can be clearly seen, corresponds to descriptions of her gown in eyewitness account cited above. Both the dress and the under-dress are embroidered with gold thread. She wears a long golden necklace, pearl earrings, and a blue lapis rosary attached to a belt at her side. Her costly attire is completed with the *scuffia* modeled on Isabella's hairdo in Titian's portrait: the headdress appears to be made from hair and silk, resembles a curly toupee, and has a jeweled ornament in the center. Isabella commissioned the portrait from Giulio Romano upon Margherita's arrival in Mantua. As Martineau suggests, the portrait may have been intended to hang alongside portraits of Federico, one by Raphael and one by Titian, in rooms specially designed for the bride.

Romano's *Portrait of Margherita Paleologo* confirms the existence of an "Estense *scuffiotto*" and gives us evidence that Isabella's hairdo in Titian's portrait most likely represents the Marchesa's "regal" hairpiece in the early 1530s. As well, it provides grounds for attribution of the Timken portrait. Since Isabella's *scuffiotti* were given as "welcome" gifts to brides signaling that they had become "d'Este," it can be argued that the lady's hairdo in the Timken portrait also broadcasts her close familial relation to Isabella, as her future daughter-in-law. The lady's *scuffiotto* in the Timken portrait (fig. 19) is concurrent with that of Isabella in the Titian's portrait and that of Margherita Paleologo in Romano's portrait. It accurately reflects Isabella's style in its round shape, rich texture, and exquisite form: a large toupee of curls on the crown of her head, adorned with blue and gold ribbons and precious ornaments. The Timken lady's natural hair in front is parted in the center and drawn back smoothly over the temples, allowing only a couple of curls to loosen into a waiving line, a style that closely imitates Isabella's model. Obviously, the hairdo in the Timken portrait is not identical to that of the Titian or Romano portraits, but the presence of a jeweled centerpiece—a large cockade with a jeweled pin—suggests it was likely modeled on those "proprietary" designs made fashionable by Isabella. That the Timken lady wears rather an "Estense *scuffiotto*" is also evidenced by another Bartolomeo work, *Portrait of a Lady* in Ottawa, that has been linked with the Timken portrait by Creighton Gilbert⁴⁸ (fig. 20). The *scuffia* in the Ottawa portrait differs significantly from that of the Timken lady in its texture and details: it looks like woven turbans or stuffed rolls popular in the Veneto in the 1520s–30s, as discussed earlier. It does not appear to be made of hair and silk, nor does it resemble a toupee of curls, and it lacks a jeweled centerpiece that seems essential in the "Estense *scuffiotto*" for signaling the status and identity of the sitter. This visual evidence suggests that the lady in the Ottawa portrait has no relation to the Gonzaga-Este clan, while the Timken lady very much does.

⁴⁶ Now the portrait has been identified as *Portrait of Margherita Paleologo*. See: Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, 161.

⁴⁷ Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, 161. See note n. 18 for a description of this dress.

⁴⁸ Creighton Gilbert, "Bartolomeo Veneto and His Portrait of a Lady," *Bulletin of the National Gallery of Canada* 22 (1973): 2–16.



Fig. 19. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Lady in Green Dress*, detail. Source: Wikimedia Commons online, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veneto_0026.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 20. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c.1520–30, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veneto_0022.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

Bartolomeo Veneto's Portrait Date and a Marriage Intrigue

The Timken portrait's date of 1530 is another key piece of evidence that supports our identification of the sitter in the painting. Bartolomeo usually did not put dates or signatures on his works. What could have been his reason for doing so this time? June to September of 1530, the year inscribed on the portrait, was a time of intense negotiations between Casale, Monferrato, and Mantua regarding the marriage of Isabella's son, Federico II Gonzaga (1500–1540), to Maria Paleologo (1508–1530), the duchess and first-born daughter of William IX (Guglielmo), Marchese of Monferrato and his wife Anna d'Alençon. The story is full of fascinating details, but here we will highlight only the important moments in Federico Gonzaga's tortuous and less than honorable path to marriage.⁴⁹

Maria's betrothal to Federico was formally legalized on April 6, 1517, when Maria was eight years old and Federico was seventeen. Federico was residing at the court of Francois I in France at the time. He travelled to Monferrato to meet his beautiful bride and, taken by her beauty, married her on the spot instead of delaying the ceremony until Maria's fifteenth birthday. According to the original documents published by Stefano Davari, Federico took vows in front of witnesses, put a ring on little Maria's finger, and kissed the bride. The wedding followed both civil and ecclesiastical norms that later appeared indissoluble even by the Pope. Federico showed Maria signs of great devotion by continuing to visit her at Casale over the next two years, a devotion that may have been also reinforced by the prospect of Maria becoming the heir of Monferrato. Maria's farther Guglielmo announced on his deathbed in 1518 his wish to name her as heir, an act that would have directed the possessions of his estate to the Gonzagas. However, since he died without acting on his wish, it took several years of dynastic struggle between alternate heirs before Maria could become Marchesa of Monferrato.

The death of Federico's father, Francesco II Gonzaga, in 1519 also profoundly affected Federico's betrothal to Maria, since Federico became Lord of Mantua and was then free to decide his romantic life. At that time Federico commenced a passionate affair with a mistress Isabella Boschetti, wife of the Count of Calvisano, producing a son. Maria's arrival in Mantua, scheduled for 1524, was delayed. Using as a pretext a conspiracy hatched by her husband to poison Boschetti, Federico moved to annul his marriage with Maria in 1527 on the grounds that her family was also involved in the plot to kill his mistress. Adding to unfortunate Maria's grief, Federico, who set his marital ambitions higher when he became Lord of Mantua, was offered by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V a different bride, Giulia of Aragon, in 1530. A marriage to her would secure for Federico the new rank of Duke for his alliance with the emperor, but the prospective bride was thirty-eight years old, unattractive, and lacking a large dowry.

Federico was mulling over his new marriage prospect, when Maria's brother, Boniface IV Paleologo (1512–1530), who succeeded his father as Marchese of Monferrato died suddenly on June 6, 1530, leaving the Duchy without a male heir, since her father's brother (Maria's uncle), the aged and sickly uncle, John George Paleologo, Marchese of Monferrato (1488–1533), was unmarried and without issue. Therefore, Maria, as the first-born daughter of the Marchese (and already the legal wife of Duke Federico), who was now twenty-two years old and also a beauty,

⁴⁹ Archival documents pertaining to Federico's marriage were first published by Stefano Davari, "Federico Gonzaga e la famiglia Paleologa del Monferrato (1515–1533)," *Giornale liguistico di archeologia, storia, e belle arti* 17/18, fasc. XI–XII (1890), 421–69; 18, fasc. I–II (1891), 40–76; 18, fasc. III–IV (1891), 81–109. A more recent discussion of the marriage details in relation to Pietro Aretino's *Marescalco* can be found in Deanna Shemek, "Aretino's Marescalco: Marriage Woes and the Duke of Mantua," *Renaissance Studies* 16, no. 3 (2002): 366–379.

was the next in line, and whomever she married would become the ruler of the richly desired territory of Monferrato. Federico, seeing a new opportunity, realized his earlier mistake in breaking the marriage contract with Maria in 1528 and instantly decided to pursue Maria and renew their engagement.

For a short period of time, Casale of Monferrato became a center of intrigue; frequent envoys delivered urgent messages from Mantua, Milan, Rome, Savoy, Urbino, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, which further complicated the courtly dance surrounding the engagement of Maria Paleologa and Federico II Gonzaga.⁵⁰ Federico mobilized his legal counselors to annul his engagement with Giulia and renew his marriage contract with Maria, by claiming that he was still bound to Maria. Therefore, Federico was in urgent pursuit of an agreement from Monferrato. He also needed to get Papal confirmation that his original 1518 engagement with Maria was still valid, and that his current engagement with Giulia should be voided, due to the preexisting contract with Maria. Finally, he needed to convince the Emperor to grant him an excuse for not marrying Giulia, who, at age thirty-eight, was older than the Duke. While Federico was sending his trusted agents to negotiate these agreements, Anna d'Alençon, Maria's mother, also received proposals for Maria's hand from the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza; the Emperor Charles, who tried to arrange a wedding with his Count Palatine; and the Duke of Savoy, Charles III, who was negotiating a contract for his ten-year-old son. However, because she received multiple testimonies from Federico, including the absolute renouncement of his affair with Isabella Boschetti, Anna was inclined to marry her daughter to Federico after all. In a letter dated August 11, 1530, Anna clearly states that she has forgiven past wrongs and expresses her consent to give her daughter as wife to Federico:

È ritornato messer Edigio Cattaneo, il quale riporta che madama marchesa de Monferrato, li ha ditto che venghi dal Sig. nostro Ill.mo, e le dichi, che ancho che per il passano li fosse fatto qualche iniuria et torto, che però si vol havere scordano ogni cosa, et che li vol essere sempre bona matre; che è contenta darli sua figliola Mad. Maria, la quale è sua, e che sa non può essere altramente per haver fatto vedere il caso a homeni dotti. Che a voler venire a lo effetto è bisogno chel p.to S.r nostro Ill.mo faci iare sopra ciò una declarazione a N.S., e che haveria piacere che presto li fosse mandato una citazione per potersi con quella excusare con Don Loyso Sermanta, che a nome dello Imperre sollicita per farne contratto con il conte Palatino, a anco risolvera il duca de Milano che cerca quanto può restringere et concludere la practica, nella quale è già molti mesi.⁵¹

The letter also asks for an explicit declaration of the Duke's intentions, so that she may use it as an excuse to decline the proposal from Count Palatine (negotiated by the Emperor and the Duke of Milan), who had been trying to sign the marriage contract for a few months. In a letter dated September 9, reaffirming his marital intentions, Federico avowed his infinite gratitude and love to the Marchesa as his mother and *signora*:

⁵⁰ Extant correspondence has been published, along with a detailed log of events, by Stefano Davari, "Federico Gonzaga e la famiglia Paleologa del Monferrato" (1891).

⁵¹ Quoted from Davari, "Federico Gonzaga e la famiglia Paleologa del Monferrato" (1891), 45, n. 1.

[C]on mio grandissimo contento ho inteso il buon animo che la Ex.ia V. tiene verso di me, dimonstrando di amarmi quanto l'ha mai fatto in el tempo passato. Del che di buonissimo cuore la ringratio infinitamente, certificandola che il medesimo animo, è in me, et più se è possibile, amando io et osservando essa V.Ex.ia come madre et signora mia.⁵²

Pope Clement VII supported Federico's case and, annulling his engagement with Giulia due to Giulia's unsuitability to the task of procreation, affirmed the validity of the Marchese's marriage contract with Maria on September 20. With the Pope's declaration in hand, Federico needed only to obtain the Emperor's consent to excuse himself from his engagement with Giulia. This would have been a merry conclusion for all, but Maria died suddenly on September 15, with no sign of illness, perhaps because she was poisoned as a result of the internal dynastic struggle. In view of the heartbreaking outcome of the much-desired marriage, could Anna have commissioned a portrait both to find consolation and to commemorate her daughter as a "d'Este" bride?



Fig. 21. Ambrogio de Predis, *Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza*, c.1493, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Source: Wikimedia Commons online, public domain,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ambrogio_de_Predis_-_Bianca_Maria_Sforza_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

⁵² Davari, "Federico Gonzaga e la famiglia Paleologa del Monferrato" (1891), 46.



Fig. 22. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Anne Cleves*, 1539, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Source: Wikipedia, public domain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Anne_of_Cleves_by_Hans_Holbein_the_Younger.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

It was customary to commission portraits of prospective brides among the Italian and European élites as part of the betrothal.⁵³ Ambrogio de Predis's *Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza* (1493) (fig. 21)⁵⁴ and Hans Holbein the Younger's *Portrait of Anne of Cleves* (1539) (fig. 22)⁵⁵ are well-documented examples of bridal portraits commissioned in conjunction with a potential marriage. In addition, commemorative portraits of beloved daughters and wives who had prematurely passed away were often commissioned; Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of Giovanni degli Albizzi Tornabuoni* (c.1489–90) (fig. 23) is a prime example.⁵⁶ Given that the ruling family of Monferrato had an illustrious ancestry dating back to the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus and Yolanda of Monferrato, and had previously been known to commission portraits, it is probable that the forthcoming marriage of Maria, followed by her unexpected death before the wedding, was an especially strong occasion for making a portrait.

⁵³ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries*, 197.

⁵⁴ Christiansen and Weppelmann, *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, 264.

⁵⁵ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries*, 85.

⁵⁶ Christiansen and Weppelmann, *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, 67–68.

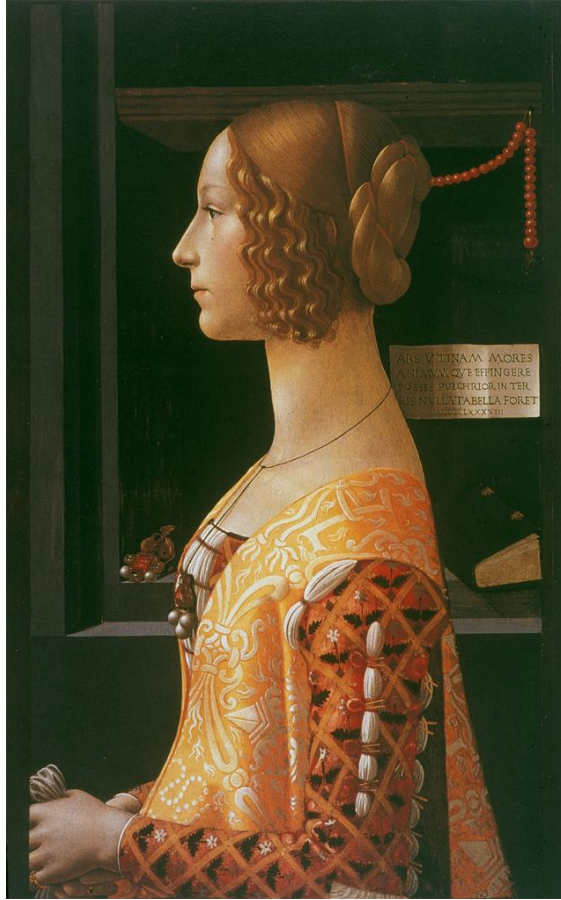


Fig. 23. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of Giovanni degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, 1489–90, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghirlandaio-Giovanna_Tornabuoni.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

Other Clues

Maria's physiognomy and other costume accessories provide additional important pieces of evidence to support the proposed attribution. Although no other likeness of Maria is known, the sitter in Bartolomeo's portrait shares some features in common with Giulio Romano's painting, identified as the *Portrait of Margherita Paleologo* (c.1531) (fig. 18), Maria's sister, who married Federico II Gonzaga a year after Maria's death. Anna proposed to give her second daughter and last child, Margherita, only one year younger than Maria, as wife to Federico immediately after her first daughter's death. Maria's beautiful blue eyes, high forehead, elongated and straight nose, and strong chin reveal a family resemblance when compared to Margherita in Giulio Romano's portrait. Given that the facial characteristics of the two sitters are fairly distinct, it is highly unlikely that both portraits had the same model.

The proposed identification of the Timken *Lady in Green* as Maria Paleologo is further supported by the sitter's dress and accessories—in particular, the style of her dress, the golden *bavero* with an embroidered pomegranate motif, the lapis rosary beads she wears, and the two rings prominently displayed on her left hand, a small one on the little finger and a large one on the index. The rings plausibly allude to her two engagements with Federico Gonzaga. As discussed

earlier, Federico put a ring on Maria's small finger during their first engagement/marriage ceremony in 1517.

The elaborate design of the ample and slashed sleeves in the Timken portrait follows the fashion of Isabella's court. Although lavish and extravagant sleeves were in vogue in many Italian city-states, the puffed type with diagonal slashes was prominent in the courts of Mantua and Ferrara, influenced by Spanish and above all French fashions of this period.⁵⁷ In contrast to states like Venice and Florence, where sumptuary laws restricted not only the amount of jewelry worn in public but also certain costume designs such as extravagant sleeves,⁵⁸ fashion in Mantua and Ferrara took advantage of such sleeves and adopted the elaborate styles of France and Burgundy, as the cities were connected via political and trade networks with the French kings. In fact, the diagonal slashes of the sleeves of the Timken lady find direct parallels in the French fashions favored by Isabella, rather than in the lengthwise vertical slits on more narrow sleeves associated with Spanish fashion and extremely popular in Milan.⁵⁹ An example of French-style diagonal slashes can be seen in Jan Gossaert's *Portrait of a Man* (c.1520s) (fig. 24), identified as a descendant of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy.⁶⁰ In contrast, vertical slits inspired by Spanish costume in Bronzino's *Portrait of Eleanora of Toledo* (c.1544–1545) (fig. 25) are held together by eyelets and elaborate golden ornaments.⁶¹ The form of the sleeves in the Timken portrait parallels both that in Giulio Romano's painting and the sleeve worn by Isabella in Paul Rubens's *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* (c.1605) in Vienna (fig. 26), probably modeled on another portrait of the Marchesa that is now lost.

The low-cut bodice in the Timken painting, framing the golden *bavero* in a deep neckline, also matches the design of the dress in Giulio Romano's portrait, as well as that in Titian's and Rubens's respective likenesses of Isabella. This style of dress was seemingly less common in Milan, as well as in the ruler portraiture of European monarchs, but very popular in Isabella's court. An abundance of examples in portraiture associated with Mantua, as well as with Ferrara and Venice in this period, point to the diffusion of this style in these centers.⁶²

⁵⁷ Jacqueline Herald, *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400–1500* (London; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Bell & Hyman; Humanities Press, 1981), 193–195.

⁵⁸ For example in Venice, as Stella Newton shows, the Senate outlawed slashed sleeves “as the new threat of the current fashion” because of the high cost associated with the production of slits. Due to the prohibition, slashed sleeves did not become characteristic of Venetian fashion in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and they do not appear in Venetian painting of this period. See Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians, 1495–1525*, 63.

⁵⁹ See multiple examples of Spanish-style costume popular in Italy in the 1520s–1550s in François Boucher, *A History of Costume in the West* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 235–238. Also, examples of dresses in the court of Milan with vertical lengthwise slits can be seen in Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis's *Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza* or Leonardo da Vinci's *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani (Portrait of a Lady with an Ermine)*. As Boucher states, “the slashings which spread from Swiss uniforms throughout Germany, France, and England, were smaller and more sparingly used in Spain. The Valladolid Cortés even forbade these *acuchillados* in 1548 and straight slits were than adopted, and were very wide spread after 1550,” (228).

⁶⁰ Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries*, 211.

⁶¹ Also see the discussion of Spanish-style sleeves in Cox-Rearick, “Power-Dressing at the Courts of Cosmío de' Medici and François I: The ‘moda alla spagnola’ of Spanish Consorts Eléonore d'Autriche and Eleonora di Toledo,” 43 and 47.

⁶² See, for example, Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians, 1495–1525*, 48, 49, 53, 61, 70, 107. Isabella's fashion is well captured by Titian and Rubens. For Ferrara, see images by Dosso Dossi, for example *Portrait of Laura Pisani* (1525).



Fig. 24. Jan Gossaert, *Portrait of a Man*, c.1520s (?), Staatliche Museen Preussischer, Berlin. Source: Wikimedia Commons online, public domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jan_Gossaert - A Noble Man - WGA9779.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jan_Gossaert_-_A_Noble_Man_-_WGA9779.jpg), consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 25. Bronzino, *Portrait of Eleonora of Toledo*, c.1544–45, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Source: Google Art Project, public domain, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bronzino - Eleonora di Toledo col figlio Giovanni - Google Art Project.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bronzino_-_Eleonora_di_Toledo_col_figlio_Giovanni_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg), consulted June 30, 2016.



Fig. 26. Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Isabella d'Este*, c.1605, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_122.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

Additionally, beads were a true obsession for Isabella and Federico.⁶³ Isabella and Federico used rosaries and paternosters as adornments, establishing contemporary fashion. For instance, in Titian's *Portrait of Federico II Gonzaga* (c.1530–1540) (fig. 27), a rosary of blue lapis is depicted around Federico's neck, while in Rubens's portrait, Isabella's paternosters are hung from her belt. Similarly, Margherita Paleologo displays her blue lapis rosary, gifted by Isabella,⁶⁴ attached to the belt (fig. 18). The type of necklace in the Timken portrait (fig. 19), also made of blue lapis beads divided by golden elements, is similar to that in Giulio Romano's picture and recalls those of Isabella and Federico.

The constellation of clues discussed here, including the aforementioned similarities in the facial characteristics and the costumes, supported by archival diplomatic correspondence and the painting's date, is better explained by the suggestion that the sitters in Bartolomeo Veneto's and Giulio Romano's portraits were indeed sisters, and that as prospective d'Este brides they had received similar gifts from Isabella: her fashionable *scuffiotti*, paternosters, and other adornments.

One could argue that the sitter in the Timken portrait simply wears the costume and adornments popular at the time, and thus that the work should not be considered a portrait in the proper sense of the word but rather an idealized image of a beautiful woman. A number of influential scholars, in fact, including Elizabeth Cropper, Rona Goffen, Amedeo Quondam, and Giovanni Pozzi, have all raised the issue that paintings of beautiful women produced in Northern

⁶³ Herald, *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400–1500*, 175. For instance, Isabella once ordered “50 paternosters of gold, 70 of amethyst, and others of black amber.”

⁶⁴ Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, 161.

Italy destabilize the concept of unitary, historical, or biographical identity.⁶⁵ Similarly, Georges Didi-Huberman has questioned the entire enterprise of trying to attach biographies to unknown sitters. Rona Goffen perhaps best articulates the issues, emphasizing that Renaissance portraiture was multivalent and likeness was not a necessary requirement; patrons demanded not only accurate renderings but also exemplary images. As Goffen rightly observes, Titian's *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* belongs in a category of likeness that both acts as an idealized type and represents Isabella as a beauty and a dignified Marchesa. According to Goffen, this purposeful confusion of painting genres and types of portraiture "makes it difficult if not impossible to differentiate such metaphorical or idealized portraits from pictures of beautiful women *per se*" and suggests that many pictures of beautiful women should be understood as portraits, functioning to honor an individual woman's identity and her charms.⁶⁶ The Timken portrait, however, stands out among lovely ladies of the period for several reasons: the lady in the image is presented standing formally in a three-quarter length; her sensuality is suppressed to accommodate the social and psychological agencies of official portraiture; and she is showing off her elaborate hairdo, dress, and distinct costume accessories—the crucially important details for public representation that typically signaled a high station. In this, the Timken portrait is closer to those made for marriage proposals like Ambrogio de Predis's *Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza* (1493) (fig. 21) or Hans Holbein the Younger's *Portrait of Anne of Cleves* (1539) (fig. 22), or portraits painted as the pendant to that of a husband, like Titian's *Portrait of Eleonora Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino* and its counterpart *Portrait of Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino* (1536–38). Thus the Timken sitter encourages us to contextualize her identity based on specific details provided, including the portrait's date.

If the sitter is Maria Paleologo, this provides a good explanation of the peculiar choice of colors for her splendid attire—dark green and gold with a brownish-red tint—as well as the presence of the embroidered pomegranate motif on her *bavero*. The golden *bavero* can be read as symbolic of Maria's Byzantine imperial ancestry, as the ubiquitous pomegranate motif embraces the connotations of regality, fertility, and immortality.⁶⁷ In addition, as Jacqueline Herald shows, green colors were prominent in the courts of Mantua, Milan, and Ferrara⁶⁸ and would complement well the shimmering golden tint of the silk *bavero*.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, 'Petrarchismo,' and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 374–394; Elizabeth Cropper, "Prolegomena to a New Interpretation of Bronzino's Florentine Portraits," in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth*, vol. 2, ed. Andrew Morrrough (Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1985), 149–162; Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ed. M.W. Ferguson et al. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 175–190; Amedeo Quondam, *Il Naso di Laura* (Ferrara: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore S.p.A., 1991); Giovanni Pozzi, "Il ritratto della donna nella poesia d'inizio Cinquecento e la pittura di Giorgione," *Lettere Italiane* 31 (1979): 3–30; Rona Goffen, *Titian's Woman* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Portrait, the Individual and the Singular: Remarks on the Legacy of Aby Warburg," in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 165–188.

⁶⁶ Goffen, *Titian's Woman*, 95.

⁶⁷ Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings, 1300–1550* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 218.

⁶⁸ Herald, *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400–1500*, 142.



Fig. 27. Titian, *Portrait of Federico II Gonzaga*, c.1530–40, Museo del Prado, Madrid. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tizian_063.jpg, consulted June 30, 2016.

Final Consideration

The Timken portrait is associated with the final period of Bartolomeo Veneto's artistic career when he had a wide circle of patrons in the city of Milan and the Lombard and Veneto areas.⁶⁹ Considering that Casale of Monferrato had political and economic relations with Milan, and that the Duke of Milan was negotiating for Maria Paleologo's hand with her mother, Anna d'Alencon, the Marchesa of Monferrato, it is not unreasonable to presume that Bartolomeo could have been recommended by Milanese nobility as a portrait artist.

If the sitter's identification as Maria Paleologo is correct, then the portrait would have stayed at Casale with Anna. There are no good reasons to suggest that Margherita would have brought with her to Mantua the portrait of her unfortunate dead sister. Following Margherita Paleologo's marriage to Federico II Gonzaga, and the death of Maria's and Margherita's uncle John George Paleologo, the Duchy of Monferrato was annexed by Mantua. As the imperial

⁶⁹ Pagnotta, *The Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, 28.

decree of 1536 states, Federico and his heirs obtained the title of Marchese of Monferrato.⁷⁰ It is plausible that in later years, the portrait entered the Gonzaga collections. In particular, the painting may have been transferred to Mantua during the reign of Vincenzo I Gonzaga (1562–1612), an avid art collector who set about establishing an outstanding gallery of religious works and portraits in 1594.⁷¹ According to archival documents published by Luzio, the Duke gathered in Mantua “every kind of painting.”⁷² In his 1604 letter to Carlo de Rossi in the court of France, the Duke details his plans to create a special room in the gallery dedicated to the most beautiful women of the world:

Di piu faccio fare una camera nella quale penso di raccogliere li ritratti di tutte le piu belle dame del monde, cosi Principisse come dame private, onde vorrei che parimenti V.S. si pigliasse pensiero di farmi havere li ritratti di quelle piu famose di bellezza di cotesto Regno, non tanto vive quanto morte, et non tanto Principesse quanto d'altra conditione, rimettendo a V.S. l'esquisitezza della pittura che da me sara pagata la spesa prontissim.te.⁷³

It is known that Vincenzo made regular stops at Casale in Monferrato, the Duke's property. Could it have been that the Duke considered the Timken portrait suitable for his room full of “the most beautiful women of the world”? Whatever the case, the Duke's newly created private gallery may have been an occasion for the transfer of the Timken portrait to the Gonzaga collections in Mantua. After Vincenzo's death, a significant part of the gallery, together with other Gonzaga treasures, was sold in 1627 to Charles I of England, thus entering the royal collections of the British kings.⁷⁴ According to Luzio's research, the pictures were shipped through the port of Venice where, apparently due to confusion and delays in payments, a good many works disappeared, whether lost or stolen. The collection was stored in Venice from 1629 to 1632, while the dealer Daniel Nys was trying to extract a payment from King Charles.⁷⁵ As Lionel Cust confirms, based on the comparison of the inventory taken in Mantua in 1627 with Van der Doort's catalogue of the pictures belonging to Charles in 1639, only a portion of the Duke of Mantua collection arrived in England.⁷⁶ Could this explain why the Timken painting appeared on the art market in Venice? There are certainly other possibilities to account for the painting's history prior to the Manfrin collection. After all, the acquisitions of Charles I were sold overseas by the British Parliament after the monarchy was overthrown in 1649, while the city of Mantua was sacked by the Austrians in 1630, and whatever remained of value was carried off to Germany or stolen.

The Timken painting must have entered the Manfrin collection in Venice sometime before 1802, as there are no documented acquisitions after Girolamo Manfrin's death. The painting is definitively listed in the collection inventories of 1834.⁷⁷ With the exception of a handful of

⁷⁰ Ady, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 351.

⁷¹ Alessandro Luzio, *La Galleria Dei Gonzaga: Venduta all'Inghilterra Nel 1627–28. Documenti Degli Archivi Di Mantova e Londra* (Milan: Casa Editrice L.F. Cogliati, 1913), 40.

⁷² Luzio, *La Galleria Dei Gonzaga*, 39–40.

⁷³ Luzio, *La Galleria Dei Gonzaga*, 39–40.

⁷⁴ George R. Marek, *The Bed and the Throne: The Life of Isabella d'Este* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 237.

⁷⁵ Lionel Cust, “Notes on Pictures in the Royal Collections—XXVII: The Mantua Collection and Charles I,” *The Burlington Magazine* 24, no. 131 (Feb. 1914): 254–257.

⁷⁶ Cust, “Notes on Pictures in the Royal Collections—XXVII: The Mantua Collection and Charles I,” 257.

⁷⁷ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Linda Borean for verifying the unpublished inventories for me.

letters, these archival inventories do not include information about paintings' provenance, making it difficult to trace the ownership of the Bartolomeo work prior to the Manfrin collection. Further identification may be assisted in the future by extant seals and collection stamps on the reverse of the painting (fig. 28).⁷⁸ Of particular importance is a small seal of dark brown wax impressed by a signet ring, dating back to the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries and bearing a monogram with a cross, a crown, and two letters, "G" and "V," placed symmetrically on each side of the cross (fig. 29). It is very difficult to connect this monogram with a particular owner, as only a few monograms or seals associated with paintings have been published and interpreted. Could the letters "G" and "V" signify a personal device of one of the Gonzaga collectors?⁷⁹ The signet seal requires further research before we can know for certain the whereabouts of the painting prior to its becoming part of the Manfrin collection.



Fig. 28. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*, reverse, The Timken Museum of Art, San Diego. Source: Courtesy of John Wilson.

⁷⁸ The reverse of the painting preserves several seals, ink numbers, and lot numbers from the Sotheby's sale of 1977.

⁷⁹ For example, the Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga (1538–1587) famously used the device "GV" twice on his *scudo*. See: Chambers and Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, 210. Given that the signet also bears a cross, the owner could have been a cardinal. There were at least two cardinals in the Gonzaga family who played a prominent role in governing Mantua and whose names correspond to the "GV" monogram: Cardinal Giovanni Vincenzo Gonzaga (1540–1591), son of Ferrante Gonzaga, was called to Mantua by Duke Guglielmo to assist in the government of the Duchy, and Vincenzo II Gonzaga (1594–1627) was also a cardinal before becoming the seventh Duke of Mantua.



Fig. 29. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*, reverse, detail, signet seal, The Timken Museum of Art, San Diego. Source: Courtesy of John Wilson.

After the death of Girolamo Manfrin's son Pietro, the collection was inherited by his sister Giulia-Giovanna Battista Plattis and then by her children, the Marchese Antonio Maria Plattis (1802–1876) and the Marchesa Bortolina (or Lina) Plattis. The heirs made the first sale of a number of major works from the collection in 1856.⁸⁰ The remainder of the collection was divided between the heirs, and the Marchese's part of the collection was auctioned in Paris in 1871. His sister's part, comprising 215 paintings, remained in Venice until 1897 and was published in a catalogue of 1872. The Manfrin paper label reveals that the Timken painting was assigned no. 59 in 1851 (fig. 30) and then no. 63 (fig. 31) upon entering the Marchesa Bortolina's collection.⁸¹ The painting was bought by the art dealer Alexander Baker of London, whose ownership is confirmed by his monogram in ink, "AB No 1" (fig. 32). From Baker, the painting entered the collections of the fifth Earl of Roseberry (Mentmore, Buckinghamshire) and was then purchased in 1979 by the Putnam Foundation for the collections of the Timken Museum of Art.⁸²

⁸⁰ See note on the history of Manfrin collection. Nicholas Penny, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings. volume II, Venice 1540–1600* (London; New Haven, Conn.: National Gallery Company; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2008), 321.

⁸¹ This conclusion has been reached based on the comparison with paper stamps and the ink numbers on the reverse of "A Naval Battle" from the Manfrin Collection in the National Gallery in London. The reverse is published in Penny's catalogue, as referenced above, 322.

⁸² Pagnotta, *The Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, 67.



Fig. 30. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*, reverse, detail, Manfrin label, The Timken Museum of Art, San Diego. Source: Courtesy of John Wilson.



Fig. 31. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*, reverse, detail, Bortolina Plattis ink label, The Timken Museum of Art, San Diego. Source: Courtesy of John Wilson.

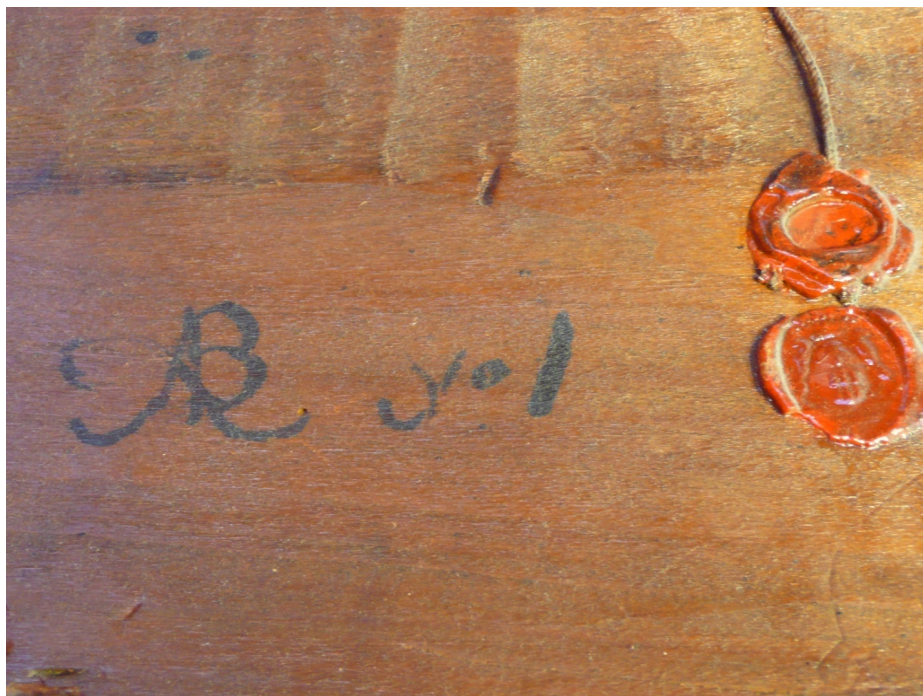


Fig. 32. Bartolomeo Veneto, *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*, reverse, detail, Alexander Baker ink label, The Timken Museum of Art, San Diego. Source: Courtesy of John Wilson.

Conclusion

A close reading of the hairdo, costume accessories, and facial characteristics of the sitter in Bartolomeo Veneto's *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress*, evaluated in the context of Northern Italian court fashion, suggests the identification of the sitter as Maria Paleologo (1508–1530), the heiress of Monferrato. The portrait date corresponds to the period of torturous marriage negotiations between Monferrato and Mantua and further supports the proposed attribution of the sitter. Such an attribution helps to clarify the artist's source of patronage in his later period, and may be especially invaluable because we hardly know who is depicted in most of his pictures and what the occasion was. Bartolomeo, active in Brescia and the vicinity of Milan during the last period of his career, could have secured this commission through his circle of Milanese patrons connected to the court at Casale of Monferrato. This paper proposes to identify the portrait as a wedding portrait. Tragically, the duchess died early, at the age of twenty-two, to be replaced at the altar by her sister. If this is indeed Maria's portrait, it would be the only known depiction of her. Since no other portraits of Maria exist, much of the evidence presented here is comparative and supplemented by non-visual, archival materials. In view of the uniquely preserved original seals on the back of the painting, the portrait's provenance could tentatively be traced to Casale and later to the renowned Gonzaga collections in Mantua, prior to its entering the Manfrin collection in Venice.

The Timken portrait reveals a complex game of identity in Renaissance courts. Rulers like Isabella d'Este strategically deployed the power and agency of Roman imperial fashions to construct and project their dynastic identity and social status. Through bestowing her exquisite headdresses as gifts, the Marchesa was able to reinforce her ideals and symbolic values. Her daughters-in-law displayed their allegiance to Isabella visually by wearing headdresses and costume accessories modeled on her proprietary designs. In turn, Isabella's Roman-inspired styling aided her in the construction and transmission of her own feminine virtue and political aspirations. The commission of the Titian portrait concludes the period of the power struggle between Isabella d'Este and her son Federico Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua. As is well-established, beginning from the mid-1520s, Isabella engaged in a relentless battle to arrange a marriage for the Duke, who spent years defying his mother's expectations of him taking a wife appropriate to his station, instead becoming passionately involved with his mistress Isabella Boscetti.⁸³ The three works by Titian, Veneto, and Romano discussed here celebrate Isabella d'Este's successful campaign to get her son at last to make a dutiful marriage of state in 1531. Portraits of Federico Gonzaga's prospective brides embody the ideals of feminine virtue and rank fashioned by his mother, the First Lady of the Renaissance. Undoubtedly, Titian's portrait of the Marchesa was intended to decorate the ducal apartments and perhaps be displayed alongside images of Federico (one of them by Titian) and Romano's painting of Margherita Paleologo, that long-desired and respectable duchess who took the place intended for her late sister, whose portrait would have hung there instead—the *Lady in the Green Dress*.

⁸³ Shemek, "Aretino's Marescalco: Marriage Woes and the Duke of Mantua," 373.