

Male Portrait of a Young Man on Panel: Technical-Stylistic Investigation and Attributional Purposes

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Abstract

The present study, conducted for attributional purposes, proposes a technical-stylistic and iconographic reading of the Male Portrait of a Young Man on panel, based on diagnostic investigations and material analyses integrated with historical-artistic reflection. The multidisciplinary approach examines the support, preparation, painting technique, and conservation history in order to define chronology, area of production, and lines of attribution. Particular emphasis is placed on the presence and stratification of the halo, interpreted in light of analytical evidence and the Renaissance portraiture context. The study provides an organic framework of material and stylistic data, offering elements useful for placing the work within the context of Northern Italian portraiture between the late 15th and early 16th centuries and for evaluative attributions.

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1. Introduction

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This study aims to analyze the Male Portrait of a Young Man (Fig. 1), an oil on poplar panel belonging to a private collection, through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates historical-artistic investigation, technical-material analysis, and scientific diagnostics. In the absence of certain documentary sources regarding the commissioning, provenance, or attribution of the work, the research is based primarily on direct observation of the artifact and the interpretation of data obtained through stratigraphic, reflectographic, and spectrometric analyses. This methodology allows for the reconstruction not only of the executive aspects of the work but also of the cultural and technical context within which it was conceived.

The composition, set according to a rigorous vertical structure, focuses attention on the figure of the young man portrayed, isolated against a dark background and devoid of spatial or narrative references. This formal choice, typical of cultured Renaissance portraiture, directs the observer toward a reading centered on individual identity, the psychological quality of the face, and the symbolic function of clothing. The work indeed manifests particular attention to the material rendering of the fabric, constructed through sophisticated chromatic glazes and a calibrated orchestration of light, elements that highlight a full knowledge of the potential of painting and the technical practices developed in Northern Italy between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century.

Diagnostic investigations confirmed the use of a single poplar panel, prepared with a thin and carefully smoothed gesso layer, consistent with the Central-Northern Renaissance painting tradition. Pigment analysis highlighted the use of precious

materials such as lead white, cinnabar, copper-based pigments, and lead-tin yellow, while infrared reflectography revealed the presence of incisions and traces of preparatory drawing attributable to a structured and aware workshop practice. The construction of space through light, glazes, and tonal modulations, combined with the quality of physiognomic and textile rendering, suggests a figurative context akin to the Lombard-Venetian culture of the mature Renaissance.

The objective of this research is therefore to define, through the convergence of technical and stylistic data, a more precise historical-artistic contextualization of the work, contributing to the debate regarding executive methods, workshop practices, and the material culture of Italian Renaissance portraiture.



*Fig. 1: Male Portrait of a Young Man
Oil on poplar
Panel Dimensions: 53.3 cm x 41.9 cm
Private Collection*

2. Materials and Methods

The technical-material characterization of the painting was conducted through an integrated protocol of non-invasive and micro-invasive diagnostic investigations, aimed at defining the executive technique, stratigraphic organization, and state of conservation, according to standardized procedures for the study of painted artifacts on wooden supports.

Multispectral Imaging

The multispectral investigation included acquisitions in visible light, raking light, UV fluorescence, IR reflectography at 1000 nm and 1700 nm, as well as false-color IR. The images were realized using:

- 1) Nikon Mirrorless Z7 II Full Range camera, 46 MP, modified for a spectral range of 300–1000 nm, equipped with a Nikon Nikkor Z 50 mm f/1.8 S lens.
- 2) Lighting system composed of two Godox AD300 PRO flashes for VIS and IR, and two Madatec CR230B HP lamps for UV fluorescence.
- 3) Macro photography executed with a Nikon Coolpix 4500 equipped with an SL1 LED ring illuminator.
- 4) IR 1700 nm reflectography acquired via a Wildcat 640 InGaAs camera (Xenics), resolution 640×512 px, range 900–1700 nm, with a Kowa SWIR 50 mm lens and a Midwest 1475 nm high-pass filter. The multispectral images allowed for the identification of overpainting, lacunae, material variations, traces of preparatory drawing and incisions, as well as the presence of the golden halo hidden by subsequent interventions.

Digital Radiography

Radiography was performed with:

- 1) PORTA 100 HF source, 40 kV, 0.2 mA/s
- 2) VIVIX S 4343VAW FPD detector, pixel pitch 140 µm

The investigation allowed for documenting the internal structure of the support, the presence of battens inserted into the thickness of the panel, ancient nailings, and stuccos with high radiopacity. The radiographs also evidenced regular vertical lines not attributable to visible joints on the back, suggesting complex structural phenomena of the support.

Optical Microscopy VIS and UV

Stratigraphic sections were observed with:

- 1) L2020 Series metallographic microscope
- 2) Optika B 510 fluorescence microscope

XRF Analysis (X-ray Fluorescence)

XRF measurements were conducted with:

- 1) Bruker Tracer 5g, rhodium anode, SDD detector, 8 mm collimator
- 2) Parameters: 35 kV, 10 µA, 15 s integration time

3. Preliminary Elements

This study aims to elaborate a rigorous analytical framework to situate the painting in coherent formal and chronological coordinates. The examination of a sixteenth-century painting transcends mere descriptive exercise, configuring itself as a foundational moment of historical-artistic analysis. Such analysis allows for the identification of the structural elements of the image, the recognition of the main compositional choice, and the definition of the bases for complex interpretations. Description assumes a preponderant role, given the absence of documentary data which imposes an approach founded exclusively on visual¹ and laboratory analysis. The vertical rectangular format²

1 : Visual Analysis — By “visual analysis” is meant the systematic examination of form, color, light, and gesture without recourse to external historical documentation.

2 Vertical Rectangular Format — The choice of format influences the direction of the gaze and the hierarchy of iconographic planes.

favors an ascensional reading³ of the image, guiding the gaze from the splendor of the clothing to the face. This compositional setting, far from being neutral, responds to a precise communicative intention: the dress as an indicator of social status, the face as an expression of the individual and psychological dimension. The absence of spatial or landscape references places the subject in an atemporal dimension. This choice, recurrent in cultured sixteenth-century portraiture, allows for concentrating attention on the individual, subtracting him from contingent narration. The figure occupies almost the entire pictorial field. This centrality reflects a humanistic conception of the image, in which man is the measure and fulcrum of representation. Painting configures itself as a tool for investigating identity, rather than mere physiognomic registration. The absence of inscriptions, dates, or signatures on the pictorial surface inscribes the work in a vast portrait production of Renaissance figurative culture, in which the recognizability of the author did not always prevail over the representative, symbolic, and devotional function of the painting. A distinctive and immediately perceptible element is the presence of the halo, today visible thanks to restoration interventions and confirmed by XRF analysis as made of gold. This datum excludes reductive interpretations of the painting as a mere secular portrait and imposes, from the outset, a more articulated reading, which takes into account the hybrid forms between portrait and sacred images diffused between the 15th and 16th centuries.

4. Analysis of Materials

The work, realized on a single poplar panel⁴ is distinguished by the absence of joints and fixed battens incorporated into the thickness. Radiographic investigation evidenced the presence of nails on the strips, as well as further metallic elements. Microscopic analysis of the transverse, radial, and tangential sections of the wooden support⁵ confirms the arboreal species employed, identified as poplar.

Fig. 2: Back part of the painting



The employment of poplar panels aligns with the practices of the 15th and 16th centuries in specific Italian areas, characterized by the use of native broadleaf timber. The absence of joints supports the hypothesis of a support of contained dimensions, worked as a single element. The presence of battens and small nails signals interventions of a structural nature or posterior reintegrations, aimed at

³ Ascensional Reading — The progression from attire to face is a frequent compositional strategy in court portraiture to emphasize status and identity.

⁴ Single Pane — The absence of joints indicates a panel cut from a single piece of wood, a limit that conditions dimensions and hygroscopic behavior.

⁵ Microscopic Analysis of Sections — The anatomical examination of transverse, radial, and tangential sections is the standard method for identifying wood species.

stabilizing the support, an indication of continuous use and diachronic conservation. The object under examination presents a constructive peculiarity: the reinforcement structure was integrated inside the panel through the realization of a recess by excavation on the back. (Fig. 2)

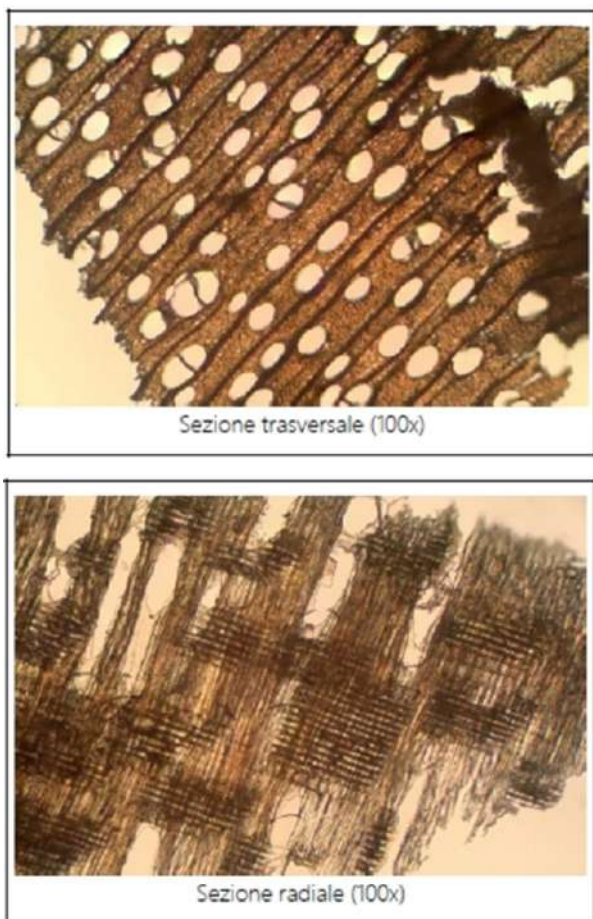


Fig. 3: Transverse and radial section of the wood used for the panel

This intervention, together with subsequent restorations, raises questions about the chronological coherence of the modifications and their influence on the historical and conservative reading of the work. The wood essence used was frequently employed in Northern and Central Italy in the 16th century. Excavations on the back intended to accommodate battens and reinforcements are highlighted, a technique not customary in the Cinquecento, and therefore presumably subsequent. This conservative methodology, while reducing deformation, entails the

disadvantage of weakening the original panel. Poplar wood manifests lower stability compared to essences such as oak or walnut, showing notable sensitivity to hygroscopic variations. Therefore, the vertical fissures found are coherent with the natural tangential shrinkage proper to poplar (Fig. 3), accentuated by centuries of exposure to environmental fluctuations. This mechanical behavior justifies the need for subsequent structural interventions, such as the insertion of battens and nailings. The identification of poplar, while not allowing a univocal localization, excludes a Nordic origin of the work, where oak predominated, reduces the probability of Flemish importation, and consequently strengthens the hypothesis of an Italian provenance. In the context of Renaissance painting, the wooden support transcends the mere technical element, configuring itself as a primary historical source, capable of providing crucial information on chronology, area of production, and workshop practices. The analysis of the wood, with the identification of *Populus* sp. (poplar), is based on the presence of diffuse porosity, medium-large vessels, thin and numerous wood rays, as well as the absence of resin channels. As previously mentioned, poplar holds particular historical-artistic significance for Italian painting between the 14th and 16th centuries, especially in Central-Northern Italy. The wide use of poplar is justified by its abundant availability, for example in the floodplains of the Po, Arno, and Tiber rivers, its ease of working, its reduced weight, and its relatively contained cost compared to woods like walnut and oak. In the case under examination, the choice of poplar results coherent with a work destined for a private or semi-private context, rather than a monumental liturgical placement. In the advanced 15th century and early 16th century, the availability of wide poplar panels suggests access to quality

supplies, an index of a not modest commissioning and non-serial production. It is deduced, therefore, that this type of support is not the fruit of improvisation, but of a conscious choice.

5. Stratigraphic and Technical Analysis of the Paint Layer

Two stratigraphic samples (Fig. 4) were taken from the work under examination in correspondence with the perimeter zone of the painting. These samples were then subjected to microscopic analysis, both in visible and ultraviolet light.

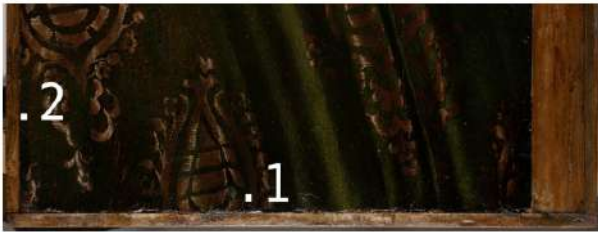


Fig. 4: Sampling points for stratigraphic analysis

Stratigraphic study configures itself as a primary source of investigation, equivalent to an archival document. It indeed documents the artist's choices, workshop practices, technological innovations, and transformations occurred following restoration interventions or environmental alterations. Stratigraphic analysis has brought to light a wide range of information of relevant interest. From the stratigraphic investigations and chemical analyses carried out, it emerges that the base layer was realized with gypsum (calcium sulfate), (Fig. 6) by virtue of the recurrent presence of calcium and strontium in the respective counts. The stratigraphy also highlighted the existence of a white preparatory layer, based on gypsum, containing translucent inclusions and reddish particles.

The yellowish fluorescence⁶ highlighted in micrography under UV illumination directs towards the hypothesis of a lipid-based medium. The detected thickness is comprised between 0.05 and 0.09 mm. The paint layer, overlying the preparatory layer, manifests as heterogeneous and fragmented, with a thickness equal to 0.03 mm. Locally, glazing elements are found with darker layers obtained through the employment of earths suitable for darkening the filling, of variable dimensions between 0.01 and 0.03 mm. The analysis conducted highlighted a gypsum-based preparation, of thickness⁷ varying between 0.05 mm and 0.09 mm, applied uniformly and carefully smoothed. This type of preparation reveals itself fully coherent with the Italian tradition of panel painting, a codified technique, in particular, in Cennino Cennini's "Libro dell'Arte"⁸, where the thinness of the layer preludes to an evolved phase of such tradition. During the late 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, one assists, in fact, to a progressive reduction in the thickness of the gypsum used for preparation⁹ to greater attention to smoothing, and to a more refined control of binder absorption. The preparation, in addition to the mechanical function, acts as a luminous interface between the wooden support and the image. In the painting under examination, the clear preparation amplifies the transparency of the overlying paint layers, allowing light to reflect and refract within the paint film.

⁶ UV Fluorescence — Yellowish fluorescence in UV is often indicative of lipid components or organic varnishes; spectroscopic analysis confirms the nature of the medium.

⁷ Stratigraphic Thicknesses — The measured thicknesses (0.05–0.09 mm for the preparation; 0.03 mm for the paint layer) fall within the values observed for thin preparations typical of the period.

⁸ Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, ed. Gaetano e Carlo Milanese, Florence, Felice Le Monnier, 1859.

⁹ Function of the Preparation — In addition to the mechanical function, gypsum acts as an optical interface that influences the brightness and transparency of the overlying paint layers.



Fig. 5: Sample 1 (front and rear micrography at 45x)

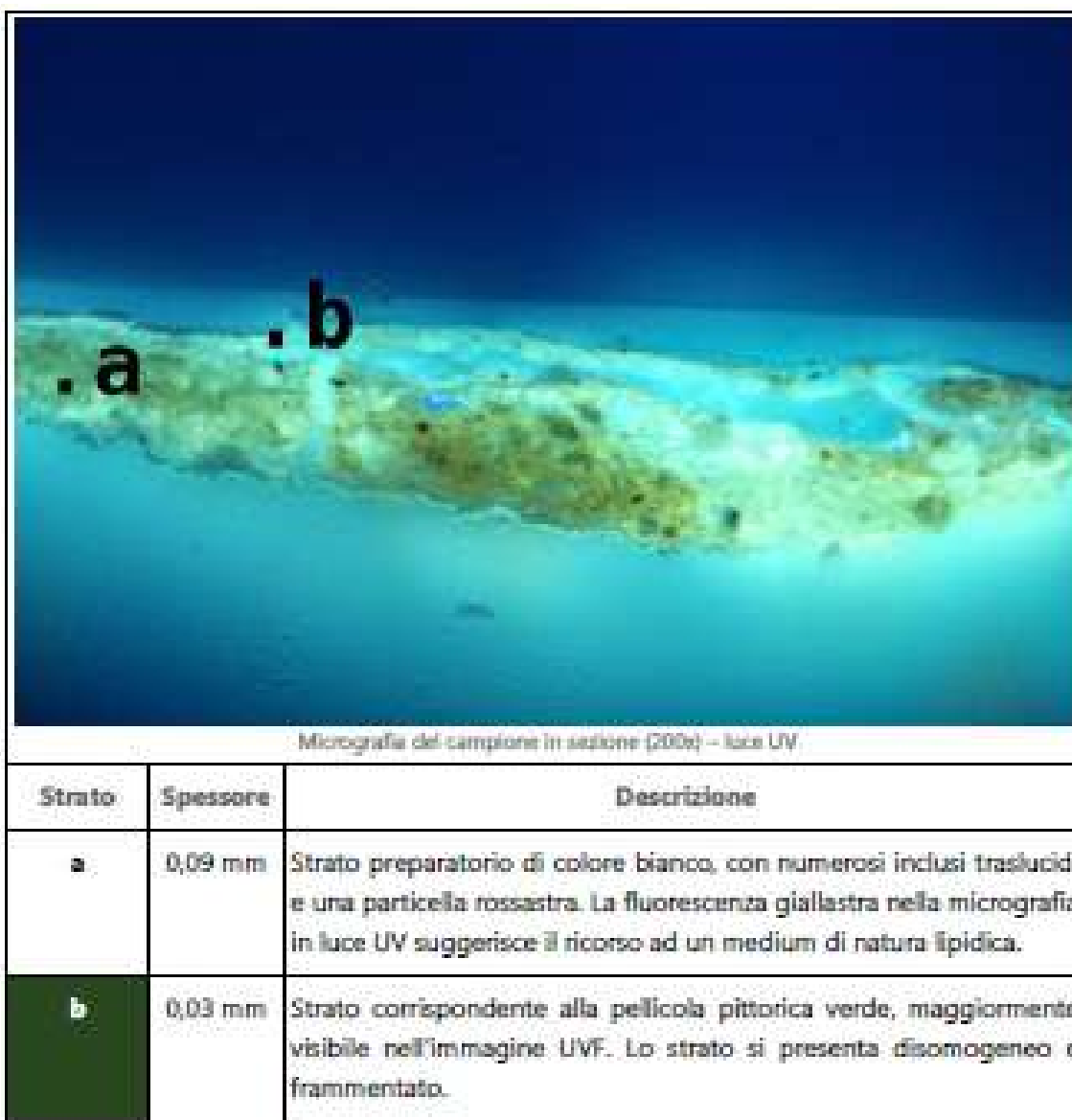


Fig. 6: UV micrography at 200x and relative stratigraphic analysis

Fig. 7: Stratigraphy of sample 1 in visible light at 200x – 400x

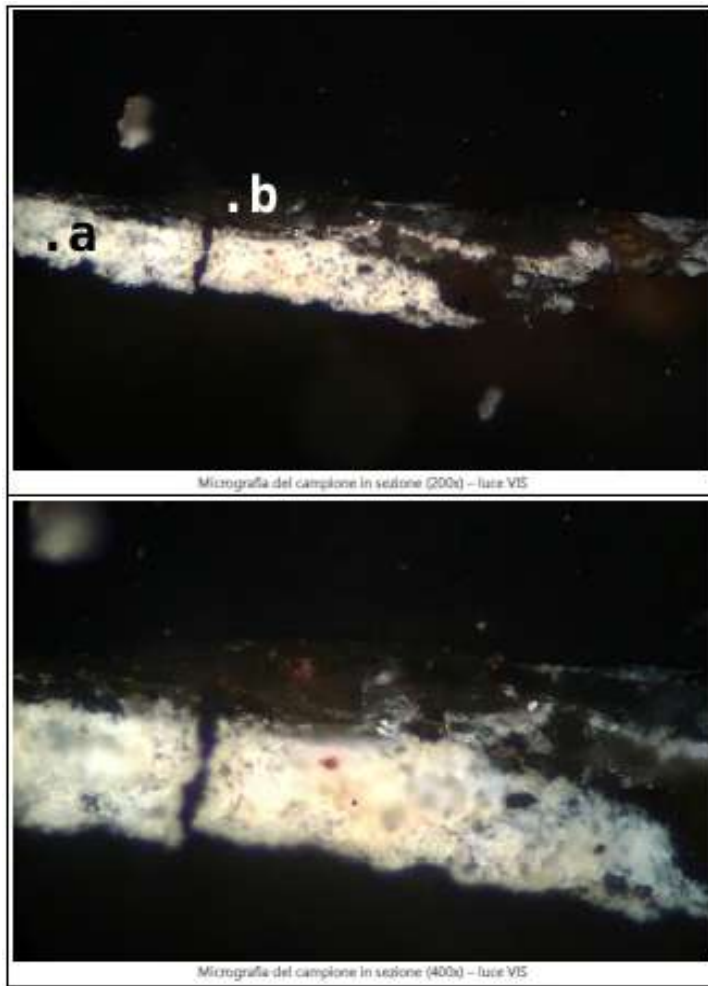
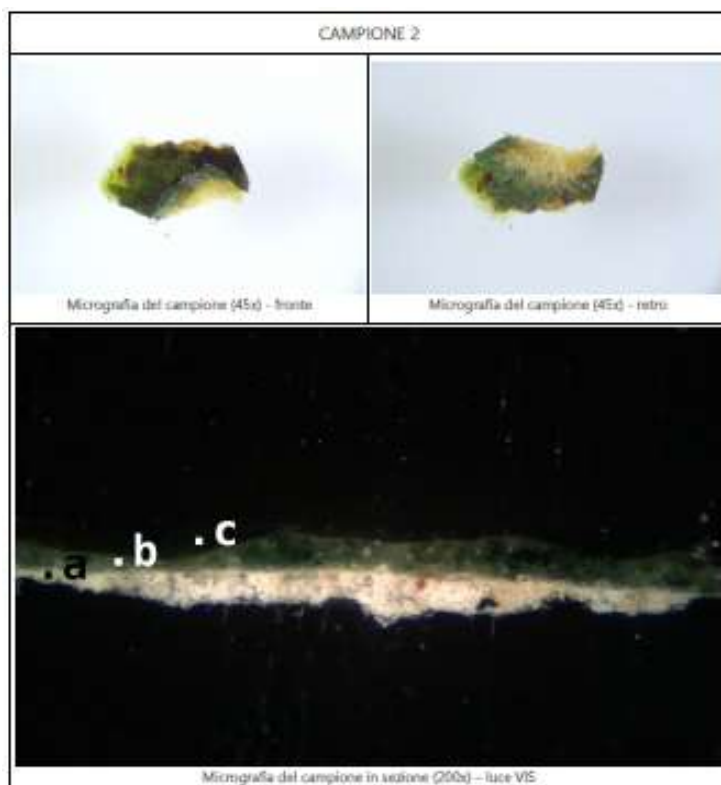


Fig. 8: Sample 2 – Micrography of the sample (45x) front and back, and stratigraphy of sample 2 at 200x



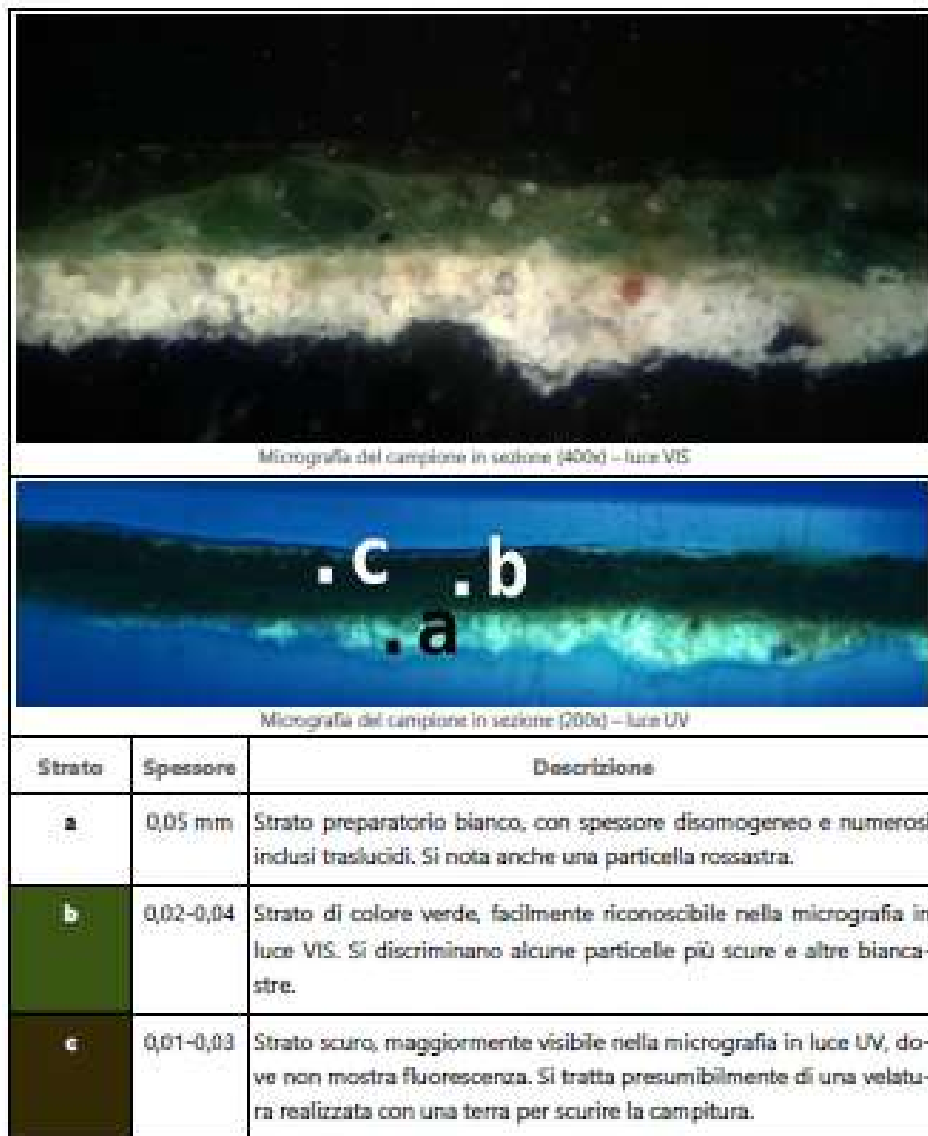


Fig. 9: Stratigraphy of sample 2 (in section at 400x in visible light) and (in section at 200x in UV) and stratigraphic description of the individual layers.

The effect of light reflection, also found in the painting under study, is particularly evident in the flesh tones realized with lead white and cinnabar, in the green glazes of the robe, and, above all, in the tonal transition zones of the background. From a comparative point of view, this conception of the preparation as a "luminous field"¹⁰ is attested in numerous works of the mature Renaissance, especially in the Lombard and Venetian areas, where

painting tends to privilege softness and atmospheric depth. As can be deduced from the analyses, the yellowish fluorescence detected in UV in the preparatory layer indicates the presence of an organic binder of a lipid or mixed nature. Although traditionally medieval preparations were bound with animal glue, starting from the end of the 15th century many Italian workshops began to experiment with fatty, mixed¹¹ (glue+oil)

¹⁰ Luminous Field of the Preparation — The clear preparation acts as a "luminous field" that amplifies the transparency of glazes and contributes to the softness of flesh tones.

¹¹ Mixed and Fatty Preparations — From the end of the 15th century, many Italian workshops experimented with "fatty" or mixed preparations (glue + oil), solutions that facilitate the transition towards oil painting and reduce gypsum absorption.

preparations, or oily primings over gypsum. Such solutions make the surface more compatible with oil painting, reduce absorption, and improve the cohesion of the paint layers. In the painting under examination, the presence of a lipid binder in the preparation places the work in a fully Renaissance phase, technically updated and distant from archaic practices. The stratigraphic sections reveal a structure coherent with the poplar wooden support used and a thin gypsum preparation. The main paint layer also presents modulation glazes; the analyses also highlighted the presence of non-original retouches, deriving from restoration interventions. The original paint layers present thicknesses comprised between 0.02 mm and 0.04 mm, an index of a refined technique, based on controlled superimpositions rather than thick impastos. This executive mode is typical of artists who operate with full awareness of the properties of oil and its expressive potential.

In the Renaissance pictorial system, the preparation must not be considered solely a functional layer, but an interface of mediation between the wooden support and the composition of the image, thus fulfilling three primary functions: a mechanical role, guaranteeing adhesion and stability; a chemical function, regulating binder absorption; and an optical function, influencing brightness and chromatic perception. In the painting under study, the limited-thickness gypsum preparation effectively fulfills this triple function: its exiguity favors uniform color adhesion, preventing material accumulations; simultaneously, the presence of an organic binder attenuates the excessive hygroscopicity of the gypsum, avoiding phenomena of color

"burning"¹². On an optical level, the clear preparation configures itself as an internal reflecting surface, allowing light to cross the semi-transparent paint layers and reflect towards the observer. This principle underlies the luminous rendering of flesh tones and glazes, in coherence with a painting conceived to be enjoyed at close range, in an indoor environment and with controlled lighting. The quality of the preparation found is not attributable to an automatic practice, but to a stratified technical culture. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the most avant-garde workshops developed a refined empirical knowledge, transmitted through practice and observation, rather than through theoretical treatises. The choice of a thin and well-smoothed preparation reveals a deep knowledge of the properties of the pigments employed, an awareness of oil drying times, and the capacity to obtain effects of chromatic depth. The reduced thickness of the preparation layer is manifest. An interval of 50-90 μm is relatively meager compared to some more consistent preparations of the late Middle Ages, in line with the application of finely smoothed coats of gypsum and with the intent to obtain a luminous and neutral base, ideal for glazes. The yellowish UV fluorescence signals, as previously mentioned, the presence of an organic binder, presumably of a lipid nature or a mixture of glue and oil. Historically, the adoption of "fatty" or "mixed" preparations is attested in workshops transitioning from tempera to oil painting (15th-16th century). The use of a fattier binder reduces capillary absorption, favoring a uniform application of oil and chromatic regularity. Although in treatises, such as Cennini's, the preparation is described

¹² "Burning" of Color — The use of an organic binder in the preparation attenuates the excessive hygroscopicity of gypsum and reduces the risk of darkening or "burning" phenomena of the color.

with animal glue and gypsum, in later epochs (16th century) experiments with different binders are recorded. The micro-variations in thickness between the sampled points indicate distinct areas of application.

As mentioned previously, the stratigraphic sequence offers us information on the thinness of the layers; we indeed find a sequence:

- Poplar support
- Gypsum preparation (0.05-0.09mm) with organic medium
- Paint layer/layers
- Modulation glazes (0.01-0.03mm)
- Retouch/integration layers (variable)

The thinness of the chromatic layers suggests careful consideration of drying times¹³ significantly reduced by such exiguity. This leads to supposing a high volume of commissions for the artist or workshop, for whom this technique represented an efficient solution to optimize production. The fineness of the paint layers implies an application technique in which chromatic modulation is obtained through superimpositions and transparencies, rather than through thick fillings. This approach is characteristic of the use of oil and mixed media, which allow for uniform glazes. Further stratigraphic investigations, deriving from samplings in internal areas of the work, obtained from complementary analyses, focus on the stratigraphy at the level of the flesh tones, focal element of the painting. In this sample, a preparatory layer based on gypsum and proteinaceous binder is detected, common to the entire study, and a base tone laying for the flesh tone (Fig. 10), constituted

predominantly by lead white, with minimal additions of light tone. Chromatic modulation was obtained through the controlled addition of red pigment (cinnabar) and browns (natural earths). Thin glazes are observed, applied with an oily binder, aimed at tonal harmonization and three-dimensional rendering. On a chemical level, the widespread presence of lead (Pb) in the flesh tone layers, detected via XRF analysis, confirms the systematic use of lead white as a structural pigment. This datum is coherent with a mature oil painting, in which lead white fulfills a function not only chromatic but also supportive of the correct polymerization of the oily binder. The stratigraphy also reveals that the pigments are not mixed randomly, but organized in distinct functional layers. This implies a deep knowledge of drying times and chemical compatibilities between the materials¹⁴ employed. The subject's robe, characterized by a predominant intense green tonality, represents a field of investigation of considerable technical relevance. Diagnostic investigations attest to the use of a copper-based pigment, coherent with the greens employed in the 16th century. Such pigments, notoriously unstable and susceptible to environmental variations, require accurate technical management. Stratigraphic analysis reveals that the green is not applied in a single laying, but realized through:

- An opaque chromatic base
- Darker glazes for shadow modulation
- Finishing interventions for decorative details

¹³ Drying Times — Thin chromatic layers reduce drying times and require accurate management of superimpositions to avoid polymerization defects.

¹⁴ Material Compatibility — The correct combination of binders and pigments is crucial: chemical incompatibilities can cause craquelure, fading, or detachments over time.

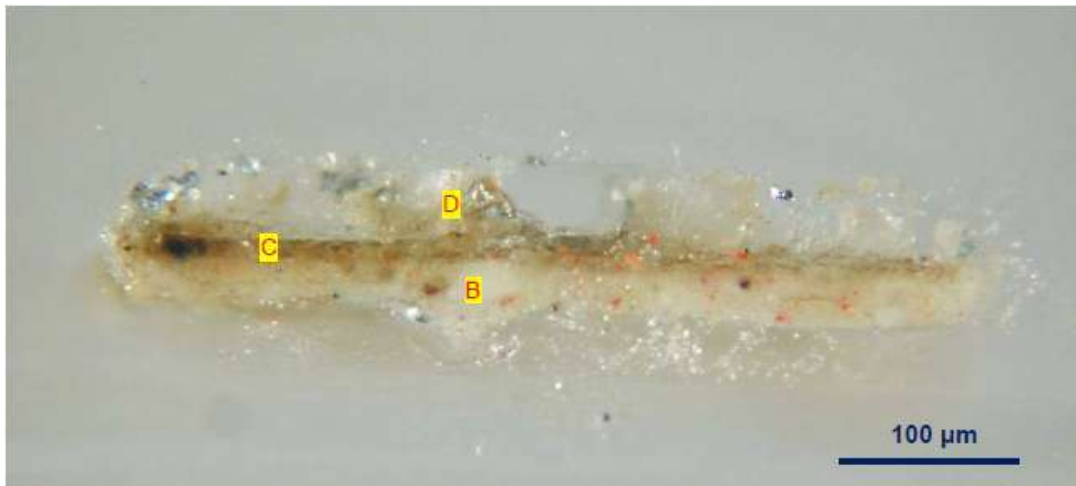


Fig. 10: Stratigraphic analysis of the flesh tone

From a chemical point of view, the presence of copper associated with an oily binder argues for a deliberate choice aimed at mitigating the alteration phenomena proper to copper green¹⁵. The use of oil as a medium indeed contributes to isolating the pigment, slowing down its degradation processes. The pigment used is a copper-based green. The concomitant identification of arsenic¹⁶ suggests its mineral origin: it could, therefore, be malachite. The golden decorative elements of the robe do not result applied on the surface, but integrated into the pictorial stratigraphy. From a stratigraphic point of view, these elements are located:

- Above the main chromatic elements
- And below any final glazes

The present interpretation suggests that the decorative elements constitute an integral part of the original conception, and do not represent subsequent additions. Their intrinsic integration into the underlying pictorial matter

¹⁵ Copper Green — The term indicates a family of copper-based pigments (malachite, natural copper green, verdigris, etc.), with different chemical and degradation behaviors.

¹⁶ Arsenic in Analytical Results — The presence of arsenic is not univocal: it may indicate contamination, arsenical pigments (e.g., arsenites/arsenates) or mineral impurities.

implies preventive planning and a rigorous executive sequence.

6. The Element of the Halo

The presence of a halo in an individual portrait represents an element of considerable interpretive complexity. In the Middle Ages, this attribute unequivocally denoted sanctity; during the Renaissance, however, it underwent a progressive semantic transformation. In certain pictorial experiences of the early 16th century, the halo was reduced to a subtle sign, integrated into the background and deprived of supernatural luminous effects. In similar circumstances, it did not necessarily identify a canonized saint, but rather an elevated moral condition, an exemplary function of the subject, or a sacralization of the individual in a humanistic sense. The painting in question fully ascribes itself to this line of iconographic experimentation. Flemish and Northern painting exercised a profound influence on Italian portraiture in the 16th century, particularly in relation to attention to detail, material rendering, and the psychological construction of the subject. In the work under examination, the accuracy in the rendering of the hair, the precision of the decorative motifs, and the textile quality of the robe suggest a direct, or mediated, knowledge of Northern models.



Fig. 11: Image of the halo detail in the painting under study

However, such elements result entirely incorporated into an Italian pictorial language, without assuming an imitative character. The halo constitutes a persistent iconographic element in Western figurative tradition. Its presence in a panel painting of Renaissance scope, as in the case of the work in question, assumes a value that transcends mere ornamental function: it becomes an identity sign, a marker of moral, spiritual, and social status, as well as a visual device that orients the reading of the image (Fig. 11). In the male portrait under study, the halo appears today fragmentary, lacunose in the central zone, but nonetheless decipherable in the lateral portions, thanks to multispectral investigations and close observations in visible and ultraviolet light. The central question orienting this deepening concerns the original nature of the halo: whether it is an authentic element, conceived by the artist in the executive phase of the work, or a subsequent addition, albeit ancient, fruit of interventions not ascribable to modern manipulations. The diagnostic evidence, conjointly with formal and technical analysis, supports the hypothesis that the halo does not constitute an integral element of the original composition, its current discontinuity¹⁷

configuring itself as the result of ancient conservative interventions entailing the partial removal of the paint film and an addition of the halo anyway ancient. The male portrait under examination exhibits stylistic peculiarities ascribable to the Italian figurative culture of the 15th and 16th centuries. The facture of the face, the luministic quality, the volumetric construction, and the use of traditional pigments (malachite, lead white, cinnabar, earths, lead-tin yellow) conform to Renaissance pictorial customs. Therefore, the halo does not constitute an incongruous element: numerous Renaissance works, including apparently secular portraits, bear clues of sacralization or moral idealization. The presence of the halo can assume various meanings, such as: the portrait representation of a saint or blessed, the investiture of a real character with Christian virtues, an idealized portrait of spiritual value, or the depiction of a young nobleman or ecclesiastic according to sacred iconographic models. The sobriety of the halo, a golden arc, devoid of punching and decorations, reveals itself coherent with the Renaissance approach, inclined to integrate sacred elements with discretion, particularly in private or devotional contexts. The examination in ultraviolet fluorescence

¹⁷ Central Discontinuity — The central interruption of the halo, highlighted in UV, may derive from ancient partial removals or localized damages rather than from an original lacuna.

unequivocally manifests the central interruption, which is highlighted in the image below via lines of red color.

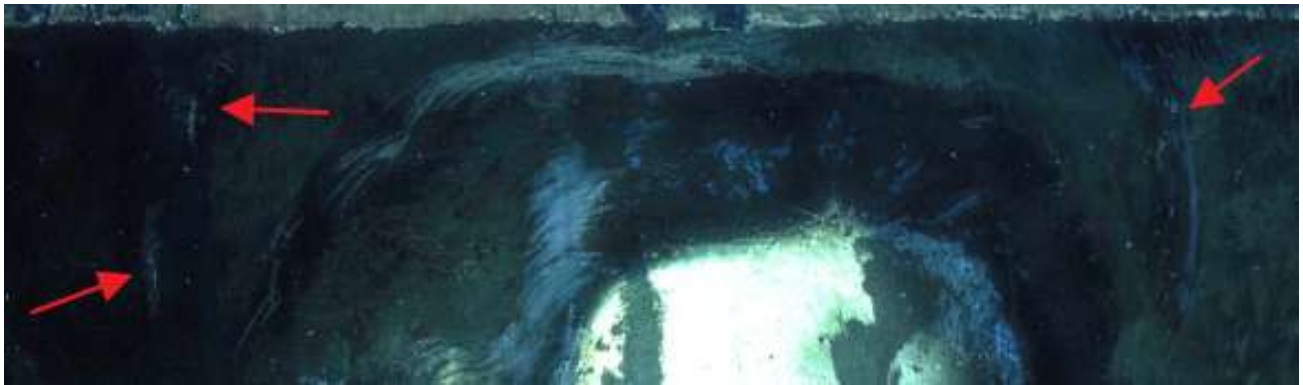


Fig. 12: UV Image, the red lines highlight the halo



Fig. 13: The red lines indicate the point of interruption caused by a past restoration.

The halo was applied in a subsequent phase¹⁸ of the pictorial process, in the absence of a carbonaceous preparatory drawing in correspondence with such area. XRF analysis detected the presence of gold in the aureolar region, supporting the metallic nature of the trait. The halo manifests through symmetrical golden arcs, positioned at the sides of the subject's head. The form is sober, devoid of complex ornamentations, in line with a will of reserve and harmonious integration with the face. The curvature follows the cranial profile, without however prevailing over it. The interruption of the halo is not attributable to a technical or material modification, but to a lacuna deriving from a previous restoration intervention, as attested by UV fluorescence. The placement of the halo results partially immersed in the cone of light that illuminates the face, generating an effect of lateral "re-emergence": the lateral sections are visible, while the central portion results occulted, verisimilarly following a reduction of the original dimensions of the work. The halo laps the hair without invading it, a peculiar characteristic of thin Renaissance halos, conceived not to interfere with the naturalistic rendering of the hair. The dark background, realized with copper-based pigments and earths, establishes a contrast that accentuates the visibility of the gold. The light irradiating the face determines a luminous cone that also invests the halo zone. This effect, typical of Renaissance painting, suggests that the halo was devised to integrate harmoniously with the luministic rendering of the face, not to overwhelm it. The gilding, although attenuated, retains a tonal coherence with the rest of the composition, indicating that it is not a recent addition.

¹⁸ Application Phase — The halo was executed in a subsequent phase of the pictorial process, as indicated by the absence of a carbonaceous preparatory drawing in the corresponding area.

In the UV image under examination, two red lines (Fig. 13) are observed delineating the extension of the lacuna in the gold. The morphology of such lacuna appears regular and compatible with a mechanical asportation or a previous cleaning conducted with excessive energy. The lacuna in question has not been the object of reintegration over time and the loss of material results of ancient date, suggesting that originally the halo presented a continuous configuration. Infrared (IR) analysis confirms the absence of a preparatory drawing at the level of the halo (Fig. 16), a circumstance that could indicate an application in the final executive phase, a practice found in Renaissance gildings. The surface of the halo also manifests microfractures coherent with the natural aging process of the pigment.

7. Pigments

The pigments identified (Tab. 1) are all compatible with the proposed period, except for the restored parts where obviously different pigments may result. The stylistic and technical peculiarities of the work, supporting the hypothesis of a Lombard-Venetian genesis, find confirmation in the analysis of pictorial materials identified via XRF and in the detected stratigraphies. The artistic workshops of Northern Italy, between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century, distinguished themselves for the sophisticated application of mineral pigments and for the search for a luministic rendering of considerable prestige. Malachite¹⁹ in particular, widely employed for the creation of intense and deep greens in dedicated fillings, was wisely modulated through dark glazes in order to obtain researched chiaroscuro effects.

¹⁹ Malachite — Malachite is a natural mineral green widely used in the Renaissance for its brilliance and chromatic depth.

	Al K α	Si K α	P K α	S K α	K K α	Sn L α	Ca K α	Ba L α	Ti K α	Cr K α	Mn K α	Fe K α	Co K α	Ni K α	Cu K α	Zn K α	Au L α	Hg L α	Pb L α	As K α	Sr K α
1	4	*	-	?	7	-	44	-	11	15	10	53	-	25	17	-	-	22	1271	-	9
2	3	4	3	30	17	-	156	-	14	17	11	73	-	22	2235	-	-	5	201	*	19
3	4	14	6	?	42	31	124	-	12	15	18	486	-	19	770	-	-	117	581	-	15
4	4	6	6	?	11	-	49	*	16	15	16	112	-	22	34	25	-	-	892	-	15
5	4	*	4	?	9	-	61	*	11	16	14	88	-	23	215	-	-	-	896	-	13
6	3	-	8	?	12	-	138	-	13	16	19	118	-	24	43	20	94	-	947	-	14

? = non identificabile
* = presente ma non quantificabile

Tab. 1: Types of elements encountered in the points analyzed by XRF

Fig. 14: XRF analysis points



In Veneto, the school of Giovanni Bellini, Cima da Conegliano, and Lorenzo Lotto exhibited an opulent and radiant palette, characterized by the extensive use of pure mineral pigments. In Venetian workshops, lead-tin yellow (giallorino) was a favored pigment, employed to illuminate figures or in portraits with symbolic meanings. The main pigments identified in the work include: cinnabar (mercury sulfide), an expensive pigment often reserved for noble flesh tones or prominent elements; malachite, of Central European provenance and used with caution given its rarity; and lead-tin yellow (giallorino), whose complex preparation made it a luxury pigment. Gold, present solely in the halo, represented the most precious material, destined for sacred details. The stratigraphic analysis of the samples reveals a simple²⁰ but researched composite structure: a clear priming followed by layers of mineral color and dark glazes²¹ used to model light, a central aspect in Northern Italian painting. The rediscovery of the halo, following the removal of overpainting during restoration, suggests the potential depiction of a young saint or an idealized figure, in agreement with an iconographic tradition widespread in Northern Italy.

8. Incisions and Preparatory Drawing

One of the most interesting aspects emerged from the investigations is the presence of hints of an incised preparatory drawing²²

²⁰ Simple but Refined Stratigraphy — The sequence (clear priming → mineral layers → dark glazes) is typical of a compositional practice aimed at modeling light with sobriety and efficacy.

²¹ Glazes for Chiaroscuro — Dark glazes applied over mineral fillings are a consolidated technique for obtaining depth and luminous transitions without increasing material thickness.

²² Incised Preparatory Drawing — The incision visible in raking light and confirmed by IR reflectography is a common practice to fix proportions and contours before the application of color.

visible in raking light and confirmed by IR reflectography. The incised drawing represents a whole series of characteristics, for example, net and continuous lines are found; we have a localization along the contour of the face and the figure. This technique was very widespread in Renaissance workshops, especially when the artist intended to define the position of the figure with precision, avoid proportion errors, and create a stable reference before the application of color. In addition to incision elements, traces of drawing and brush are also present. Reflectography revealed thick lines in the robe, not visible to the naked eye. Traces are also identifiable at the level of the face. These elements are preparatory traces, they are first layings of color. The combination of incision technique and brush is typical of Northern Italian workshops where precision of drawing was considered fundamental.

Reflectographic analysis highlighted, in certain areas, the presence of a preparatory drawing (Fig. 15-16). Such technique allows examining the ideational and operational process underlying pictorial execution. Infrared radiation allows a comprehensive and synoptic reading of the project underlying the painted surface. The interpretation of the infrared image leads primarily to a technical distinction between two types of signs: on one hand, lines executed with a brush or with soft and modulable carbonaceous materials, such as those found at the level of the nostril, constituting the trace drawing of the graphic preparation; on the other hand, linear incisions, characterized by sharpness, constancy in trend and depth, realized in the gypsum preparation layer.



Fig. 15: The arrows indicate the presence of a preparatory drawing realized with a fine brush in some points of the face.



Fig. 16: Reflectographic analysis of the painting under study

In the painting, the IR investigation thus highlights a structured and deliberate working mode, in which the preparatory drawing and the incision dialogues functionally, suggesting a mature and consolidated workshop practice in which the project proceeds and guides the materialization of the work. This double trace found in the painting is not redundant and present everywhere, but is complementary; the drawing implants the perspective and proportional structure of the effigy, the incision fixes it in a tactile way, making it legible even when the glaze and superimpositions of color would have masked them. The drawing visible in IR is characterized by an essential sign: it is not therefore an analytical sketch, loaded with hatching and shading, but a structural line that defines axis ratios, intersections, and mass limits. This type of preparatory setting is typical of practices in which the artist privileges the overall form rather than early detail, an operative strategy coherent with the subsequent construction by glazes and with the presence of a very smooth and reflective preparation. IR highlights with particular evidence the drawing of the main axes of the face (nose-chin profile, eye line, lip contour) and masses in the hair where fluent lines are observed. Such graphic security can be read as an index of daily practice and mastery of drawing from life or transferred cartoon.

Incision is a distinctive technical datum; its presence indicates that the project was transferred with a mode that offers a physical guide in addition to the visual one. Technically, this procedure produces a groove that remains legible even after the application of various pictorial layers and glazes, thus providing the executor with a stable reference point during the color laying phases. Furthermore, the presence of incisions also confirms the absence of a well-constructed underdrawing in details; indeed, from IR

analyses, large areas of drawing do not emerge but few punctual traces²³ as reference points. This datum is significant because it signals a practice in which spatial construction is obtained through few fundamental signs and then bound by incision. In other words, the author did not need radical rethinking: formal choices had already been made on the occasion of the initial drawing. The absence of structural pentimenti, together with the presence of incisions that coincide with the final lines of the composition, places us before a planned, coherent, and determining execution.

9. Comparative Element with Incision and Drawing Techniques

In the 16th century, workshops adopted a plurality of methods for transferring a graphic project. They could, for example, use:

- The cartoon transferred with pouncing
- The cartoon pressed and incised with stylus
- Direct drawing with dry medium
- Direct incision

The decision was therefore influenced by multiple factors, such as the size of the work, the need for replicas of the same subject, the need for accuracy (portraits, decorations, models), regional peculiarities, and the operative practices of the workshop. Incisions executed on preparations primarily served the function of guaranteeing the stability of the drawing during the laying of oily layers and glazes, offering a persistent tactile guide even in the painting phase. In portraits, the combination of drawing and incision was

²³ Punctual Traces — The absence of wide drawn surfaces and the presence of few reference points indicate a spatial construction by fundamental signs.

particularly widespread, given the need for stability and precision in physiognomic definition, especially of faces. In Tuscan workshops, such as those of Ghirlandaio, Pontormo, and Andrea del Sarto, drawing played a central role; therefore, the use of the cartoon was elaborated in the workshop and subsequently transferred to panels via perforation and pouncing, a technique employed especially for large compositions, although in portraits recourse was often made to preparatory drawings executed directly.

Where high precision was required, recourse was made to transfer via cartoon, sometimes lightly incised with stylus to define contours. Therefore, in works of such derivation, a preparation with marked carbonaceous underdrawing and selective incised traces along key profiles is found. In the Lombard area, the use of mixed practices was instead preferred, similarly to what is found in Lotto, Moroni, and Moretto da Brescia, with a commingling between direct drawing and incision. In works of Lombard provenance, well-visible preparatory drawings and net lines are frequently found, sometimes with charcoal signs accompanied by thin incisions to fix contours. In Lombard portraiture, attention to verisimilitude induced an instrumental control of the profile, with thin and stable incisions in correspondence with the margins of the face and textile folds, a practice akin to that found in the painting under examination. Also in the Lombard area, in workshops like those of Bellini, Titian, and the circle, practices of transfer and punctual incisions via cartoon were found, although, in many cases, the underdrawing resulted less manifest and more synthetic compared to the Florentine school, affiancing to incision and brush marking the function of guide. Venetian workshops, especially in productions on panel, frequently preferred transfer via

cartoon or incision for complex parts. In high-quality portraits, ordered incisions delineating the primary compositional limits are often observed. In the infrared analysis of Venetian works, the pigmentary sign may in some cases result less evident, while the incised groove distinguishes itself. Such elements agree with the work under study, in which a drawing not extended, but employed exclusively in strategic points as guide signals, is detected, together with the presence of net incised lines, and in the cesuras of the planes. We omit, in this place, the examination of other techniques employed at the time, also in Flanders, as they are different. Based on what can be deduced from the technical analysis of the underdrawing, the work in question can be placed in the Lombard or Venetian sphere.

10. Study of Light

The management of light and its influence on the modeling of volumes, chromatic perception, and readability of the work are of capital importance. Illumination, directional in nature and concentrated on the face, generates a marked chiaroscuro that isolates the subject with respect to the background. The plasticity of the face is accentuated by a net transition between illuminated surfaces and shadow zones, exalting the three-dimensionality of nose, cheekbones, and chin.



Fig. 17: Enlargement of the face

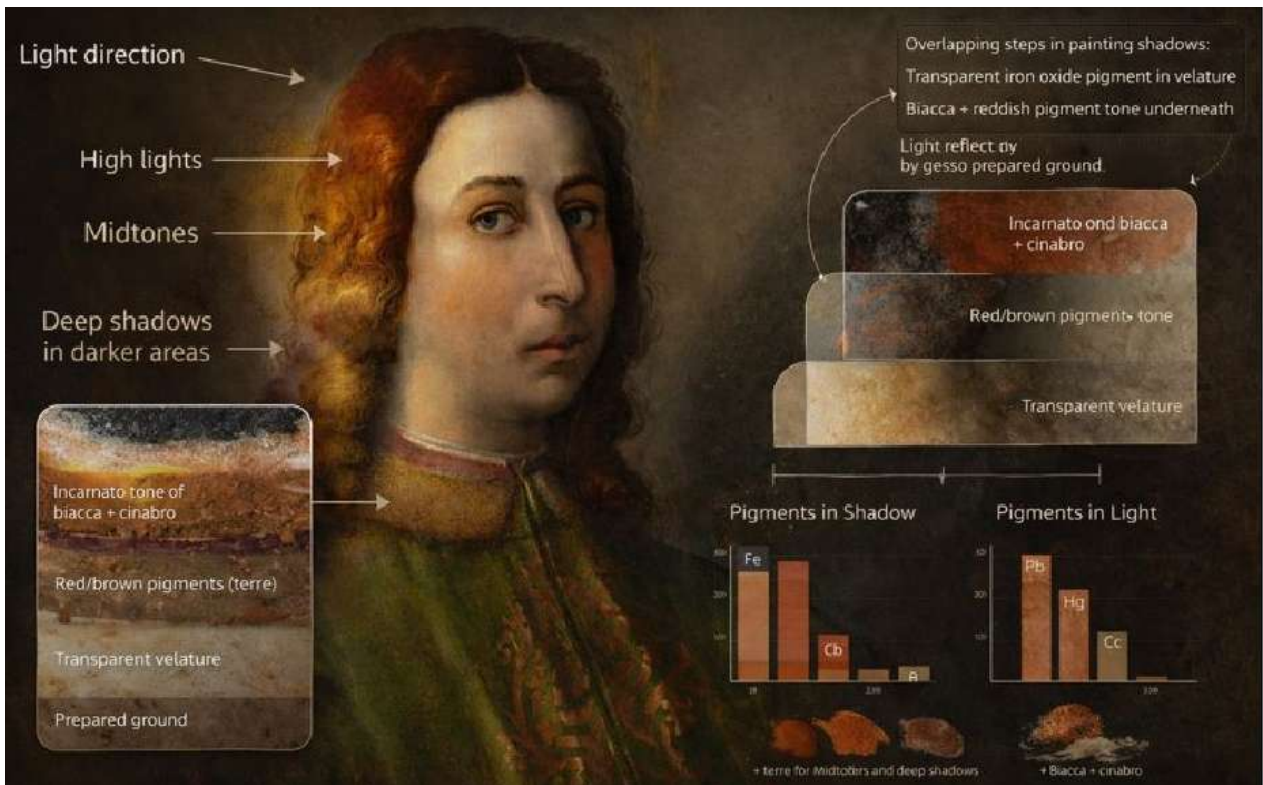


Fig. 18: This image represents only a visual synthesis of the results of the light study conducted on the painting. The side diagrams illustrate the distribution of pigments and materials in the light and shadow zones. On one side, in the light zone we have: lead white, CaCO_3 (CC), light pigments; on the other, we have earths, iron oxides, blacks. The graphs should be considered as comparative analyses for immediate visualization of the difference.

The green robe, adorned with "golden" decorations in yellow, reacts to a more diffused luminosity compared to the face, suggesting a primary light source closer to the face and a secondary, fainter illumination on the garment. The background, characterized by a dark and near-neutral tonality, increases the three-dimensionality of the subject and concentrates attention on the expression of the face. A single light source is situated high to the left; the work is characterized by a chromatic range concentrated in mid-tones and shadows; high lights are circumscribed solely to zones of reflection on the epidermal surface and on golden details. The directional light, perceived by the spectator, accentuates the psychological presence of the subject, conferring a dramatic intensity, although the controlled contrast preserves textile details and gildings.

11. Construction of Shadows and Mixing

The analysis of the painting highlights the preeminent structural role of lead white²⁴ employed both in flesh tones and for the definition of light points. Cinnabar²⁵ instead, is found in the retouches of the face and in the flesh tone. The green pigment of the robe, based on copper and arsenic, suggests the presence of malachite, possibly mixed with verdigris, although the presence of arsenic indicates mineral impurities or more complex mixtures. Shadings and blacks are realized with vegetable/carbon black and

dark earths, also employed to shade the background, hypothesizing the use of cupreous pigments to obtain darker tonalities through mixtures. The shadows, carefully constructed, are obtained through an initial laying of the local filling, for example, the base tone of the flesh tone with diluted lead white, followed by the application of thin layers of dark pigments or earths for the first modulation of color. Superimpositions of glazes correct saturation or create transitions, while lead white is used for lights, applied in specific points. Such technique allows the construction of colored shadows, not simple variations of brightness, but true chromatic transformations, obtained through warm glazes in the shadows, created with small quantities of red and brown, maintaining a chromatic cohesion. In terms of color theory, a chromatic-anamorphic shading model is configured, in which shadows result linked to the local tone for harmony, not only for contrast, conferring depth and plasticity. The main shadows of the face are realized predominantly with brown/dark elements (iron-based), mixed with lead white and thin green glazes to neutralize the temperature of the skin in shadow. In the dark background, the presence of copper suggests the use of copper-earth mixtures to obtain a warm dark brown, preferable to pure black for tonal coherence with the rest of the palette. The clear gypsum preparation acts as a "reflecting glass", allowing light to cross the glazes and be partially reflected by the gypsum, incrementing the perceived brightness. This explains the effect of internal light on flesh tones, not attributable solely to superficial lead white, but to the optical interaction deriving from stratification. Therefore, it is essential to interpret shadows not as simple

²⁴ Role of Lead White — Lead white functions as a structural and optical pigment: in addition to providing light points, it favors the polymerization of the binder and increases the brilliance of flesh tones.

²⁵ Cinnabar — Cinnabar (HgS) is employed to intensify warm tones in flesh tones and retouches; its presence is often an index of prestigious chromatic choices.

"dark areas", but as the result of stratifications and interactions between pigment, binder, and preparatory plane.

12. Iconographic Contextualization

The portrait manifests elements of ambivalence: the sumptuous robe, green with golden decorations, signals an elevated social status, while the integrated halo introduces a sacral or moralizing code. In the Italian Renaissance, the boundary between secular portrait and sacred images was labile; sometimes commissioners or families desired to depict ancestors or benefactors with exemplary connotations, resorting to formal styles of sacrality, such as the halo, without reference to canonical sanctity. This phenomenon inscribes itself in a broader horizon of "sacralization of the individual" that accompanies humanistic culture, where the halo can allude to "virtues" and nobility of spirit. The functions of the work can be dual, and not mutually exclusive. It could be a Moralizing Portrait for private devotion, where the depicted subject serves as an ethical model, destined for a studiolo or private chambers, in which the family meditated on values. Alternatively, it could configure itself as an idealized portrait of the commissioner: a figure of rank who, through formal sacralization, fulfills a function of dynastic legitimization and memory. The absence of explicit attributes, such as books, objects, or gestures, together with a neutral background, suggests a private destination and a symbolic reading, rather than a public liturgical use. The modeling of the face is soft, exalted by subtle tonal passages. Reflectographic analysis reveals, as previously observed, a preparatory drawing little evident in some points and structured in guide lines, as well as the presence of incisions in the preparation along the contours, an indication of a formally

defined project antecedent to the pictorial laying. The absence of structural pentimenti denotes a precise project decision; the slight corrections identified are limited to minimal proportion adjustments. The painting returns a face that expresses emotional control and composure. The gaze is not frontal, but lateral and meditative. Stylistically, such choice reinforces the interior dimension of the portrait: the spectator is excluded from effusiveness and invited, rather, to interpret the image as an act of contemplation. Soft shadows in the orbital hollow are obtained through transparent glazes. The use of lead white in thin layers and cinnabar to confer warmth to the complexion testifies to a refined stratigraphic technique. The nose is defined by a net sign, realized with incisions and glazes, which creates a frontal plane and two lateral planes with a slight contrast. The delicacy of contrasts privileges tonal continuity: a mode typical of painting that employs glazes on a clear base to obtain an "internal luminosity".

13. Study of the Fabric

In the context of 16th-century portraiture, the subject's clothing cannot be considered a secondary or accessory element with respect to the study of physiognomy and pose. The dress constitutes a primary historical source. The garment thus in the Renaissance portrait becomes a true semiotic device, capable of transmitting complex information relating to social status, geographical appearance, material culture, and, not rarely, the moral and symbolic horizon of the represented subject.



Fig. 19: Detail of the fabric present in the painting



Fig. 20: Dress Detail Cosmè Tura, A Muse (Calliope?), probably 1455–1460. Oil and egg tempera on poplar panel 116.2 × 71.1 cm. National Gallery, London, Layard Bequest, 1916, inv. NG3070. Public domain



Fig. 19: Example of Renaissance velvets Ercole de' Roberti, Giovanni II Bentivoglio, ca. 1474–1477. Tempera on panel, 54 × 38.1 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image in public domain / Open Access.

In the painting under study, the extremely accurate rendering of the dress, its decorative richness, and its visual predominance within the composition clearly indicate that the artist and the commissioner attributed to this element a determinant role in the definition of the character's identity. In the Renaissance, the dress is placed within a precise anthropological vision, where exteriority was never disjointed from interiority. The concept of *Habitus*²⁶. In this context, therefore, the dress is not a simple covering of the body, but a visible sign of the quality of the individual. Wearing a certain type of vestment made one's placement in the world manifest. In our case, the dress constantly dialogues with the expression of the face, with a controlled pose, and with the aura of composure that pervades the image. This formal and symbolic coherence suggests that the garment was chosen or at least approved with extreme awareness.

The clothes depicted in the pictorial work reveal the employment of the language of fashion as a tool of identity affirmation. Sumptuary laws²⁷, widespread in numerous Italian and Northern European cities, disciplined with precision the admissibility of fabrics, chromies, and decorations as a function of social class. In multiple circumstances, the painted vestment constitutes an idealized version, selected in order to completely express the values that the subject intends to communicate, or, given the probable elevated social status of the portrayed subject, a truthful representation of the clothing actually worn. This custom was widespread in the Renaissance epoch,

²⁶ *Habitus* — The term indicates the set of moral and social dispositions that manifest through outward appearance and which in the Renaissance were communicated also through clothing.

²⁷ *Sumptuary Laws* — Sumptuary norms regulated the use of fabrics and decorations; the choice of precious materials was therefore also a legal and social signal

especially in portraits destined for a public or commemorative function. The dress becomes, therefore, an integral part of an iconographic strategy aimed at the construction of a lasting image, apt to transcend contingency and fix the individual in a quasi-exemplary dimension. The relationship subsisting between the dress and the eventual presence of the halo assumes relevance, an element that introduces a symbolic dimension transcending mere secular representation, placing the subject in a liminal zone between terrestrial reality and spiritual aspiration. Thus, in such context, the dress assumes a further function; it becomes a support on which the sacralization of the individual is articulated, not so much in a religious sense, but ethical and moral. The richness of the fabric is not vain ostentation, but a sign of a dignity that manifests externally in an ordered, harmonic, and measured form. Through the dress, therefore, complex information is communicated relating to social position, material culture, symbolic horizon, and moral identity of the subject. These are outer vests, worn in superposition to other garments, conceived to manifest unequivocally a status of elevated prestige. The garment depicted seems to situate itself in an intermediate position between the *giornea*²⁸, more common and of simple structure although realized with precious materials, and the *zimarra*²⁹, whose rendering resulted more solemn thanks to the use of decorated and heavy fabrics; qualities, these latter, partially found in the characteristics of the fabric present in the pictorial representation. From a structural point of view, the dress is connoted by a controlled volumetry. The shoulders appear ample but not padded, without marked folds

²⁸ *Giornea* — The *giornea* is a simpler and more common garment.

²⁹ *Zimarra* is more solemn and heavy; the depicted vest situates itself between these typologies.

or constriction elements. Its function was, therefore, that of a parade dress, aimed not so much at protecting the body as at visually communicating a social and cultural identity. The analysis of pigments and materials compatible with the pictorial rendering of a complex fabric, characterized by irregular, reflecting, and stratified surfaces, suggests that the fabric worn by the subject can be identified as operated velvet or brocade on a velvet base. The artist does not limit himself to generically evoking a precious fabric, but visually constructs a surface that returns the density, softness, and depth typical of high-quality velvets. Velvet is distinguished by the presence of a dense and cut pile, obtained through a complex weaving technique that involves the use of complementary threads. Such structure confers to the fabric a velvety surface and a peculiar capacity to absorb and reflect light, producing chromatic variations even minimal with the variation of the angle of observation. The garment worn by the subject depicted inserts itself perfectly into the panorama of high-ranking male clothing in the full '500. The depicted dress can be traced back, on a typological level, to the family of long or semi-long representative dresses, commonly called with terms such as *Giornea*, *Zimarra*, or *Parade Vest*. These are, therefore, outer garments, superimposed on other garments, designed to be immediately perceived as symbols of prestige. The depicted garment would seem to situate itself in an intermediate position between the two mentioned typologies: the *Giornea*, more widespread, characterized by a simple structure but realized with precious materials, and the *Zimarra*, connoted by a more solemn rendering thanks to decorated and notably

heavy fabrics; qualities, these latter, found at least in part in the head portrayed in the painting. In the 16th century, velvet represented one of the most onerous and prestigious fabrics available on the European market. Consequently, the use of velvet is strictly correlated to social and political elites.

The pictorial execution evokes a medium-long pile velvet, capable of generating soft and deep shadows, conferring solemnity to the dress. The latter, beyond the simple presence of velvet, ostents an elaborate phytomorphic golden decoration that stands out on the green background. Such characteristics lead back to the typology of operated or chiseled velvet (Fig. 21), in which the design is not superficially applied, but intrinsic to the textile structure. In operated fabric, the ornate areas can present differences in pile height or variations in the weave, determining a relief effect perceptible to touch and sight. Such technique, of exquisite refinement, was particularly appreciated in Italian manufacturing of the 15th and 16th centuries. The pictorial representation of the work returns this sensation of relief, suggesting the artist's intent to depict a fabric of elevated facture, immediately recognizable as such by a contemporary observer. Alternatively, the presence of brocade on a velvet base is hypothesizable, namely a fabric in which ornamental motifs are realized through the insertion of metallic threads (gold, silver) in the warp. Brocade represents one of the highest expressions of Renaissance textile art, almost exclusively associated with contexts of extreme luxury. The combination of velvet and brocade further amplifies the symbolic value of the dress, placing it unequivocally in a sphere of highest prestige.

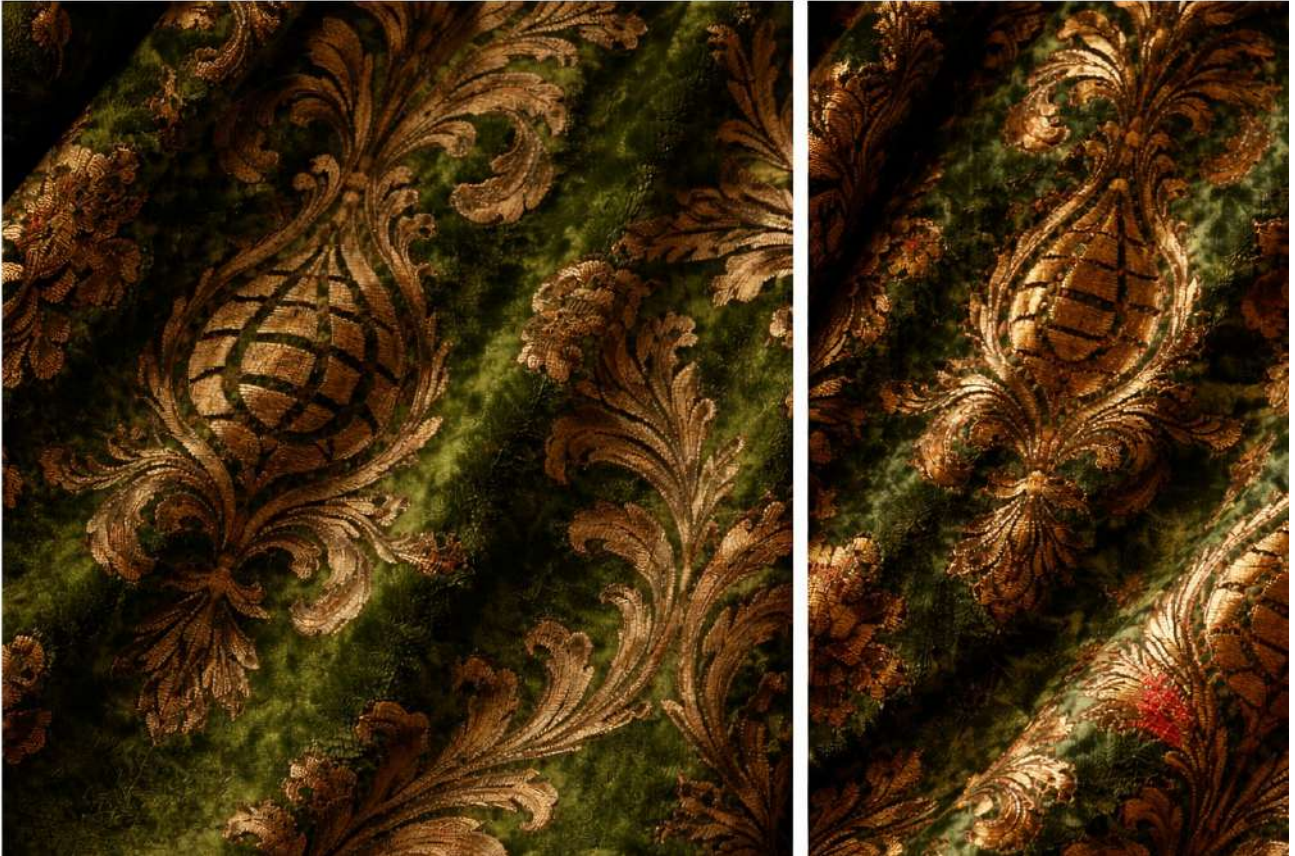


Fig. 21: Difference of fabric with the same stylistic composition



Fig. 22: Example of fabric of the era Vittore Carpaccio (attributed), Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan, 1501–1503. Oil on panel, 50.6 × 67.7 cm. Bergamo, Accademia Carrara, Fondo Lochis, inv. 81LC00151.

The realization of velvets and brocades was very complex; for a single meter of Operated Velvet, weeks of work could be employed, involving several specialized artisans. This datum allows understanding why such fabrics were luxury goods comparable in value to jewels and objects. Among the main centers of velvet production in the 16th century, Venice stands out; their manufactories are famous for their rich velvets, with saturated colors and complex decorations. Parallely, the Lombard area, particularly Milan and Como, develops a production of velvets characterized by greater chromatic sobriety and equally elevated technical refinement. Lombard velvets were often appreciated for their composure and the fineness of the design. The dress of the painting, for chromy and decorative typology, places itself perfectly within this productive horizon, making plausible a provenance of the fabric from one of these two great manufactories. The very high cost of velvets and brocades caused them to become true indicators of wealth. Possessing a dress realized in such materials was equivalent to possessing a symbolic capital. The fabric represented is characterized by a dark surface, predominantly deep green, on which golden and brown-reddish ornamental motifs of great amplitude and richness are present. The decoration is constituted by vegetal motifs, volute elements, and forms that recall the so-called pomegranate or palmette motif. Such elements are organized according to a repetitive modular structure, typical of large Renaissance operated fabrics. It is not a minute decoration, but designs conceived to be legible even from a distance.

Operated Velvet is a velvet characterized by the presence of a velvety background on which zones with differentiated pile emerge, sometimes obtained via chiseling or selective cutting of the fleece. From a technical point of

view, velvet is constituted by: ground warp, ground weft, supplementary warp). In operated velvet, the pile can be (continuous, partially shaved, differentiated in height). In the painting under examination, the artist suggests this complexity through:

- Subtle tone variations within the green
- Micro-contrasts between darker zones and slightly lighter zones
- Soft borders in transitions

These pictorial expedients are compatible with the will to evoke a surface. We cannot however eliminate with certainty the other hypothesis that it is Brocade on a Velvet Base; they are very similar fabrics. In brocade, the design is obtained with the insert of golden and silvered metallic threads. In the case of brocade on velvet, the background will also be velvety here and the motifs emerge thanks to metallic wefts that deposit on the surface. Visually, this fabric produces strong contrast between opacity of the background and brilliance³⁰ of the decorations, perception of relief, and pinpoint reflections. In the painting, the decorative motifs show a distinct luminosity with respect to the background, suggested pictorially through the use of warm pigments mixed with white and touches of yellow-ochre, integrated with a minimum quantity of lead white and lead-tin yellow.

The artist employs a technique of superimposed glazes to construct the background color, while the ornamental motifs seem to have been realized with more corpulent and covering brushstrokes. With this technique, the different reflectivity of real materials is imitated and the sense of depth is

³⁰ Simulation of Brilliance — The use of warm pigments, lead white, and touches of yellow-ochre reproduces golden luminosity without creating pinpoint metallic glints typical of metallic thread.

accentuated. The fabric depicted, for quality and typology, is perfectly compatible with a production of Venetian or Lombard area; used for aristocratic elites, high ecclesiastical hierarchies, ceremonies. The fabric as it is composed acquires a symbolic valence. Indeed, velvet is a symbol of dignity, brocade with gold refers to wealth and power, green to hope, regeneration, and in a religious context, to eternal life. The combination of green and gold produces messages of terrestrial and spiritual values. From this in-depth analysis that takes into account reflectivity, softness of contours, continuity of background-design, and absence of pinpoint metallic glints, we can confirm that the fabric is not brocade on a velvet base but Operated Velvet.

Fig. 23: Operated Velvet similar to that of the painting.



14. Analysis of Compositional Space and Construction of Depth in the Painting

On a formal level, the 3/4 pose of the subject is symptomatic of a renewal from portrait practice: it indeed allows the artist to play on the depth of the visual field and with anatomical modeling without resorting to architectural elements that would have boxed the figure in a declared linear perspective. This setting is typical of Renaissance models, in which spatiality is constructed through light and volume; comparing this painting to celebrated artists of the tradition.

Making a comparison with Tuscan portraits that present a pose similar to that of Piero della Francesca, in which we have the construction of space and volume and often follows a mathematical logic, the portrait under study shows a predilection for the softness of draperies, for a control of light penetration that thins the contours and confers to the figure a more "psychological" presence than architectural one. Similarly, if compared to certain Venetian portraits of the early '500, in which color and glazes play a dominant role in the definition of pictorial materiality, a sort of middle way is grasped in our painting: the use of color is measured, and tint glazes are employed to harmonize the surface, but the constraint of the face remains firmly entrusted to the relationship between light and dark modeled on superimposed planes. If one thinks of Venetian portraits, sensibility towards color and glazes often prefers a luminous materiality that renders the vest and fabric with a chromatic fullness that here is mitigated by a more controlled measure. On the other hand, with respect to the Tuscan lesson, in which geometric clarity and specific structure can be proclaimed, this painting finds a situation in which geometry is not denied, it is grasped in the use of incision, but

does not become the dominant principle; on the contrary, the construction of presence is based on a wise orchestration of tonal values. Perspective in the male portrait reveals itself fully only when one abandons the idea of a space measurable in an architectural sense and accepts to read the image as a mental construction, calibrated on human perception rather than abstract geometry. In this work, space is not a container, but creates a condition: it arises from the dynamic relationship between the subject's body, the light that models it, and the background that welcomes it without defining it. Thus, the fundamental measure is not that of distance, but that of proximity. Indeed, the face appears at an intimate distance from the observer, does not result invasive, according to a choice that reveals refined perceptive awareness. The scale of the bust with respect to the format of the panel is such as to saturate the pictorial space without ever oppressing it: the upper margin lets the head breathe, while the sides outline the figure within a controlled visual field. Such calibration suggests a stable and meditated point of view, coherent with a slow and contemplative function. The absence of architectural or landscape elements does not equate to a renunciation of depth, but to an interiorization. Depth transfers from the physical plane to the optical and psychological one. The dark background, devoid of articulations, functions as an atmospheric diaphragm: it retreats indefinitely, allowing the figure to advance into the perceptive space of the observer. This retreat is not obtained through blurring or dissolution, but through a controlled reduction of chromatic and luministic contrast.

The subject's body is constructed as a solid inscribed in space. The shoulders define an oblique base, not parallel to the plane of the image, which introduces a subtle but constant

perspective tension. Such inclination³¹ generates a rotation that propagates along the axis of the neck and culminates in the face, creating a sequence of successive planes. This progression is not mechanical, but organic: every passage is mediated by tonal transitions that avoid abrupt visual fractures. The measure of anatomical parts reveals a conscious use of proportions not as a rigid scheme, but as adaptive equilibrium. Even the face is not constructed according to perfect symmetry: slight asymmetries³² in the disposition of the eyes, in the angle of the mouth, and in the lines of the nose contribute to reinforcing three-dimensionality and perceptive truth. From a perspective point of view, such scarts are fundamental, because they prevent the frontal and bidimensional reading of the image. Light plays a determinant role in the definition of spatial measure. Illuminated zones advance, those in shadow retreat, according to a logic that recalls atmospheric perspective more than linear one. The cheek in shadow, the less exposed side of the neck, and the retreated shoulder contribute to a continuous gradation that guides the eye in depth. Particularly significant is the rendering of the passage between face and background. There is no net contour, but a zone of interaction in which light attenuates gradually, merging the figure with the surrounding space without ever dissolving it. This soft margin represents one of the highest points of the perspective construction of the work, since it avoids the artificial separation between figure and environment and returns instead an idea of presence immersed in space. Also the vest, with its rich decoration, introduces a further

³¹ Perspective Inclination — The inclination of the neck axis generates an organic rotation that guides the progression of planes towards the face.

³² Functional Asymmetries — Slight asymmetries in the eyes, mouth, and nose reinforce three-dimensionality and verisimilitude.

complexity. The phytomorphic motifs, although having bidimensionality in their ornamental conception, are adapted to the curvature of the body through minimal but decided variations of scale and orientation. In this way, the ornament does not flatten the surface, but follows its volumetric trend, reinforcing the perception of depth. Perspective, in this case, manifests itself as the capacity to integrate decoration and space without conflict. Overall, the measure of space in the male portrait does not respond to an explicit mathematical system, but to a refined empirical logic, founded on direct observation and understanding of perceptive mechanisms. It is a perspective that we could define as humanistic, in which space is constructed in function of the man who looks and the man who is looked at. The face constitutes the fulcrum of luminous construction. Here *chiaroscuro* is not employed in a contrasting way, but according to a continuous gradation, which allows perceiving the form as fully three-dimensional. Pictorial and atmospheric modeling highlight the form that emerges by condensation and rarefaction of light. Transitions³³ are so soft as to often render indistinguishable the boundary between light and half-tone, contributing to an effect of great natural perceptive quality. The more illuminated and defined face occupies the first perceptive plane; the bust, treated with a more attenuated light and with a less contrasted pictorial texture, places itself on a retreated plane (Fig. 25). This luminous articulation effectively substitutes a traditional spatial construction, entrusting to light the task of organizing space. The refinement of *chiaroscuro*, the directional coherence, and the tonal comprehension place the work

within a tradition of high-level painting, in which light becomes a tool of knowledge of form and the real. We can confirm that the spatiality of the painting is the result of a complex synthesis between optical knowledge, technical mastery, and material sensibility. Perspective is not traced, but constructed; light is not applied, but generated, volume is not drawn, but stratified. This convergence of factors places the work in a context of high pictorial culture, in which artistic doing is inseparable from a deep understanding of visual phenomena. In the painting under study, perspective is thought as an interaction of multiple levels, such as linear, chromatic, and aerial perspective. We indeed find in the painting, the absence of net contours, the progressive loss of definition of retreated zones, and the use of light as a means of knowledge of volume. In the Padanian zones, light is often denser and volume constructed through the relationship between pigment and form. The painting presents many affinities with this sensibility. The figure is "heavy", present, and rooted in matter. Light does not dissolve the body, but makes it emerge slowly from the background. Perspective, in this sense, does not open space, but condenses it around the subject, reinforcing its perceptive impact. One of the most modern aspects of the painting resides in the transformation of physical space into psychological space. The neutrality of the background, the luminous concentration on the face, and the reduction of accessory elements direct the gaze towards the interiority of the subject. In this case, perspective serves to relate the subject with the observer. From a historical-artistic point of view, the work testifies to an advanced transition phase, in which fourteenth-century models are assimilated and surpassed, without however approaching a full Mannerist codification. Perspective and light become flexible, adaptable tools, at the service of an

³³ Tonal Transitions — Soft transitions between planes avoid visual fractures, favoring a perceived spatial continuity.

increasingly complex representation of the individual. This places the painting in a position of great interest, as a document of a figurative culture in evolution, capable of

integrating tradition, experimentation, and personal sensibility.

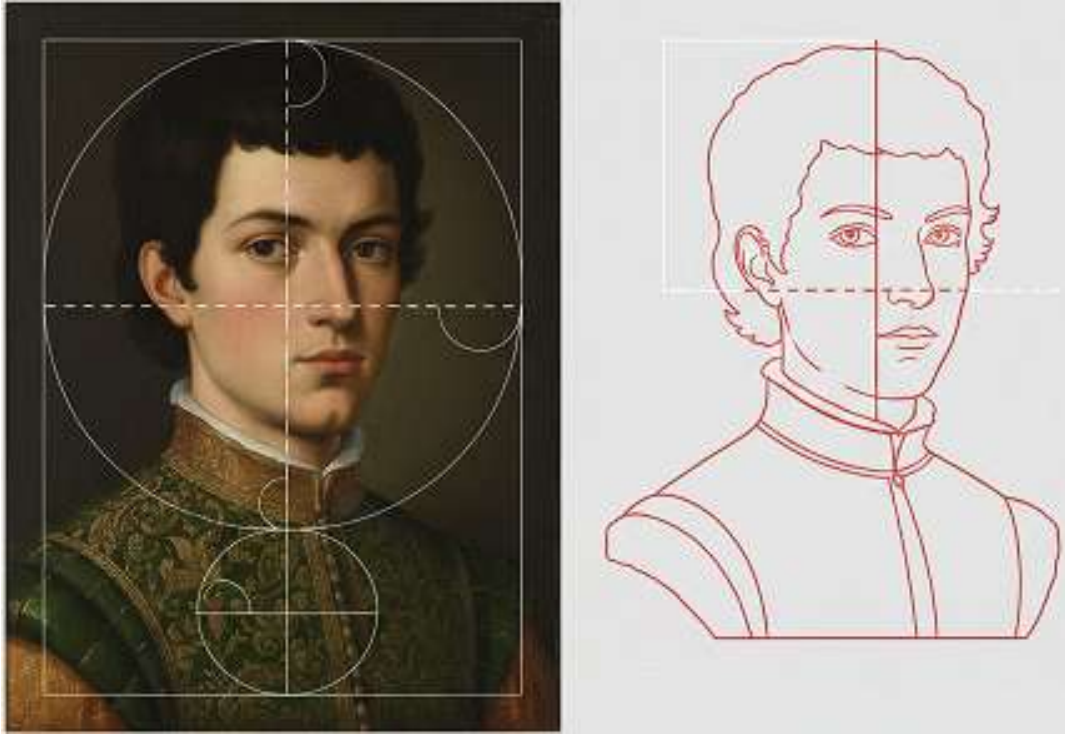


Fig. 24: The reconstructed photographic image illustrates the execution of the work under study, for purposes of technical understanding. From the graphic elements evocative of the work, it emerges how the figure occupies about 80-85% of the visual field, with a centralized composition of the face.

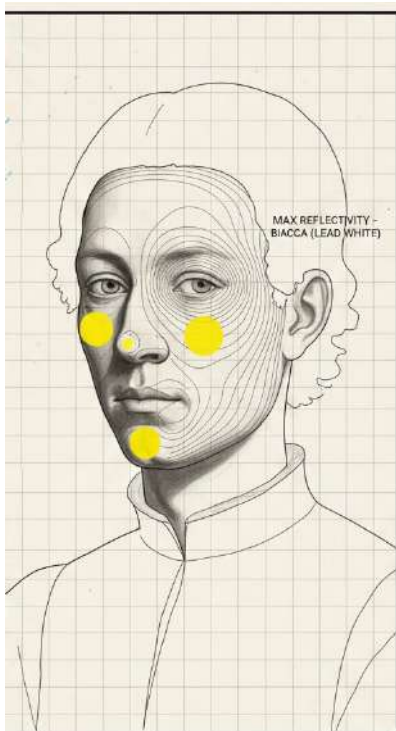


Fig. 25: Map of Luminous Distribution (image inverted with respect to reality)

15. Micro-morphological Analysis of the Brushstroke

In Renaissance painting, the brushstroke is no longer an autonomous expressive element, as it will be in subsequent epochs, but a tool subordinated to the optical construction of forms. The artistic gesture is more controlled, interiorized, and rendered invisible in its macroscopic evidence, but remains legible at a micro-morphological level. As said, close observation reveals an extremely calibrated laying, characterized by a reduced presence of impastos and by the presence of thin glazes. Such datum is coherent with what emerged from the stratigraphic sections, which indicate thicknesses of the paint layers comprised between 0.02 and 0.04 mm, values compatible with a technique fully aware of the optical potentials of oil.

In the analysis of the pictorial surface of the skin, a laying characterized by a light touch is found, exercised with minimum pressure of the brush and accurate control of the chromatic load. Directional traces, hardly perceptible to the naked eye, reveal themselves in raking light and in microscopic analysis as parallel micro-striations, often interrupted and re-oriented, an indication of a work conducted by successive approximations. Such executive technique presupposes short drying times and rigorously respected, together with a deep knowledge of the interactions between pigment and binder. The lead white employed in such sections fulfills not only the function of chromatic rendering, but also concurs to the correct polymerization of the oil, allowing the application of very thin glazes without incurring pictorial cediments or discontinuities. In the zone of the face, the brushstroke results characterized by minimum and constant pressure. The objective of the artist is to seek as much as possible the

annulment of the graphic sign in favor of a tonal transition. The laying occurs by superimposed glazes of micrometric thickness. The brush grazes the surface leaving a layer of transparent color. The density of the pigment (mixed lead white and earth) increases only in the points of maximum light (on the forehead and cheekbone), where the brushstroke becomes slightly more "corpulent". As for the traits, they are short, multi-directional, and fused together. Net contour lines are not observed; volumes are defined by an accumulation of passages that go to create depth, for example, at the orbital level and at the relief of the nose.

To make a maximal comparison, unlike the Ferrarese school of Dosso Dossi where the brushstroke remains more nervous and visible, in the work under study the laying almost recalls the skin as an effect similar to those used also by Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, in which the fusion is tonal and almost enameled.



Fig 26. Detail of the skin in the work under study

The analysis of the pictorial ductus highlights an analytical methodological approach, together with a certain executive freedom reconducible to the Venetian tradition. In the face, the sfumato technique is realized through a pressure of the brush almost imperceptible. In these areas, the color is deposited in very thin glazes, exercising a constant and minimum force in order to eliminate every material asperity. The use of an extremely thin brush tip allows creating a tonal transition that preserves luminous continuity³⁴. At the level of the vest, the pictorial treatment adapts in order to evoke a complex textile surface, characterized by variations of reflectance and depth. The green background is constructed through a pigmented base, on which darker glazes are superimposed to modulate shadows. Such glazes present themselves as extremely tenuous layers, distributed in a way to avoid mechanical uniformities. The brushstrokes follow the trend of the ornamental design with a precision that suggests preventive planning and a particularly disciplined hand. In contrast with the treatment of the face, the vest shows a more decided brushstroke. The rendering of the green operated velvet reveals a dynamic executive force, indicating a change of technical register aimed at simulating textile consistency. For the reproduction of phytomorphic motifs and velvet folds, the painter exercises greater pressure. The brushstroke is of "tip" charged with pigment (lead-tin yellow and malachite), this creates a slight impasto that physically reacts to ambient light.

In the rendering of the vests, the pictorial touches result quicker, a technique employed in order to fragment light and simulate the

peculiar luster of textile fibers. In this phase, an acceleration of the pictorial gesture is also found in the shadow zones, where the green assumes tonalities close to black (obtained through the dense application of malachite and black), while in the illuminated areas the trait becomes slower and more accurate.



Fig. 27. Detail of vest ornament

Come precedentemente As previously observed, the artist also avails himself of incision³⁵ to define the area of encumbrance. Such element reveals itself of capital importance: incision, indeed, constitutes a "pressure devoid of color". It denotes a rigorous, almost architectural approach, in which the force applied directly on the predisposed support determines the boundaries within which the brushstroke can move with greater expressive freedom.

With reference to a comparative analysis with the Venetian school, a transmutation of the vibrating brushstroke into luminous details is found in some authors, a technique adopted, among others, also by Lorenzo Lotto. Therefore, the ability to confer such effect of

³⁴ Luminous Hierarchy — Light organizes space: illuminated areas advance, those in shadow retreat, defining perceptible planes.

³⁵ Incision as Pressure Devoid of Color — Incision is a mechanical groove in the preparatory layer that functions as a tactile guide; it does not introduce pigment but defines encumbrance limits and reference points for the laying of color.

luminosity on the surface of the velvet via rapid touches represents a stylistic cipher that leads back to Venetian chromatic sensibility. The analysis of the brushstroke confirms the presence of an author of elevated figurative culture, capable of managing two different speeds of execution on the same support.

A controlled application of expressive force on the face is discerned, aimed at conferring a psychological and atmospheric rendering; at the same time, in the drapery, a greater expressive energy is found, oriented towards a more marked material rendering. Such gestural dichotomy seems reconducible to techniques in use between 1490 and 1515.

At the level of the eyebrows, we have calligraphic traits³⁶.



Fig. 27: Particular of the eyebrow of the work

At the level of projected shadows and the background, a pictorial trace of greater amplitude is detected³⁷. The artist exploits such width to generate an atmospheric vibration in the neutral context. Despite the apparent neutrality and absence of

³⁶ Calligraphic Traits of the Eyebrows — The thin strokes (<1 mm) in the eyebrows are executed with a precise and blocked gesture, a legacy of fourteenth-century training and masters like Antonello da Messina.

³⁷ Amplitude of the Brushstroke in the Background — Brushstrokes up to 1.5 cm in the background serve to create atmospheric vibration; the width of the stroke is here a tool to modulate density and depth.

iconographic articulations, the dark background configures itself as one of the most micro-morphologically sophisticated fields. Its function transcends mere opposition, concurring to the construction of a specific atmosphere and perception. A close analysis reveals that the background is not the result of a single uniform layer, but of a controlled stratification of superimposed dark glazes, presumably composed of earths and carbonaceous pigments bound in oil. The brushstroke of the background distinguishes itself for its amplitude and lower chromatic density with respect to other zones.

Such executive mode implies a conception of pictorial space understood as an atmospheric environment, rather than as a mere architectural backdrop. This translates into a surface that gradually absorbs light, without generating net reflections, favoring the natural emergence of the figure. The capacity to modulate the pictorial gesture in function of optics, declining the pictorial layer in lighter and more diffuse forms in the flesh tones, more structured in decorative motifs, and more atmospheric in the background, denotes a dominion of the expressive medium and the use of technique as a tool of visual thought. At a micro-morphological level, discontinuities suggesting interventions extraneous to the original phase are not found. The observed variations result therefore functional and coherent, never contradictory. Such evidence reinforces the hypothesis of a unitary execution, realized by a single artificer under direct and rigorous control.

16. Pressure of the Brushstroke

While in the face a practically null pressure is observed in order to obtain the desired chromatic fusion, the bust and remaining depicted areas denote a more marked

pressure. Consider, for example, the use of lead and tin yellow pigment, used in decorations and other sections of the velvet: such pigment, characterized by high viscosity, needed decisive vertical pressure during application, translating into a pinpoint or "snap" brushstroke, apt to guarantee the suspension of the pigment on the underlying green surface without fusion phenomena. The average length of decorative traits, equal to 3.2 mm and executed with a gesture from bottom to top, suggests an executor who does not draw the detail, but "creates" it through a precise action of pressure and release. In the shadow zone projected by the nose towards the right cheekbone, a variation in the amplitude of the sign is detected: in this area, the artist uses a flat-tip brush, exercising a lateral force that drags the brown color on the flesh tone, already partially dry, in order to create a glaze effect not obtainable with a constant pressure trait. The use of incisions inside the painting, employed to delimit the profile of the shoulders, also concurs to the creation of a groove that brakes the free brushstroke³⁸ of the vest, preventing its invasion of the background. The analysis of the pressure exercised by the artist during the laying of brushstrokes suggests the coexistence of a Venetian technique and elements proper to the Lombard school, a commingling typical of artists operating along the way connecting Milan to Venice in the first two decades of the Cinquecento. Note how, in the Lombard area, artists such as Solario and Luini manifested a practically homogeneous, almost obsessive pressure, aimed at the search for smoothness; differently, on the Venetian side, figures like Lotto and Savoldo used brushstroke

techniques aimed at exalting light, especially in fabrics, with a force such as to make the signs of the bristles visible. Although presenting elements of contiguity, the Lombard-Venetian sphere reveals an artist who has assimilated elements of the Leonardesque tradition, with particular reference to the dissolution of the contour, the systematic use of glazes, and the conception of painting as an optical process. The micro-morphology of the brushstrokes of the flesh tones reveals affinities with such spheres, characterized by a laying constructed by thin superimpositions, devoid of impastos, with an extremely controlled pressure of the brush. However, the absence of a true and proper deep atmospheric sfumato prevents placing the work in a direct Leonardesque sphere. The Venetian sphere, particularly concerning the management of textile materials and the chromatic construction of the vest, constitutes a further element of interest. The pictorial laying employed to evoke decorative motifs reveals expertise in obtaining complex surfaces through minimal variations of tonality and reflectance, peculiarities found in artists operating between Venice and the Padanian hinterland. However, unlike the more canonical Venetian tradition, the painting under examination demonstrates greater discipline of the trait and a lesser propensity for chromatic impasto. Such peculiarity reduces full compatibility, while suggesting a technical dialogue, verisimilarly mediated, with that environment.

17. Executive Analysis of Ductus and Manual Skill

The identification of the artist's manual skill constitutes a field of investigation of high specialization. In the pictorial sphere, the factors determining the preference for one hand over the other translate into recurrent

³⁸ Incision as Brake of the Brushstroke — The incised groove delimits the profile of the shoulders and prevents chromatic invasion of the background, functioning as a tactile guide.

configurations, found at a micromorphological level, such as the trend of curved brushstrokes, the inclination of oblique traits, the modes of raccord between chromatic areas, and the management of margins. It is highlighted how lateralization does not manifest itself homogeneously on the entire pictorial surface, but tends to emerge with greater clarity in superficial zones, such as flesh tones, hair, tonal transitions, and ornamental details executed freehand. The flesh tone of the face configures itself as a privileged corpus³⁹ for the analysis of manual laterality⁴⁰ as it is distinguished by a freer brushstroke, less bound by decorative schemes, and more expressive of the artist's natural gesture. In the studio painting, the curved brushstrokes that model the cheeks, forehead, and jaw present a curvature predominantly concave towards the right, with a trend indicative of a movement⁴¹ of the brush from top to bottom and from left to right. Such type of gesture results biomechanically more natural for a right-handed artist, who tends to push the brush towards the outside of the body with a fluid movement. The microstriations observable in raking light also reveal a progressive lightening of pressure in the terminal part of the trait, coherent with the natural release of the right hand. The hair represents a second field of observation of notable significance. In this area, the brushstrokes follow a wavy and directional trend, frequently executed with a continuous and rhythmic gesture. The lateral locks highlight a prevalence of arched traits

³⁹ *Flesh Tone as Field of Investigation* — The flesh tone is privileged because the brushstroke there is less bound by ornamental schemes and more expressive of the natural gesture.

⁴⁰ *Manual Laterality* — Laterality is identified via recurrent patterns: curvature of traits, prevalent direction, and final lightening of pressure.

⁴¹ *Spiral Movement and Biomechanics* — Spiral movements, rather than linear ones, are biomechanically coherent with the use of the right hand on vertical or slightly inclined surfaces.

that develop from left to right with a tension of the wrist compatible with the use of the right hand. Successive superimpositions do not contradict this directionality, but reinforce it, suggesting a gestural coherence along the entire executive process. At the level of transition zones, in the points between light and shadow, particularly along the profile of the nose and face, offer further clues on laterality. In these areas, the artist works with thin and repeated brushstrokes, often inclined. The prevalent inclination of such traits in the painting under examination results coherent with an oblique descending movement from left to right, again compatible with a dominant right hand.

Chiaroscuro transitions, especially along the nasal and facial profile, provide further evidentiary elements relating to laterality. In such zones, the artist operates through thin and reiterated brushstrokes, often inclined. The prevalent inclination of such pictorial traits in the painting under examination denotes a coherence with an oblique descending movement from left towards right, resulting compatible with a dextral manual dominance. The analysis of manual laterality requires impescindibly a biomechanical evaluation of the pictorial gesture, understood as the outcome of the coordinated interaction between shoulder, elbow, wrist, and fingers. The distribution of brushstrokes and their curvature suggest a predominant use of spiral movements, rather than linear ones, characteristic of the right hand when operating on a vertical or slightly inclined surface. Areas of meticulous detail, such as the palpebral contour, the definition of the nostrils, and the more elaborate decorative motifs of the clothing, offer a further field of observation. In these zones, the brushstroke is extremely reduced and the control of the gesture is maximum. The direction of the micro-traits and the modulation of pressure

result fully coherent with what observed in the wider areas, confirming that even in phases of maximum precision the artist operates according to dextrous gestural schemes. This datum is particularly significant, since in operations of detail the dominant hand tends to emerge with greater clarity.

18. Craquelure in the Painting

The craquelure⁴² observable on the surface of the male portrait inserts itself fully into the theoretical framework of multilayer pictorial systems. The poplar wooden support presents a mechanical behavior strongly dependent on thermo-hygrometric environmental variations. The expression and differential contraction along the directions of the fibers generate tensions that are transmitted to the overlying layers, namely to the preparation and to the paint layers. In the specific case of the work, the preparation appears relatively thin and compact⁴³. This datum is of primary importance for understanding the morphology of the craquelure, which presents itself as the result of an unstable equilibrium between rigidity of the upper layers and mobility of the support. The genesis⁴⁴ of the craquelure must be placed in a long, progressive, and stratified temporality. The first microfractures form verisimilarly already in the first phases of aging of the pictorial film, when the oily binder completes the processes of oxidation

and hyperpolymerization. Subsequently, cyclic environmental fluctuations amplify and stratify the fracture network, transferring it into a structured and legible system.

From a physical point of view, the craquelure of the painting cannot be interpreted as a uniform phenomenon. It articulates itself into a plurality of typologies that reflect the diverse composition and function of the pictorial areas: zones of high visual plasticity, like the face, present a mechanical response profoundly different with respect to areas of greater material and pigmentary load, like the vest. The morphological and distributive analysis of the craquelure constitutes the central nucleus of the present report, since it allows reading in a direct and scientifically founded way the material behavior of the work over time. The pictorial surface of the male portrait does not present a uniform fracture network, but an articulated and hierarchized system of cracks that varies sensitively in function of the iconographic areas, of the materials employed, and of the structural relationship with the wooden support. Close observation, conducted in high-resolution visible light and in raking light, reveals how the craquelure distributes itself according to non-random logics, but fully coherent with the executive technique and with the physics of the artifact. In the zone of the face, the craquelure presents itself extremely fine, with thin, close, and limited-depth fractures. The network assumes a practically isotropic configuration, devoid of marked directionality. This datum is of extraordinary relevance, because it indicates a thin, well-controlled pictorial laying characterized by a high degree of residual elasticity. The pigments employed for the flesh tone appear finely ground and intimately bound to the oily binder, generating a compact but not fragile pictorial film. The elevated density of the craquelure in the face

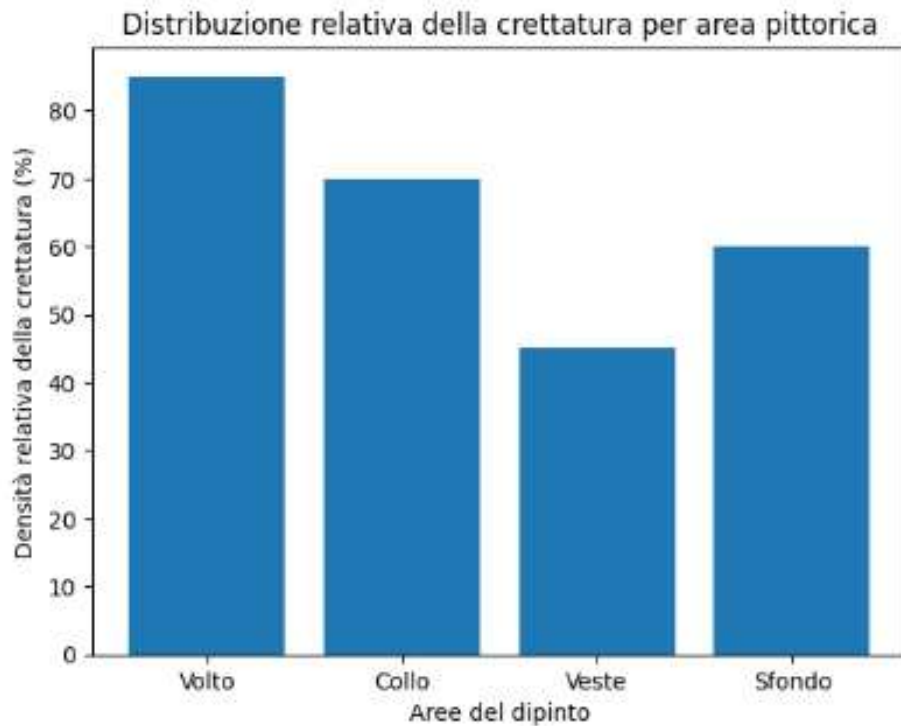
⁴² Craquelure — Network of superficial fissures of the pictorial film due to mechanical tensions and aging; not to be confused with lacunae (loss of film).

⁴³ Thin and Compact Preparation — A not very thick and rigid preparatory layer favors the direct transmission of tensions, reducing the capacity to harmonize movements between support and pictorial film.

⁴⁴ Progressive Genesis — Microfractures form in long times: they begin with microfissuring during the aging of the binder and amplify due to repeated environmental cycles.

must not be interpreted as a sign of structural weakness. On the contrary, it testifies to a process of progressive micro-adaptation of the pictorial film to the solicitations of the support. The dense network of microfractures distributes tension uniformly, avoiding the formation of wide and destructive cracks. This behavior is typical of high technical quality painting, in which the painter demonstrates a deep empirical knowledge of materials. In the transition between face and neck, a gradual modification of the morphology of the craquelure is observed. While conserving a relatively fine texture, the fractures begin to denote a slight directionality, often coherent with the vertical orientation of the wood fibers. Such transition zone holds particular interest from a mechanical point of view, as it represents an area of adaptation between two different pictorial systems: that of the complexions and that of the vest. In the vest, the craquelure manifests its most structural and legible character. The fractures present themselves wider, deeper, and, often, interconnected. The trend is predominantly oriented, with a clear predominance of vertical and oblique lines, directly reconducible to the behavior of the poplar wooden support. In some points, the cracks reach the preparatory layer, making the underlying stratigraphy visible and confirming the greater overall rigidity of such areas. The different mechanical response of the vest is strictly linked to the nature of the materials employed. The green pigments and the decorative and golden elements introduce into the pictorial system materials characterized by lower elasticity with respect to other zones. To this is added a greater material load, with thicker and less homogeneous paint layers. This combination of factors favors the formation of more marked cracks, which organize themselves according to a less dense but more evident network. At the level of the background, the

behavior of the craquelure configures itself as intermediate. The craquelure is present, but less dense with respect to the face and less deep with respect to the vest. Such distribution suggests a functional pictorial laying, devoid of excessive material thicknesses, presumably realized with the intent not to interfere visually with the main subject. From a structural point of view, the background acts as a tension compensation zone, absorbing part of the movements of the support without developing extreme fractures. The graphic representation of the distribution of craquelure per pictorial area, above, allows immediately visualizing these differences. Poplar wood, particularly sensitive to relative humidity variations, tends to deform mainly along one direction, transmitting such solicitations to the overlying pictorial layers. The combined reading of the spatial distribution and orientation of the craquelure allows inferring that the painting has undergone, over time, cyclic environmental variations, but not sudden traumatic events of a damaging nature. The absence of radial cracks, concentric fractures, and discontinuities suggest a progressive and relatively controlled aging. From an interpretive point of view, the craquelure appears therefore as the result of a long process of material adaptation, rather than as the outcome of accelerated degradation. This datum reinforces the hypothesis of a generally respectful conservative history of the original structure of the work. The craquelure of the portrait finds numerous points of contact with those observable in panel paintings of Northern Italy between the end of the '400 and the first decades of the '500. In particular, the absence of a fine and regular craquelure of the meats is compatible with a pictorial tradition attentive to the rendering of chiaroscuro and to the stability of the pictorial film.



Graph. 1: Relative distribution of craquelure per pictorial area

19. Anatomico-Morphological Study of the Face

The face of the represented subject shows proportions typical of Northern Renaissance portraiture: moderate forehead, straight nose with slight medial gibbus, little marked supraorbital arch, almond-shaped eyes with slight inclination to the right, thin-medium lips, and rounded chin. The rendering, as already seen, is modeled thanks to very thin glazes on clear preparation. The orientation is half-bust slightly at 3/4; face turned towards the observer with frontal gaze. It must be remembered that some parts of the face present modern or ancient reintegrations, therefore the morphological reading must take into account also possible small superficial variations. The proportions are balanced, with slight vertical elongation of the face that confers an elegant and slender aspect, frequent in portraits of young nobles of the late '400 and early '500.

As said, the nose appears straight with a slight dorsal convexity (little pronounced medial gibbus), rounded tip (not bulbous) but defined, nostrils not excessively wide, lateral profile with moderate naso-labial angle. The nose is not markedly aquiline (typical of some idealized depictions), nor is the nose short and flattened. The form suggests a naturalistic rendering, not idealized, and can be useful for comparisons with documented portraits of Lombard and Venetian figures. The shape of the eyes is almond-shaped with a slight external inclination; soft upper eyelids, palpebral fold not marked. The iris is well defined and the pupil centered; we have a rendering of specular light (light points) coherent with a single light source from the top left. The eyebrows are arched, not thick, with thin trait; not emphasized by marked dark pigments. The gaze is direct and controlled; the rendering of the eyes is realistic, with attention to luminous reflection that contributes to the vivacity of the portrait. The shape and inclination are compatible with

portraits of Venetian and Lombard school that privileged naturalness and introspection. Upper lips thin and medium, lower lip slightly fuller; Cupid's bow present but not marked. The corners of the lips result slightly turned downwards, conferring a composed and reserved expression. The mouth is not emphasized for expressivity; the chromatic modulation obtained with glazes creates an effect of softness typical of the glaze technique of the period. As for the chin, it is rounded, not protruding with a soft mandibular line; the neck is proportioned with shadings that suggest an oblique light. The hair is dark brown, long curls up to the shoulders; detailed rendering of curls with thin brushstrokes and lights on cinnabar/light earths. The hair frames the face without overwhelming it, contributing to the balanced composition.

19.1. Analysis of the Represented Subject

Below will be reported iconographic and representative elements of a historical character that presents many points of contact with the subject represented in the painting under study. The subject represented, as seen previously, could be from the Lombard-Venetian area between the end of the '400 and the first decades of the '500. Among the possible identifications of the depicted subject, we lean with particular interest towards the hypothesis that it is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, eminent historical figure of the 15th century. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was born in 1463 and died prematurely in 1494, as results from ascertainments today, following poisoning, at the age of thirty-one. The effigy in question, ascribable to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, reveals delicate physiognomic lines, a smooth skin surface, and hair characterized by soft curls, traits that induce hypothesizing an age

comprised between eighteen and twenty-five years. Taking into account the year of birth, 1463, the subject would have turned eighteen in 1481 and twenty-five in 1488. Therefore, if the portrait was executed *de visu* as an easel work by a mature artist, its realization would presumably be placed between 1481 and 1488. To these images will respectively follow anatomo-morphological comparisons to evaluate if there can be the possibility of accosting this subject with the young man represented in the painting. At the level of compatibility of values attesting around 70%, they are deemed acceptable, meaning similarities; values from 70 to 80% are to be accosted to elements of strong similarity; values above 80% are to be considered linked to a positive match of compatibility or associated with blood kinship between the two subjects.

This painting by Cristofano dell'Altissimo is part of a series of 492 portraits of illustrious men; the collection was enriched until 1840 and was started by Cosimo I de Medici in 1552. Cosimo I, indeed, sent the painter Cristofano dell'Altissimo to Como with the specific charge of copying the portraits collected in about 30 years by Paolo Giovio (1483-1552). The presence of a portrait of Pico della Mirandola in the Giovian series is attested and the catalog card signals the dating of the copies between 1552 and 1568; Cristofano's copies are today conserved in the Uffizi. In our case, we can say that the practice of copying and diffusion of celebrated portraits makes plausible that local versions or subsequent copies (even eighteenth-century) may derive from a Giovian prototype or from a previous portrait conserved in Mirandola. The works were arranged in the Villa sul Lago; the Giovian collection was for the most part constituted by portraits copied from frescoes, funerary monuments, or medals, and a certain space

was dedicated also to portraits of contemporary characters; the representative picture of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was present in the Vasarian list from 1568.



Fig. 28: Cristofano dell'Altissimo, *Portrait of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, ca. 1552–1568. Oil on panel, 59 × 45 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Serie Gioviana. Public domain.



Fig. 30: *Reconstructed face with forensic techniques of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.*



Fig. 29: *Engraving Subject Giovanni Pico della Mirandola Taken from "Les Vrais Pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres" by André Thevet - 1584*

Fig. 31: *Skull of Pico della Mirandola used for the creation of the reconstructive forensic study.*



The presence of an eighteenth-century work by Antonio Ferri that explicitly declares the subject as “Pico della Mirandola” suggests that in the territory of Mirandola, an iconographic model recognized as representation of the philosopher was circulating. Furthermore, Ferri's work differs from the Giovian copy for the different disposition and the headdress that we find in Cristofano's copy. This leads us to deduce that they were two distinct iconographies of the same subject. One line reproduced starting from the Giovian one with headdress. A second line instead without headdress and in different position like that of Ferri. The fact that Ferri associates the name of Pico below attests the veracity of the lines and morphology. But if the work under study of the 16th century as setting were similar to that of Ferri, it would mean that very probably the work under study was the initial work that inspired the eighteenth-century artist. The most probable hypothesis is therefore the existence of a local prototype (painting) in Mirandola or surroundings, from which Antonio Ferri drew his version; the same iconographic matrix could have been copied in other seats, giving rise to affine versions, among which the work under study. This hypothesis explains the strong similarity between Ferri and the work under study and the presence of a model locally recognized as Pico della Mirandola. There is also another remote and less probable hypothesis that the painting under study is independent but adheres to a widely diffused iconographic model, for which the similarities with Ferri are the result of shared stylistic conventions. This hypothesis is reported, but is not very convincing in light of the results of anatomomorphological correspondence. It is worth noting how in Eugène Müntz's catalog mention is made of a portrait of Pico della Mirandola executed by Leonardo da Vinci, a small pen and mixed technique drawing

currently dispersed. Such portrait, of modest dimensions, belonged in the 17th century to the collection of Fulvio Orsini, librarian of the Farnese family.



Fig. 32: Civic Museum of Mirandola (Portrait of Giovanni di Pico della Mirandola) Realized by Antonio Ferri (1804-1868) 49 cm X 40 cm Portrait of 3/4 turned towards the right. Writing present: IO.PICVS MIRAND.COMES MCCCCXCIII Translated Giovanni Pico Count of Mirandola - 1494

The presence of an eighteenth-century work by Antonio Ferri that explicitly declares the subject as “Pico della Mirandola” suggests that in the territory of Mirandola, an iconographic model recognized as representation of the philosopher was circulating. Furthermore, Ferri's work differs from the Giovian copy for the different disposition and the headdress that we find in Cristofano's copy. This leads us to deduce that they were two distinct iconographies of the same subject. One line reproduced starting from the Giovian one with headdress. A

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"Quadretto corniciato d'hebano, tocco di aquarella con la testa del Pico della Mirandola, di mano di Leonardo (sc. 4)."—De Nolhac, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1884, vol. i., p. 427, et seq. The s

Fig. 33: Photo from the catalog of Leonardo Da Vinci, Artist, Thinker and Man of Science · Volume 2, By Eugène Müntz · 1898

In the catalog of the Ducal Palace in Mantua, Dr. L'Occaso, citing the source, advances the hypothesis of a divergent iconography, in Leonardo's portrait, with respect to that conventionally attributed to Pico della Mirandola.

MV 5681) e nel castello di Beauregard. Vale il ricordare che Fulvio Orsini possedeva un ritratto della Mirandola creduto "di mano di Leonardo" (DE NOLHAC 1884, p. 435), che però probabilmente è in relazione con la nostra composizione (

Fig. 34: Catalog of the Ducal Palace, with the writing of L'Occaso

The most consolidated depictions of the philosopher arrived until today present him, as is known, in profile; such iconography, according to doctrine, would derive from an anonymous work of preceding epoch. In support of this, reference is made to a further source that describes the work previously belonging to the Orsini collection, underlining how Leonardo portrayed Pico in profile. The question arises, therefore, whether all subsequent representations, including that of Altissimo in the Uffizi, derive from this latter. The question, deserving of wider disquisitions in different contexts, arouses notable interest and, in any case, precludes the ascribability of the Leonardesque iconography to the painting object of the present study.

XI. Portrait of a young beardless profile, turned to the left; the features what incisive: a long aquiline nose, mouth, long hair falling over the chin, hiding the ears; the head covered by cap (Pico della Mirandola?). Height cm., width 0 m. 255 cm. A fine Milanese drawing.

Fig. 35: Photo from the catalog, Leonardo Da Vinci, Artist, Thinker and Man of Science · Volume 2, By Eugène Müntz · 1898

19.2. 1st Comparison

Evaluation of Compatibility between the work under study and the painting in the Uffizi.

Fig. 36: Comparison between work under study and the painting in the Uffizi.



A first comparative analysis is proposed between the work under examination and the portrait of Pico della Mirandola by Cristofano dell'Altissimo conserved in the Uffizi, through a morphological study that takes into account the limitations imposed by the diversity of materials and the angulation of the figures, one at three-quarters and the other in profile. The investigation will concentrate in particular on comparative facial analysis, a useful tool for evaluating possible connections between Renaissance portraits, especially in the absence of certain attribution. In the work under study, an elongated oval of the face is found, characterized by a wide forehead and a rounded and non-protruding chin. The structure of the face appears balanced, devoid of significant protrusions or retractions, with a prevalence of height over width, conferring a slender aspect. In Cristofano's portrait, an oval shape of the face is observed, albeit slightly more compact; the profile shows a

harmonious transition between forehead, nasal dorsum, and chin, returning an image of regularity and equilibrium. The face, overall, results less proportioned and perhaps slightly less elongated with respect to the painting under study.

Analyzing facial proportions, a high compatibility is found, both subjects presenting an oval face, not massive, characterized by a certain linear finesse. The nasal structure denotes medium compatibility: both noses are long, of aristocratic fashion, and devoid of significant gibbosities. The volumes of the face appear soft, devoid of accentuated angularities. The examination of the lips reveals a notable similarity: thin lips, not turgid, which suggest a controlled expression. The minimal discrepancies found, partly attributable to the different poses and representative style, determine a medium-high labial compatibility. Finally, the study of the chin and jaw highlights a non-prominent jaw and a chin of moderate dimensions in both subjects. Morphological compatibility attests itself on a high level, despite stylistic and pose divergences. The concordance between eyes and eyebrows, characterized by a moderate arch and thin form, reveals itself of medium-high grade. The hair, distinguished in both cases by length, undulation/curls, and brown tonality, highlights a high compatibility. It is considered that the presence of dissimilar facial elements between the images, due to different framing, significantly influences the overall evaluation of physiognomic compatibility, reducing its percentage. The aggregate physiognomic value of the two faces reaches 89.7%, suggesting a derivation from a common physiognomic archetype.



Fig. 37: Facial Analysis of comparison of comparison 1

19.3. 2nd Comparison

Evaluation of Compatibility between the work under study and the painting in the Museum of Mirandola representing Pico della Mirandola.



Fig. 37: Comparison between work under study and the painting of the Museum of Mirandola

This second comparison inserts itself in a research oriented to verify the existence of a shared physiognomic model or of a possible direct iconographic relation. From the analysis of the head, we find an elongated oval skull with wide forehead and rounding profile. Compatibility is high if one takes into account the different pictorial material and surface and the different hand of the artist. If we also compare the nasal profile, we find an impressive compatibility, both present (long dorsum. Slight convexity, rounded tip, high attachment to the forehead). As for the comparison of eyes, eyelids, and eyebrows, we also have here a high compatibility with large eyes, marked upper eyelid with elliptical eye shape and a slightly lowered external angle. Also all other elements offer full compatibility, meaning a strong derivation from the same iconographic prototype. The two works compared present an extremely high compatibility with the portrait of Pico della Mirandola; there exists between these

two works a strong possibility of direct and indirect relation. Compatibility at 89%.

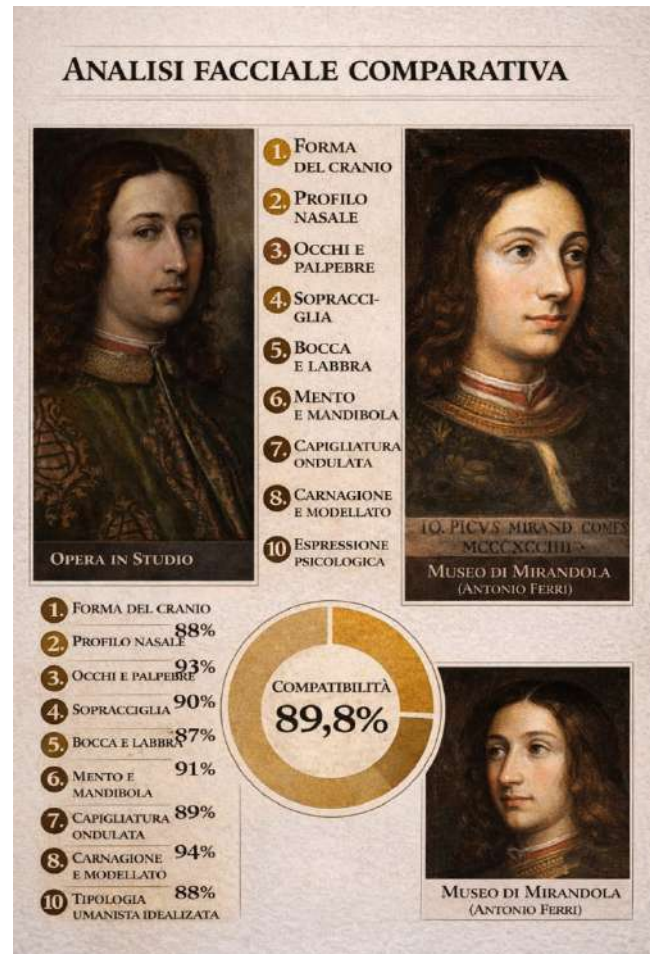


Fig. 38: Facial analysis of comparison 2

19.4. 3rd Comparison

Evaluation of Compatibility between the work under study and the forensic reconstruction of the face of Pico della Mirandola realized starting from his Skull.



Fig. 39: Comparison between work under study and the forensic reconstruction of the face of Pico della Mirandola

Comparing the portrait image with the reconstruction derived from the skull of Pico della Mirandola, a notable correspondence is found, keeping in mind that the reconstruction highlights facial volumes and that the Renaissance pictorial representation may present idealizations, stylistic choices, or alterations due to restorations. The analysis of the skull reveals a dolichocephaly, characteristic common in individuals of Northern Italy of the 15th century, united to a high forehead. The general conformation of the skull demonstrates a surprising compatibility with the portrait, particularly evident in the coincidence between the reconstructed forehead and that painted in terms of form and inclination. The morphometric examination of the nose reveals analogies in length and linearity of the dorsum, with a slight divergence in the tip, area which, being constituted by cartilage, is not directly reconstructible from the bony structure and therefore not considered in the analytical process. The concordance with the skull of Pico della Mirandola attests itself on high levels, exceeding that found in other comparisons. Therefore, the painted face

shows a significant coherence with the cranio-facial structure attributed to the philosopher, with a notable morphological convergence and an estimated reliability between 88% and 91%. The overall average of the results reaches 91%, a value which, in a comparative ambit between portrait and forensic reconstruction, indicates a structural coherence of exceptional importance, suggesting a possible derivation from direct observation. In conclusion, the analyzed work places itself coherently in the ambit of the iconography of Pico della Mirandola. The comparative morphological analysis, with a concordance of 91%, assumes statistical relevance and significance in historical physiognomic ambit, allowing to affirm, with good probability, that the face represented in the work is strongly compatible with the cranial structure attributed to Pico della Mirandola.

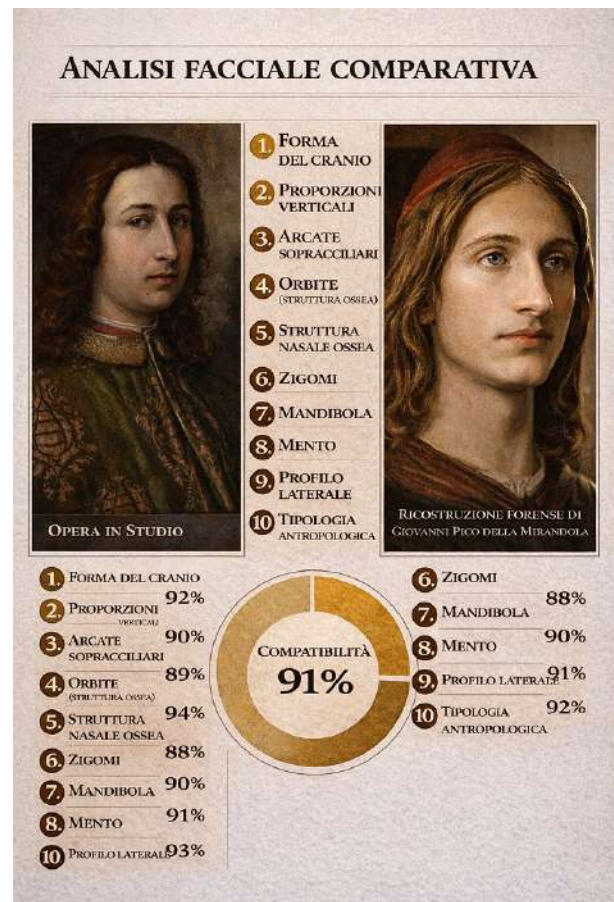


Fig. 40: Facial analysis of comparison 3

19.5. Historical Synthesis of the Represented Subject

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) was born in the signorial castle of Mirandola and represents a central figure of Renaissance humanism. His formation led him to frequent the main cultural centers of fourteenth-century Italy (Ferrara, Padua, Florence, Paris) and to enter into contact with figures such as Lorenzo the Magnificent and Marsilio Ficino. His most known work, the *Oratio de Hominis Dignitate* of 1486, has had a diffusion and reception that have contributed to consolidating his public image and historical memory. Giovanni di Pico belonged to a noble family, the Counts of Mirandola, and his figure was object of commemoration and iconographic diffusion already in the centuries following his death. The practice of portraying illustrious men and conserving such images in public and private collections (for example the series of Giovanian copies promoted by the Medici) has favored the circulation of recognizable iconographic prototypes. The presence of copies and versions⁴⁵ is historically plausible. The circulation of iconographic models has produced, in subsequent centuries, copies, reinterpretations, and local versions: eighteenth-century portraits, busts, and modern forensic reconstructions that insert themselves in this line of transmission. The presence of an eighteenth-century portrait identified as “Pico” in local collections is coherent with the practice of reaffirming local historical figures through commissions and copies of the 19th century.

The title and residences indicate a position of signorial rank; he belonged to a family that had territorial government functions and connected to the network of feudal power of the Modenese territory. This status provided

Giovanni di Pico with a social and material base that guaranteed him access to resources, protections, and educational opportunities not common. Pico della Mirandola was a count and this implied land possessions, incomes derived from fiefs, and signorial rights over villages and local rents. Economic availability is indirectly confirmed by the possibility of undertaking long travels in Italy and Europe and by the capacity to sustain expenses for publications and the defense of his theses: all activities that required not negligible means.



Fig. 41: Civic Museum of Mirandola (copy of the work present in the Uffizi) 17th century (between 1640-1660) Giovanni Pico della Mirandola The portrait reprises the classic iconography of Giovanni di Pico della Mirandola, seen in profile turned towards the left. The eighteenth-century frame of wood painted in white and gold. Portrait that reprises the original conserved in the Uffizi.

Pico della Mirandola is described as a figure of exceptional formation: juridical studies in Bologna, deepenings in Ferrara and Padua, stays in Florence and Paris, knowledge of Latin, Greek, and oriental languages. He

frequented: Lorenzo the Magnificent, Marsilio Ficino, Angelo Poliziano, Savonarola; we can thus place him at the center of the Italian humanistic network and among the main representatives.

This elevated cultural capital made him socially influential beyond the local ambit; he was recognized as an intellectual of European portée. The vicissitude of the 900 theses and the will to sustain a public dispute in Rome show a project of visibility and public prestige. The episode of the partial condemnation by the curia and the subsequent imprisonment in Vincennes also reveal the political dimension of his acting. Pico della Mirandola was not an isolated erudite, but an actor who confronted powerful institutions (Roman curia, Popes, city governments). His capacity to obtain diplomatic interventions for liberation indicates relations and protection of note.

In Florence, a significant spiritual evolution occurred that led him to deepen theology and embrace a life of recollection in the convent of San Marco. This transformation, verisimilarly intended to mitigate tensions with ecclesiastical authorities, while not affecting his noble heritage and erudition, reoriented his public presence: from young animator of academic debates to figure dedicated to contemplation, preserving intact his intellectual prestige.

The figure of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was celebrated and remembered in subsequent centuries: his *Oratio* and *Conclusiones* became object of publication and discussion. This collective memory favors the production and conservation of commemorative portraits, copies, and versions: the presence of images of Pico in public and local collections is coherent with his posthumous fame. The

social status of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was that of a noble, rich in cultural capital, politically visible, and object of collective memory. Giovanni is indicated as Count of Concordia; he is also indicated as “nonconformist genius” endowed with a prodigious memory and passionate temperament. As said, he was arrested in Lyon for his positions and liberation occurred through the intercession of Lorenzo the Magnificent. In his osseous remains, traces of arsenic have been found, this leads therefore to the hypothesis that he may have been poisoned. The central thesis of his text highlighted the dignity and freedom of man: man is placed at the center of the world and can “make” himself by choosing his own intellectual and moral destiny. Among the main themes, he spoke of Radical Freedom and said that man is indeterminate by nature and can model himself; freedom is not only acting but becoming (power – being). He believed that human greatness lay in the possibility of choosing the supreme good and ascending. The encyclopedic project and the intellectual defense provoked conflicts with the curia (there was indeed the condemnation of some of his theses); all this marked a thought and influenced the reception of cabala, natural sciences, and Renaissance philosophical syncretism.

19.6. Representation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in Cosimo Rosselli

The creation of the pictorial cycle by Cosimo Rosselli roots itself in the spiritual and vital fabric of the Florence that preceded it in the 13th century. The abbess Bernabei commissioned Cosimo Rosselli to decorate the vault and walls of the chapel between 1484 and 1486. Rosselli was fresh from the Sistine Chapel yard in Rome, where he had worked in close contact with Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Perugino. This experience had led him to develop a monumental style, characterized by chromatic richness and minuscule attention for realistic detail that made him perfect for a commissioning that desired a celebratory and documentary work at the same time. Rosselli chose not to represent the miraculous event of 1230 in itself, but a solemn ceremony of ostension of the relic ambiented in the square of Sant' Ambrogio contemporary to the artist. This choice confers to the work an extraordinary value of visual chronicle. The scene opens onto a faithful reproduction of the Florentine square of the late '400.

The crowd filling the square is divided by ranks and genders, according to the customs of the time. The aspect that makes Rosselli's fresco an indispensable document for the history of Western thought is the presence of the group of three Neoplatonic humanist men situated almost in the center of the square. These are Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the center, Marsilio Ficino, and Agnolo Poliziano, the three brightest minds of the circle of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Their inclusion in a scene dedicated to the Eucharistic miracle is not only a homage to the celebrity of the time, but represents a complex theological-philosophical declaration.



Fig. 42: Cosimo Rosselli Miracle of the Sacrament Fresco 1484-1486 Chapel of the Miracle – Church of Sant' Ambrogio – Florence

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494, the “Count” par excellence of humanism, is the central figure of the trio. Vasari praises his portrait defining it “alive”, and Rosselli catches him with his distinctive portraits: blond or light brown hair and a face with intense and melancholic expression. Pico wears a bright green vest, a color not chosen casually but which holds fundamental importance in his philosophical system. In the years in which the fresco was completed (1486), Pico himself was living a moment of extreme tension with the Holy See. Having published his 900 theses, he was preparing the great universal dispute in Rome, but some of his positions on transubstantiation had been declared suspect of heresy.

To the right of Pico is portrayed Marsilio Ficino, the soul of the Academy and he who had rediscovered and translated the works of Plato in the West. To the left of Pico is Agnolo Poliziano, the poet and tutor of the Medici family. Poliziano is depicted with his

characteristic face and an expression of wise detachment.

The analysis of Pico della Mirandola's clothing in Rosselli's fresco unveils not only the dictates of Florentine fashion of the 15th century, but also the rich chromatic and material symbolism of the epoch. Pico's dress reflects his noble status, his intellectual stature, and his title of Count of Mirandola.

The green tonality of his vest stands out, an aristocratic fashion *giornea*. In Pichian philosophy, green assumes a precise metaphysical meaning: associated with youth, understood as a state of vigor and integrity of the soul preserved from the corruption of time and error.

The Chapel of the Miracle offers the opportunity to compare the finished fresco with the underlying preparatory drawing, revealed during detachment in the '60s. With respect to the original drawing, Rosselli made significant modifications in the course of work, the main of which concerns the positioning of Pico. Initially placed in a different position in the group of men on the left, his shift towards the center conferred on him a role of greater dramatic relief. The accurate examination of Pico's face in the fresco reveals distinctive traits that Cosimo Rosselli knew how to catch with mastery.

Indeed, the philosopher is portrayed at 3/4 in a position that allows appreciating both facial features and the overall volumetry of the skull. Pico's face in this work by Rosselli appears with wide face, strong cheekbones, and well-defined jaws that terminate in a pronounced chin characterized by a small dimple, and strongly recalls the painting under study.



Fig. 43: The ultraviolet light analysis of this work, focused on the chin area, reveals a removal of pre-existing pigment. Consequently, the presence of a dimple, although perceptible, cannot be considered a reliable identifying element, given the chromatic alteration undergone by the surface.

The presence of the dimple, found in other works previously analyzed, although perceptible, is not verifiable in the work under examination due to a partial restoration in that specific area, making such detail unusable for comparative purposes. Contemporary sources describe a "milky" complexion, a characteristic also found in the painting in question. The eyes, vivid and light-colored, evoke the intelligence and nobility attributed to Pico by his biographers. Particularly worthy of note is the dimension of the skull, emphasized by Cosimo Rosselli to suggest the intellectual capacities of the subject through a spacious and elongated cranial box, characteristic further accentuated by the hairstyle. The attentive observation of the nape reveals that the hair does not fall vertically, but follows and accentuates a posterior prolongation of the occiput. Therefore, the blond hair does not limit itself to an ornamental role, but functions as an aesthetic covering for an anatomical structure

that manifests a marked dolichocephaly⁴⁶. Rosselli, while following the dictates of Renaissance ideal beauty, does not hide Pico's peculiarity, but integrates it harmoniously into the composition. From the study of the skull that we were able to notice also previously, it reports an elongated form along the longitudinal axis. Rosselli, while following the dictates of Renaissance ideal beauty, does not hide Pico's peculiarity, but integrates it harmoniously into the composition. From the study of the skull that we were able to notice also previously, it reports an elongated form along the longitudinal axis. In Pico, this elongation is not pathological but constitutes a natural anatomical variant that translates into a nape particularly protruding towards the outside (prominence of the occipital bone). Thus, this bony conformation perfectly explains why Rosselli gave space to the posterior part of the head in his fresco. The volume occupied by the blond hair in the work of art corresponds exactly to the space required by a dolichocephalous skull with a marked occiput.

19.7. Possible Iconographic Variation

This male portrait of the early '600 can be placed in dialogue with the dynamics of production and conservation of aristocratic effigies between the 17th and 19th centuries.

This work is by the artist Sante Peranda (1566-1638), court painter of the Pico family, currently conserved in the Civic Museum of Mirandola.

Fig. 43: Work by Sante Peranda Civic Museum of Mirandola Oil on canvas Portrait of Fra Daniele Quistelli 17th century.



Peranda's portrait, depicting Fra Daniele Quistelli, executed between 1600-1610, constitutes a fundamental example for understanding the physical and semantic mutations to which the work of art can be subjected over the centuries; as probably happened to the work under study. Peranda's work is an oil on canvas of reduced dimensions (45cm x 36cm), but its conservative history reveals a much more complex reality. Historical vicissitudes confirm that the effigy of Fra Daniele Quistelli was a full-length figure placed in the convent of the Observants of Mirandola. The suppression of religious orders and the passage to private collections determined its drastic cutting, reducing it to the sole upper portion. This example is not an isolated case, but reflects a common practice: the readaptation of monumental works for domestic contexts or for purely conservative

⁴⁶ Dolichocephaly — Indicated as anatomical variant (cephalic index < 75–76) not pathological; explains the elongated rendering of the skull and the compositional choice to accentuate the nape.

purposes. The dimensional reduction of a work entails the deprivation of contextual elements that defined its original identity and function, such as backgrounds, attributes, and inscriptions. Such phenomenon configures itself as interpretive key of the work under examination, whose surface manifests signs of material alteration. The prevailing hypothesis is that the pictorial image was subjected to an operation of excision in the upper portion, on the right side, and, presumably, in the lower zone. The fragmentation does not appear determined exclusively by space requirements or deterioration of the support, but seems to conceal a deliberate intention to modify the iconography of the depicted subject. The comparison with the eighteenth-century portrait of Pico della Mirandola, executed by Ferri and bearing an identificatory inscription in the lower part, induces hypothesizing that the painting under study constituted a prototype for the artist, and that originally contained textual elements or attributes subsequently removed. The identification of the subject with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola opens prospects of notable interest in the ambit of sociology of art and history, considering the central role of Pico in Humanism and his figure, historically opposed and perceived as uncomfortable by ecclesiastical hierarchies. Recent scientific investigations on the remains of the philosopher, which confirmed the presence of arsenic, strengthen the hypothesis of a political-religious assassination, highlighting the perception of dangerousness that surrounded his person. In a similar context of suspicion and repression, the possession of an image of Pico della Mirandola would have represented a concrete risk for collectors and religious institutions, suggesting that the conservation of the work was guaranteed through an operation of "iconographic camouflage". The depicted halo, although

apparently coeval, reveals a facture diverging from the general pictorial style. The single golden brushstroke, of *sommarie* execution, contrasts with the refinement of the work. It is hypothesized, therefore, a posterior application, perhaps not far from the original creation. This addition, if confirmed, could conceal a conservative intent, a sort of protective disguise. The halo, in this context, becomes the most salient element, transforming an aristocratic portrait of a heterodox intellectual into a standardized religious image. The occultment of identificatory elements – physiognomic traits, heraldic inscriptions – and the insertion of the attribute of sanctity suggest an action aimed at preserving the painting from censorship and destruction. The halo, therefore, does not celebrate the sanctity of the subject, but functions as a bulwark for its survival. A form of attenuated iconoclasm is configured: the image is not annihilated, but altered and uniformed to ecclesiastical visual canons, making it acceptable and no longer subversive. Historical stratification configures itself as intrinsic documental value to the work. Through the analysis of the history of collecting and the vicissitudes of the Pico family, the portrait transcends the mere aesthetic dimension, revealing itself as a vivid historical document. The hypothesis of the dangerousness of ideas and the adaptive capacity of art, aimed at survival through political and ideological changes, finds in this work a possible confirmation. Parallely to the physical vulnerability of court works, as demonstrated by the work of Sante Peranda, the work under examination evidences the iconographic vulnerability of images, transformed from instruments of aristocratic memory into bulwarks of spiritual dissimulation. A further clarification concerns the halo. The comparison with the version by Antonio Ferri, which depicts Pico della Mirandola devoid of halo, leads to an

operative evidence: the halo present in the work under study is presumably an addition subsequent to the realization of Ferri's version. XRF analysis reveals that the halo, now golden, re-emerged following the removal of a pictorial layer added in a second moment. It is deduced that the aureolar attribute was added post factum and subsequently occulted, therefore Ferri could observe and reproduce the work devoid of halo, because already concealed or not yet realized. The removals of portions of the painting, particularly in the upper part, were executed ignoring the pre-existence of the underlying halo. This circumstance testifies to the repeated reworkings undergone by the panel, which, while not inflicting on its intrinsic quality, have impacted exterior elements.

19.8. Portraits at the Court of the Mirandolas

The Pico della Mirandola family were lords with castle residences, matrimonial networks, and relations with the major courts of Northern Italy. The presence of Giulia Boiardo (mother of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola) as a central figure in the cultural formation of the Pichian court and the links with the Este and Gonzaga, created a context favorable to the production and circulation of quality works of art. The Pico court cultivated diplomacy through the exchange of gifts, and custodied a library and collections that reflected a refined taste and economic availability for artistic commissions.

Tradition attributes to Giovan Francesco I and Giulia Boiardo the commissioning of a studiolo adorned by Cosmè Tura, although its effective existence is object of debate. It is certain that the court possessed precious furniture, such as tables and portraits, fruit of commissions or acquisitions.

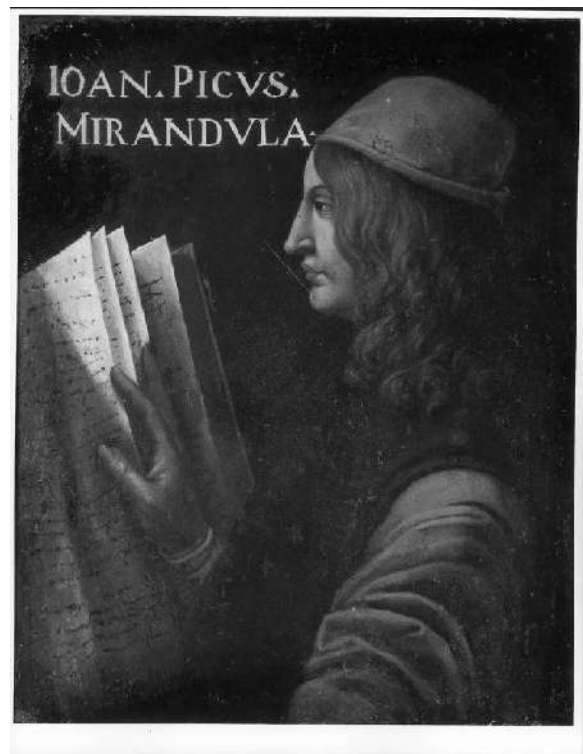


Fig. 44: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola Oil on canvas Antonio Maria Crespi (attr.) Pinacoteca Ambrosiana 1580-1630

The portrait of Alessandro I Pico and Lara d'Este, work by Santo Peranda, testifies to the custom of immortalizing family members through official portraits.

The dispersion of such goods over time is a fact. Matrimonial alliances, dowries, and wedding gifts explain the circulation of works and objects towards Ferrara, Mantua, Carpi, Luzzara, and, in later epochs, towards foreign collections. The spoliations and documented transfers in the Eighteenth century and during political crises marked crucial stages in the dislocation of this patrimony. Giulia Boiardo, mother of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, was deeply linked to the Este house; her father Feltrino was a figure of note both in military and cultural ambit. The marriage with Giovanni Francesco I Pico (1415-1467) inserted her into the network of Padanian lordships, with connections with the Este, Gonzaga, and Bentivoglio. The genealogy and

matrimonial alliances of the children (Galeotto, AntonMaria, Giovanni, Caterina, Lucrezia) reveal a family strategy aimed at weaving wide political and cultural relations. After the death of her husband (1467), Giulia assumed a leading role, as usufructuary of the patrimony, guardian of the son Giovanni, and administrator of goods and public works. The period following the death of Giovan Francesco I was marked by tensions between the sons, with Giulia Boiardo sided with AntonMaria against the firstborn Galeotto. Sources document episodes of imprisonment and accusations of conspiracies, which evidence the complexity of signorial power in a consortial regime and the active role of the mother in succession dynamics. Giulia Boiardo was also protagonist of numerous religious and social commissions, among which the foundation of the Monastery of the Clarisses in 1460 and several testamentary bequests to convents and churches. From the marriage of Giulia Boiardo with Giovan Francesco Pico della Mirandola, five children were born (Galeotto, AntonMaria, Giovanni, Caterina, and Lucrezia). As said, Giulia is co-founder of the Monastery of the Clarisses of San Lodovico, the first female cenobium of the city, and supporter of the convent of San Francesco. The conflict inside the family between Giulia and Galeotto culminated with the imprisonment of the brother AntonMaria and the temporary detention of Giulia with the accusation of conspiracy. In the testament of July 23, 1478, Giulia disposed bequests to convents and libraries. The vicissitudes of the portraits of the Pico family illustrate the intertwining between dynastic commissions, courtly customs, movement of collections, and political transformations in the Padanian plain between the 16th and 17th centuries. The dynastic gallery allestit in Mirandola by Alessandro I Pico and his successors did not represent solely a collection of family images, but a device of legitimization,

memory, and representation of power, transferred and relocated in the Ducal Palace of Mantua for war reasons and patrimonial safeguarding. In the Sixteenth century, the Pico reggia in Mirandola configured itself as one of the most sumptuous residences of the region, with the elevation to duchy in 1617 and subsequent restructuring works, including the construction of the so-called New Gallery, which inaugurated a season of ambitious commissioning and constitution of a dynastic collection of portraits. The gallery of Alessandro I was conceived as a space of representation and dynastic memory, in which the portraits of family members interacted with the architecture and furnishings of the reggia. The fire of the tower of the Este castle of Mirandola in 1716 determined the dispersion and transfer of much of this patrimony: for reasons of safety and conservation, many works flowed into the Ducal Palace of Mantua, where numerous portraits of the Pichian gallery can still be admired today. The transfer marked the end of a phase of iconographic autonomy for the Mirandolese court and the integration of the portraits in a different dynastic and museal context. In Mantua, the works entered into dialogue with the Gonzaga collection and with the exhibitiv practices of the Ducal Palace, being relocated in apartments and halls of representation, among which the apartment of Vincenzo I and the halls of Judith, the Labyrinth, and the Crucible, transforming Pichian memory into part of the visual patrimony of the Mantuan court.

Among the artists charged with defining the public image of the Picos, Sante Peranda stands out, painter active between the end of the Sixteenth century and the beginning of the Seventeenth, interpreter of the late Venetian manner and figure of reference for the ducal commissions of Mirandola. Peranda was, for a period, the official painter of the Pichian

court and realized numerous portraits destined for the gallery of Alessandro I, among which the portrait of Alessandro I Pico (1618) and the portrait of Laura d'Este (1611). The Pichian gallery, therefore, must be read as a symbolic system: the portraits are not simple family portraits, but instruments of lineage construction. Placed in halls of representation, they served to remember ancestors, sanction matrimonial alliances, and project an image of continuity and authority of the house. The choice of subjects, poses, and attributes, sumptuous clothes, coats of arms, respond to a visual grammar aimed at making visible the authority and respectability of the lineage. The transfer to Mantua and the vicissitude of restorations, spoliations, and passages of property and transfers have deeply impacted the dispersion and legibility of such works. The presence of inventories and registrations of inventories from (1649-1650) allows reconstructing only a part of the original composition of the gallery and the identification of the works.

Fig. 45: Remains of the Ducal Palace of Mantua – 1910



The lordship of the Pico della Mirandola constituted, between Renaissance and Baroque, a significant collection of paintings and furnishings. The complex historical vicissitudes of the Mirandolese patrimony, in particular the spoliation of the Palace in 1716,

had as consequence the transfer of furniture and works of art to the Mantuan court and other centers of power, enriching in part the collections of the Ducal Palace of Mantua. Art historiography has partially reconstructed the genesis of the quadreria flowed into Mantua, highlighting subsequent movements and alienations. The absence of complete archival documentation precludes at the moment an exhaustive reconstruction, leaving emerge only traces of a progressive dispersion. Further factors of fragmentation were sackings and requisitions, perpetrated in different political conjunctures, which accelerated the diaspora of objects and works. Chronical and inventory sources of later epochs testify to losses and forced transfers. Portions of the quadreria were alienated to private individuals and art dealers, entering the international antiquarian market, with destinations such as England, Venice, and Milan. Local research attest sales and dispersions since the years of the duchy of Francesco Maria Pico.

19.9. Setting of the Following Gaze

The phenomenon by which the painted gaze seems to “follow” the spectator is one of the most powerful and subtle effects of Renaissance portraiture: it is not only an optical trick, but a rhetorical device that establishes an interpersonal relationship between image and observer. In the case of the studied portrait, the orientation of the gaze is direct, slightly lateral, but perceived as turned towards whoever looks, becomes an interpretive node around which to build a technical and stylistic comparison.



Fig. 46: Detail of the gaze of the painting under study Fig. 46: Detail of the gaze of the painting under study

The gaze that seems to follow the observer arises from the combination of several factors:

- Orientation of the head
- Position of the eyes
- Luminous modeling of the eyelids and orbital cavities
- Definition of corneal reflections
- Quality of tonal transitions around the eyes

When these elements are calibrated in a way that the visual axis of the subject is not rigidly fixed on an external point, but appears centered with respect to the plane of the observer; the painting will produce the impression of a mobile visual contact, whoever moves perceives that the gaze follows them.

The persuasive force of the visual effect resides in the pictorial approach that shuns marked contours, preferring delicate glazes capable of preserving luminous continuity around the eye, allowing light to interact dynamically with the observer. Analyses on

portraits reveal a stratification of light glazes, a clear preparation, and a modeling of complexions obtained through the use of lead white and cinnabar; the rendering of the eyes and their integration in the cone of light suggest a deliberate planning of visual contact.

Giovanni Bellini emerges as the Venetian artist who transmuted light into a vehicle of deep emotional connection: light does not limit itself to defining form, but makes it participant in a dialogue with the spectator. In his Madonnas and his portraits, the orientation of the gaze is carefully calibrated to evoke a presence that transcends mere "visibility", soliciting a moral and affective response. Bellini's works testify to his ability to generate a "presence" through the fluidity of tonal transitions and the construction of a unitary atmosphere that envelops the face.

The technical examination of Bellinian portraits reveals the use of clear preparations, multiple glazes, and meticulous control of ocular reflections. Bellini adopts a strategy analogous to that of the studio portraitist, namely a reflecting base and thin glazes that allow obtaining delicate and harmonious

gradations around the eye, avoiding brusque contrasts; in both cases, a dynamic gaze is observed. A crucial factor is represented by the angulation of the head with respect to the frontal plane. In the portrait, the head is often slightly rotated towards the observer; this subtle torsion prevents frontal rigidity and infuses a sense of dynamic presence. Bellini frequently adopts a similar solution: a slight rotation of the head, combined with an ocular axis centered with respect to the plane of the observer, generates a contact that expresses neither challenge nor submission, but an invitation to participation. This particular effect of the gaze also manifests itself in the portraits of Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, who transforms the gaze of the portrayed subject into a moment of profound intimacy between whoever looks and whoever is looked at, a technique that obviously he learned from the aforementioned Bellini.

20. Comparative Analysis with Authors of the Era

20.1. Comparison with Cosmè Tura

Cosmè Tura, prominent figure among the artists active in the region, is documented for his contribution to the realization of a *studiolo*.

The artist preferred wooden supports with a carefully smoothed gypsum preparation. Incision in the preparation was a common practice, aimed at defining contours with precision and structuring the figure prior to the chromatic phase. The modeling of volumes was obtained through thin layings, superimposed glazes, and the use of enamels. On the plane of materials and preparatory techniques, a partial compatibility is found, as Cosmè Tura, although habitually resorting to

tempera rather than oil, also realized works with the latter medium.



Fig. 47: *Cosmè Tura, Portrait of young man, ca. 1470–1480. Tempera on panel, 28.3 × 19.7 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 1975.1.142. Image Open Access (CC0).*

The comparative analysis of superficial protective layers is precluded, given the heterogeneous stratification deriving from previous restoration interventions. The use of gold in iconographic ideation constitutes a distinctive characteristic of Cosmè Tura. Similarly, the execution of preparatory incisions conforms to the custom of the Ferrarese master, who used them to delineate contours and orient the subsequent pictorial laying, particularly in ornamental areas and in the definition of faces. The use of thin pictorial layers also fell within the practices of Tura, although his technique remained firmly anchored to the use of tempera, albeit with rare exceptions. Historically, his activity is

placed in a period of transition, during which the oil technique was progressively asserting itself. From a stylistic point of view, Cosmè Tura is famous for a vigorous and sometimes angular graphic trait, as well as for a rendering of faces characterized by linear accentuations and by a metallic-effect illumination. The work under examination, on the contrary, reveals a softer plasticity, obtained through more delicate oil glazes, and a representation of hair and faces of more naturalistic and less graphic imprint, configuring a significant stylistic divergence.



Fig. 48: Detail of Saint Maurelius and Paul with Niccolò Roverella Cosmè Tura Oil on panel - 1470-1474 Palazzo Colonna Rome

20.2. Comparison with Giorgione

Technical-historical literature and investigations on Giorgione's paintings indicate some elements present in the painting, recurrent in the practices of Giorgione and Venetian tonal painting of the early sixteenth century.

Tonal painting (tonalism), brings as priority the global chromatic effect obtained through glazes and chromatic superimpositions without net contours; a shaded use to harmonize figures without net contours; a subsequent shaded use to obtain chromatic depth and transparency.



Fig. 49: Giorgione, Boy with the arrow, ca. 1505. Oil on poplar panel, 48 × 41.8 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. GG_147.

The primings distinguished themselves for their clarity and chromatic refinement. The use of pigments fell within the common repertoire of the Venetian workshop of the epoch, coherently with the operative practices in study. Giorgione's drawing technique is object of debate: although Vasari underlines a progressive reduction to the advantage of

chromatic fillings, infrared investigations on works attributed to him reveal the presence of sketches and incised drawings at different levels of elaboration, suggesting a composite methodological approach.

Giorgione and his entourage preferred wooden supports, frequently of contained dimensions, for portraits and works destined for private environments. Comparative analysis evidences the use of poplar panels, prepared with gypsum and a lipid-based medium, as habitual support for studio painting. Giorgione's works avail themselves of wooden supports prepared with gypsum, practice widespread in the Venetian area. The use of colored primings, although not systematic, is found in the region, as well as the application of priming layers with greater oily component in some workshops. The combination of gypsum and oily priming results, therefore, compatible with the techniques habitually used by Giorgione. Consequently, the composition of the support and the preparation of the portrait under examination manifest a significant coherence with the artistic practices of the Venetian epoch, suggesting possible technological affinities with the stylistic approaches reconducible to the ambit of Giorgione. Literature analyses and scientific investigations reveal a pigmentary palette affine to the work under examination, characterized by the use of lead white and copper-based pigments, such as malachite and verdigris, united to lead-tin yellow, employed both for tonal primings and for oil glazes. The stylistic traits found, such as the delicacy of flesh tones, chromatic fusion, and atmospheric rendering, suggest a tonalist ancestry, reconducible to the influence of Giorgione. The scientific investigation of the painting in question attests the presence of a thin gypsum-based preparation spread on a poplar wooden support, aided by an organic

medium. A clear priming has also been detected, enriched in some areas by chromatic elements, declined in the tonalities of light green and ochre.



Fig. 50: Giorgione, David with the head of Goliath, ca. 1510. Oil on panel, 65 × 75 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. GG_—. Work in public domain.

The work coming from the collection of Archduke Leopold William. The work is particularly dilapidated and the many restorations over time have intervened to mask the pictorial cipher of the painting.

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The stratigraphic sequence contemplating smoothed gypsum, an eventual colored priming, thin oil layings, and glazes, reflects consolidated practices in Venetian workshops of the 15th and 16th centuries. Such technique is widely documented in the ambit of Giorgione's circle, revealing a predilection for defined proportions, both on panel and on canvas, an use of primings apt to modulate the tonality of the surface, and an elaborate pictorial construction through the use of glazes. However, Giorgione's practice is often characterized by a progressive abolition of preparatory drawing and by a tonal painting, constructed by chromatic spots and superimposed glazes directly on the support, with an atmospheric fusion of contours. In the

painting under study, incisions of contour and traces of drawing to delimit the area of the figure are documented; this suggests a mixed practice. Giorgione is historically associated with the so-called tonal painting: a rendering by chromatic tones, atmospheric shades, which produces a fusion between figures and environment. Investigations on Giorgione's works often show the absence of a carbonaceous underdrawing and a reconstruction by chromatic spots.



Fig. 51: Particular reflectographic detail Detail Giorgione (attributed), Moses tested by fire, ca. 1502–1505. Oil on panel, 89 × 72 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie.

In the analyzed painting, signs of incision for the contour and a netter definition of the surface emerge instead, although the rendering of flesh tones and the use of thin glazes produce a soft modeled. This combination indicates a practice that conjugates rigor of sign (incision) and tonal sensibility of the glaze, a middle way between

the Bellinian tradition and Giorgione's experimentation. Thus, from a stylistic point of view, the work shows affinities with Venetian culture, but does not integrally produce the “painting without drawing” that constitutes the most radical trait of Giorgione. We can thus say that the work under study clearly belongs to the tradition of the late ‘400 and early ‘500 and shares with Giorgione many material and chromatic choices. However, the combination of incised drawing and application of glazes, together with other technical solutions, suggests that the work is more verisimilarly the product of an artist who operated in the culture close to Giorgione. IR investigations in the painting under study show a mixed underdrawing, not a true preparatory drawing, but guide lines and the presence of incision elements. Giorgione's technique places itself at the crossroads between the 15th century and the 16th century and makes a bridge to understand, re-elaborating above all the lesson of Giovanni Bellini but with affinities Leonardesque and perhaps Emilian-Ferrarese.

20.3. Comparative Analysis with Lorenzo Costa

Fig. 52: Lorenzo Costa Tempera on Panel 1490-1492 Portrait of Giovanni Bentivoglio Gallery of the Uffizi - 55cm x 49 cm



Lorenzo Costa, prominent figure of the Ferrarese then Mantuan school, developed a production that fused Ferrarese sensibility, Florentine influences, and Emilian practices; his activity extends from the end of the ‘400 until the thirties of the ‘500. Historical research indicates that Costa adopted techniques with gypsum preparations on panel, with use of white for flesh tones; his formation and influences are associated with Cosmé Tura, Ercole dé Roberti, and Florentine experiences. Costa's arrival in the Mantuan areas is associated with the first portraits for Isabella d'Este (1508) and are fundamental for understanding his Leonardesque update and the subsequent dialogue with Correggio and Lotto. In Lorenzo Costa's works, the progressive reception of Leonardesque models is observed, especially in sfumato; from Correggio instead he will take the softness of bodies and expressivity especially resumed by Lotto. Interesting to note how in him also the Peruginesque influence manifests itself, in particular, in the modeling and definition of the hair. The use of clear gypsum-based preparations is found in Costa's works with thin and well-smoothed preparations, suitable for thin glazes and a soft shaded use. The technique used by Costa comprises both tempera works, tempera-oil, and entirely oil paintings; we thus have works that employ transition techniques; with the use of thin glazes for flesh tones and shades (Leonardesque and Lombard influences) but with a tendency to maintain a certain material solidity in the draperies. For the executive modalities of the basic drawing, the use of incisions and drawing in some works is also registered, with attention to drapery and textile rendering. At a stylistic level, the elements that we find recurrently in Lorenzo Costa are various. At the level of flesh tones, we have for example soft modeled with a certain netness in the contours: attenuated

shades for thin glazes, without however ever reaching Leonardesque psychology, and always maintaining a courtly composure.



Fig. 53: Detail of Bentivoglio Altarpiece (In the detail some sons of Giovanni II Bentivoglio) - 1488 Oil on canvas - Lorenzo Costa Basilica of San Giacomo Maggiore – Bologna

In the Mantuan phase of Lorenzo Costa shows a selective reception of the Leonardesque lesson: not a total adhesion to Leonardesque expressive psychology, but a use of sfumato to obtain softness and presence, maintaining however a courtly composure. In Lorenzo Costa's portraits, emotional distance and formal composure appear preminent, exalting the elegance and dignity of the subject to the detriment of an immediate emotional representation. The portrait of gentleman embodies such moderation: the gaze does not establish a direct interaction with the observer, but rather evokes an interior reflection. The care in the rendering of the eyes, with a carefully calibrated light point and an accurate modeled of the sclera and eyelid, aims to infuse "life" into the image, while maintaining an absence of theatricality. Such approach contrasts significantly with the painting under study, in

which a dialogue with the spectator seems to establish itself. The difference when present, is the degree: Lorenzo Costa sometimes indeed maintains a greater selective netness in ornamental details, while the portrait under study shows a more homogeneous pictorial integration between face and decoration; it must always be kept in mind that the work under study has undergone restoration interventions over time that surely interfered with the final effect. In Costa's production, the rendering of fabrics is a distinctive trait: soft draperies, elongated folds that settle with naturalness, and particular care for ornamental details. The quality of highlights and the micro-gesturalty of the brush in decorations can reveal that it is an expert hand, but not entirely compatible with Lorenzo Costa.



Fig. 54: Lorenzo Costa, Portrait of gentleman half-bust, late 15th century. Tempera and oil on poplar panel, 47.9 × 33 cm. New York, Brooklyn Museum, inv. 54.193

20.4. Comparison with Giovanni Bellini

The work under examination presents a wooden support in poplar constituted by a single panel, whose original integrity is interrupted exclusively by subsequent fractures. Investigations on preparatory layers reveal a pictorial technique in line with the experiments of the transition period between tempera and oil painting. Artists like Giovanni Bellini and his circle employed mixed solutions – fat tempera, pure tempera, tempera combined with oil or oily primings – in order to create luminous surfaces, ideal for the application of thin glazes. The stratigraphic analysis of works such as the "Pesaro Altarpiece" and other coeval artifacts evidences the presence of multiple layers of preparation, with the use of fat tempera or tempera/oil sequences, a consolidated practice in the Venetian workshop. The thin preparation observed in the work under study assumes particular relevance: a gypsum base, fine and accurately smoothed, facilitates the controlled penetration of glazes and the obtaining of luminous flesh tones, a strategy adopted by Bellini to modulate tones with delicacy and confer atmospheric depth to his creations.

The use of a lipid medium in the pictorial preparation of the portrait denotes a technical evolution affine to fat tempera and the use of oils for finishing, procedures attributed by specialist literature to Bellini and his school.

The analysis of the youthful portrait under examination reveals an absence of extended organic carbonaceous preparatory drawing, replaced by incised lines to delineate the silhouette of the figure and by traces of brush. This combination of incision, for structural definition, and preparatory brushstrokes, circumscribed to some zones, mirrors practices documented in the Renaissance

ambit. Bellini himself showed a diversified range of preparatory approaches, including, in some cases, an underlying drawing executed in charcoal or ink.



Fig. 55: Giovanni Bellini, Portrait of man (Portrait of a Young Man), ca. 1480. Tempera with oil glazes on panel, 26.7 × 21.3 cm (frame 39.4 × 34.3 cm). New York, Brooklyn Museum, inv. 32.804.

Investigations on Bellini's works reveal the use of preparatory incisions to establish compositional proportions and brush tracings aimed at delineating chromatic masses. In other cases, the underlying drawing results more manifestly visible. It is crucial to consider the variety of approaches adopted, which could differ in function of the artistic objective pursued and the dimensions of the artifact. The stratigraphic analysis of the portrait reveals a succession of thin pictorial layers and modulating glazes. This technique of thin superimpositions represents a key to understanding Renaissance luministic rendering: light, penetrating the semi-transparent layers, reflects on the clear

preparation underneath and is refracted towards the observer, generating an effect of depth and softness. Giovanni Bellini distinguishes himself for the use of thin layers and their wise construction in light glazes, thus obtaining a tonal delicacy difficultly replicable with the application of thicker layers.

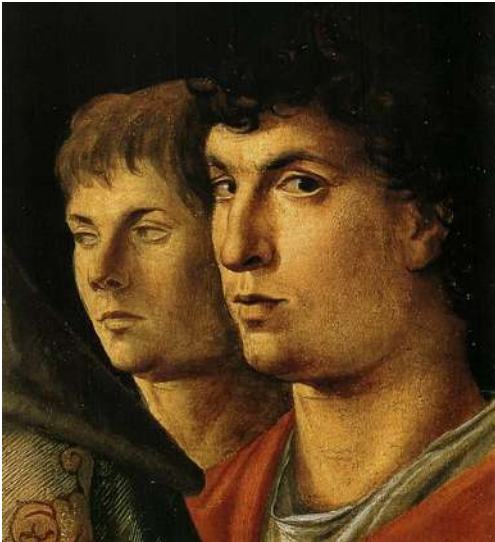


Fig. 56: Giovanni Bellini Detail Presentation at the temple – 1459

In the analyzed painting, the use of pigments such as malachite (or variants of verdigris), giallorino, lead white, and cinnabar, reveals a coherence with Venetian pictorial practices of the epoch and with the documented palette of Giovanni Bellini. The scientific analysis of Bellini's works confirms the use of malachite for obtaining intense greens and lead-tin yellow for highlights, attesting the adoption of a rich range of mineral pigments. The Bellinian ductus is characterized by a soft, shaded trait, realized through the application of thin glazes that attenuate net contours, generating a diffused and enveloping light. In Bellini's works, brushstrokes appear often fused, imperceptible at a distance, with the modeling of faces obtained through successive glazes that modulate their color and light.

In the portrait, the presence of marked incisions on the contours suggests a preparatory phase more oriented to drawing or a distinct workshop practice, in which the definition of the contour preceded, almost mechanically, the construction by glazes. While not excluding a similar combination in Bellini's method, a more shaded and integrated underlying drawing is usually observed in his works.

Bellini often conceived the pictorial space as a unitary atmospheric entity, where light molds forms and gold, when employed, harmonizes with the surrounding chromatic range. The use of preparations as "luminous field" to exalt glazes was a strategy aimed at conferring depth and softness, developed by Giovanni Bellini and his circle.

Technical and material evidences suggest a compatibility of the portrait with Venetian practices of the late Quattrocento and with the procedures of Giovanni Bellini's workshop. An affinity is also found in luminous rendering, in the softness of flesh tones, and in construction via glazes, elements reconducible to the Bellinian language. However, the net incisions on the contours and the absence of a legible carbonaceous underlying drawing introduce differentiation factors, which could indicate the intervention of a member of the workshop, of a pupil, or of a painter influenced by Bellini's teaching.

It is important to consider that not all works of Giovanni Bellini have been object of in-depth analysis and the knowledge of his entire artistic corpus is incomplete, therefore one cannot exclude a priori the use of such technical expedients in other phases of his production.

20.5. Comparative Analysis with Andrea Solari

Andrea Solari, prominent figure operating between Milan, Lombardy, and Venice, distinguished himself for the systematic use of clear pictorial preparations and accurately smoothed surfaces, expedients that favored the application of subsequent glazes, creating effects of depth and luminosity.

Solari, Milanese figure formed in the Leonardesque ambit, manifests a synthesis between technical-stylistic rigor inherited from Leonardo and a vibrant chromatic sensibility of Venetian ancestry. Workshop practices, such as the laying of light preparations, the subsequent application of transparent glazes, the use of pigments of mineral origin, and incision to define profiles, find resonance in the Venetian context, demonstrating a synergy with local pictorial customs. The techniques observed in the painting align with the technical repertoire attributed to Solari and his entourage. Andrea Solari (1460/1470 - 1524) thus configures himself as eclectic artist, capable of harmonizing Leonardesque innovation with the vivacity of Venetian colorism. The thin preparation and the stratification of glazes, individuated through diagnostic analyses, confirm the adherence of the painting to the methodologies proper to Solari.

Solari integrates Leonardesque lessons with a refined use of color (glazes) and mineral palettes. The use of quality mineral verses, lead white, giallorino, are coherent with high-ranking artists in Northern Italy and with Solario, who was an artist placed at the crossroads between Lombardy and Venice, using analogous chromatic resources.



Fig. 57: Andrea Solari Detail Portrait of the chancellor Domenico Gerolamo Morone - Tempera and oil on panel Milan - Duke Scotti Collection

The analysis of Solari's works reveals a commingling of techniques proper to the Leonardesque workshop. Some paintings present preparatory drawings of different evidence, while others manifest an articulated stratification of procedures: incisions, brush interventions, and transfers from cartoons, especially in workshop realizations. The coexistence of incisions and glazes is frequently found in Solari. Restoration interventions, succeeded over time, could have altered some peculiarities, such as the sfumato typical of Leonardo in some faces, as well as the details of hair and decorations. The impossibility of knowing the original aspect of the painting binds the study to the sole portions reached to us devoid of restoration. The absence of the representation of hands constitutes a further obstacle to attribution, since the executive technique of their realization would provide precious clues. The lack of structural pentimenti and the coincidence of incisions with definitive contours suggest a well-defined preliminary planning, common practice in workshops,

based on a preparatory drawing and its transfer. Infrared investigation (1700 nm) reveals the presence of marked lines in the vest, united to precise incisions and traces of localized brush drawing. Such incisions support the hypothesis of an use of this technique as executive guide, a practice adopted when the accurate rendering of the figure was essential. The fusion of different stylistic elements, found in the work, reflects the influence of Lombard workshops (with clear and thin preparations and tonal constructions) and Venetian (with carbonaceous underdrawings or transfers from cartoons and incisions). The executive technique of the portrait evidences notable analogies with Andrea Solario, artist of Leonardesque formation open to Venetian influences. The comparative stylistic analysis with the reference work evidences significant gaps, such as to preclude the attribution of its execution to the same hand.

20.6. Specifics on Drawing and Construction Grammar

Reflectography evidences the absence of a carbonaceous underdrawing, but highlights the use of incisions to define figures and tracings of drawing and brush in the rendering of vests. Incision, tactile practice antecedent to chromatic laying, fulfilled the function of fixing proportions and contours. The evidence of brush interventions indicates a pictorial construction by masses. The synergy between incision and brush drawing facilitated executive rapidity and proportional control, demanding to color the modeling. The analysis of the corpus of Palma Il Vecchio

attests the coexistence of the two methodologies, alternating complex preparatory drawings and direct pictorial interventions, modulating the approach based on the typology and scale of the work. The portrait, with incisions delineating contours and light glazes for the modeled, places itself in the ambit of the usual executive practice of Jacopo Palma il Vecchio.

The gaze of the portrayed subject, measured and not frontal, establishes a contained relationship with the observer. The Leonardesque influence on Palma il Vecchio does not culminate in a similar intensity of expression of the "motions of the soul"; the Palmian approach, of courtly matrix, conserves a detachment dictated by rank, portraying the subject with composure and reserve. The portrait under study embodies this tendency: presence is rendered through technique (glazes and light point) and expressive choices (distant gaze). The comparative analysis of the quality of the light point, of palpebral modulation, and of the construction of the ocular sphere, conducted via microphotography, reveals elements of compatibility with the distinctive techniques of Palma il Vecchio. The portrait under study presents incisions for the definition of contours and traces of brush drawing in the vest. This mixed practice (incision + brush) is compatible with what is observable in Venetian workshops: some artists and workshops employed carbonaceous underdrawings, others preferred incisions or brush tracings depending on the function of the work and the speed of execution required. Palma, in many works alternates a more defined preparatory drawing to fixation interventions by incision, especially when the construction of the figure requires rigorous proportions. Such variability makes the graphic datum useful but not always diagnostic in an exclusive sense.

21. Comparison with Palma il Vecchio

Jacopo Palma il Vecchio (1480-1528) is a figure of note in the Venetian school; his portrait and devotional production shows a warm palette, a wise use of glazes, and attention to the rendering of materials. The Venetian and Lombard workshop of the early '500 employed thin gypsum preparations, mineral pigments (malachite, cinnabar, and earths). In works attributed to Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, both carbonaceous underdrawing and tracings obtained via incisions or brush are found.

Fig. 58: Palma il Vecchio (Jacopo Negretti), Portrait of man, ca. 1512–1515. Oil on canvas, 93.5 × 72 cm. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum. Work in public domain; the photographic reproduction is subject to the policy of the State Hermitage Museum.



At a pictorial level, he modeled the face very softly with tonal transitions obtained by thin glazes, hair rendered with soft touches and curls with well-defined light touches; fabrics treated with attention to material quality. Palma il Vecchio sometimes integrates devotional elements in private portraits: thin

and discrete halos are not extraneous to his production and that of his circle. As for the support used and the type of preparation, we have a high compatibility with the technique employed by Palma il Vecchio; the same applies to the main pigments and the pictorial technique. There is a pleasant harmony, looking closely, in the preparatory drawing. The painting under study reveals incisions and graceful brush touches, suggesting a meticulous construction, albeit not entirely based on a widespread charcoal preparation. In Jacopo Palma, we find a happy variety of approaches, where incisions, charcoal, and brush fuse in a harmonious synergy, perfectly in line with the technique of the painting.



Fig. 59: Portrait of Young man Palma il Vecchio - Oil on panel 31.5 cm x 23.5 cm – 1500 – Private Collection.

The portrait under study reveals a fascinating affinity with the techniques and materials typical of the vibrant Veneto-Lombard school, and in particular with the wise hands

of Palma il Vecchio. The pictorial style, then, promises a further, pleasant confirmation. The construction of the face, with its delicate glazes and luminous preparations, radiates a sublime sweetness. Tonal passages fuse harmoniously, while lead white, enriched by a touch of red, ignites the light points with an ineffable grace. The modeling exalts an interior plasticity that captures the gaze. This technique, so affine to the unmistakable touch of Palma, infuses the work with an epidemic softness and an ethereal luminosity, obtained through the superimposition of glazes on a radiant background. The masterful management of light and the chromatic choice of flesh tones testify to a mastery that presages his technique. The hair vibrates with a soft and enveloping luminosity, curls defined by touches of light that exalt their fullness and volume, with a fluid and harmonious brushstroke. Similarly, also in the locks of Palma il Vecchio, curls come to life through a play of lights and shadows that amplifies their tactile consistency. This affinity in the treatment of the surface, almost a luminous caress, represents a happy point of stylistic convergence. The dress, with its shades of green and copper enriched by golden decorations, reveals a mastery that echoes that of Palma il Vecchio: draperies created with mineral greens modulated by dark glazes and embellished by golden touches, a true triumph of light and color. The wise use of light in the youthful portrait under study harmoniously exalts the features and expression, with a lateral halo that elegantly merges with the dark background, rich in ramate and earthy shades, highlighting the figure. Similarly, Palma il Vecchio adopts luminous strategies to valorize subjects and integrate iconographic symbols with grace and measure. This luministic affinity suggests a fertile common ground of influences and interests. Despite the rarity of direct documents, there is no lack of clues to

imagine a dense network of relations, exchanges of iconographic models, and movements of works between courts, opening new perspectives on the practice of commissions to painters active in different geographical areas. The typology of the subject inserts itself perfectly in the furrow of portraits and characters dear to Palma il Vecchio. The absence of pictorial works attributable to other members of the Pico family in the period of Giovanni or antecedent opens the way to the exciting possibility of rediscovering an entire artistic chapter hitherto concealed, perhaps hidden under new semblances and identities. The male portrait reveals a technical, material, and stylistic affinity with the flourishing Veneto-Lombard tradition of the early Sixteenth century and with the production of Palma il Vecchio and his circle; the use of malachite, lead white, cinnabar, Pb-Sn yellow, and gold, together with the thin gypsum preparation and construction by glazes, reinforces this promising interpretation. While lacking direct documentary proof at the moment, the suggestive correlation with the Pico della Mirandola family remains a fascinating hypothesis, stimulated by the thirst for knowledge and the hope of future discoveries that further illuminate both the figure of Palma il Vecchio and the artistic patronage of the Picos.

Jacopo Palma il Vecchio (Serina 1480 – Venice 1528) represents a central figure of Venetian painting of the early '500; his activity took place predominantly in Venice and in the area of the Venetian dominion on the mainland, where a production of portraits and devotional altarpieces characterized by a warm palette and construction by glazes developed. Palma's nephew was instead Palma il Giovane (Jacopo Negretti 1548-1628). Palma the Younger was master of Sante Peranda who was subsequently the

official painter of the Pico family. Palma's art resonates harmoniously with the echo of Leonardo, revealing a happy convergence of techniques shared among the masters of his time. The softness of faces and the wise use of glazes to mold forms, for example, illuminate this affinity. But it is in the vibrant Venetian palette that Palma reveals his unique soul, exalting the chromatic richness of pigments (a triumph of mineral greens) and celebrating the material sumptuousness of fabrics. The Portrait under study, with its construction by glazes that evokes the grace of sfumato, finds a perfect equilibrium in the definition of curls and in the palpable quality of draperies, testifying to a happy synthesis between the Leonardesque heritage and the glorious Venetian tradition. In the draperies, the artist creates sinuous folds that lengthen with grace, a perfect harmony between delicacy and volumetric presence. The scrupulous care for details, such as sparkling jewels, luxurious fabrics, and refined ornaments, manifests itself in luminous touches that exalt gilding. The radiant and velvety complexion, fruit of thin and composed glazes, evokes an idealized and courtly beauty, with delicate tonal transitions that capture a meditative gaze. The face, fulcrum of the Renaissance image, reveals a controlled and fascinating expressivity. In the male portrait, the complexion is modeled with mastery, starting from a clear base and enriching itself with glazes that dance between light and shadow. The soft plasticity, devoid of angularity, creates a measured and fascinating presence, made possible by the sfumato technique. Its efficacy resides in the subtlety of layers and in the quality of the priming, elements that testify to the great

ability of the artist. The quality of sfumato and the tonal strategy bring the work close to the vibrant art of Palma il Vecchio, both masters in the use of thin glazes and reflecting preparations, capable of creating wonderfully fluid chromatic transitions. In the portrait, the drapery and the material rendering of fabrics are a triumph of technique: the opaque preparation serves as a solid base, while the ramate green comes to life through dark glazes and the addition of precious decorations. The analysis reveals the richness of the pigments used, such as malachite and other mineral mixtures that give intense and vibrant green shades. Microstratigraphy shows thin and fragmented layers, with final glazes to darken and model. The golden decorations are not in gold but simulated in painting with lead-tin yellow and highlight of lead white. The work under study reveals a Leonardesque influence, declined according to stylistic elements characteristic of Palma il Vecchio's painting. Venice, crucial hub for commerce, distinguished itself for the concentration of merchants, collectors, and the lively diffusion of Lombard drawings. Treviso and Conegliano manifested a marked sensibility towards Padanian culture and Lombard trends. Verona, for its geographical position, served as a natural link with Lombardy, strong of a tradition already inclined to chiaroscuro. The assertion of Leonardism in Veneto found fertile ground in the pre-existing orientation towards atmospheric light and the integration of figure-landscape, concepts in resonance with Leonardesque poetics. The presence of young and permeable artists like Giorgione and Titian incentivized a re-elaboration.

21.1. Stylistic Comparison between Works by Palma il Vecchio and the Painting of the Young Nobleman



Fig. 60: Comparison of the painting under study with portraits by Palma il Vecchio. Top left image: Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, *Portrait of a Woman (recto)*, 1515, deposit Gallery of the Uffizi. Top right image: *Painting under study*. Bottom left image: Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, *Young Woman in a Blue Dress, with Fan*, 1512-14 ca. Kunsthistorisches Museum. Bottom right image: Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, *Young Woman in Green Dress*, 1512-14 ca. Kunsthistorisches Museum.

The trimming undergone by the painting under examination, on the lower, upper, and right side, has compromised the integrity of the original proportions. Previous restoration interventions have further influenced its legibility. However, the comparison with the works in photo by Palma il Vecchio leaves no room for great doubts; indeed, the subjects result affine, highlighting a notable stylistic, compositional, and expressive compatibility. The accentuation of the figure through the shadow projected by its silhouette on the background constitutes a distinctive and

corroborating stylistic element in the identification of the authorship of Palma il Vecchio, a recurrent characteristic in his portrait production. A particularly distinctive element resides in the ocular expression and in the pictorial technique employed to depict the eyes. In the male portrait under study, as in this woman by Palma, we assist to a radical choice: the abolition of the landscape view. In the male portrait, the monumentality of the figure, which occupies almost the entire panel, suggests a conception of the individual that is center of the universe. This setting finds punctual correspondence in the way in which Palma, influenced by the knowledge of the works of Leonardo da Vinci, begins to model figures no longer by way of lines, but by way of plastic volumes that emerge from the shadow. The stylistic comparison highlights how both faces are constructed through solid bony architecture, but veiled by a softness that suggests breath, a technique that requires a mastery of oil glazes that only a maturely trained artist could possess, making the comparison, even the shape of the eye, almost identical.

Fig. 61: Comparison of eye structures in Palma's portrait of woman on the left and the painting under study on the right.

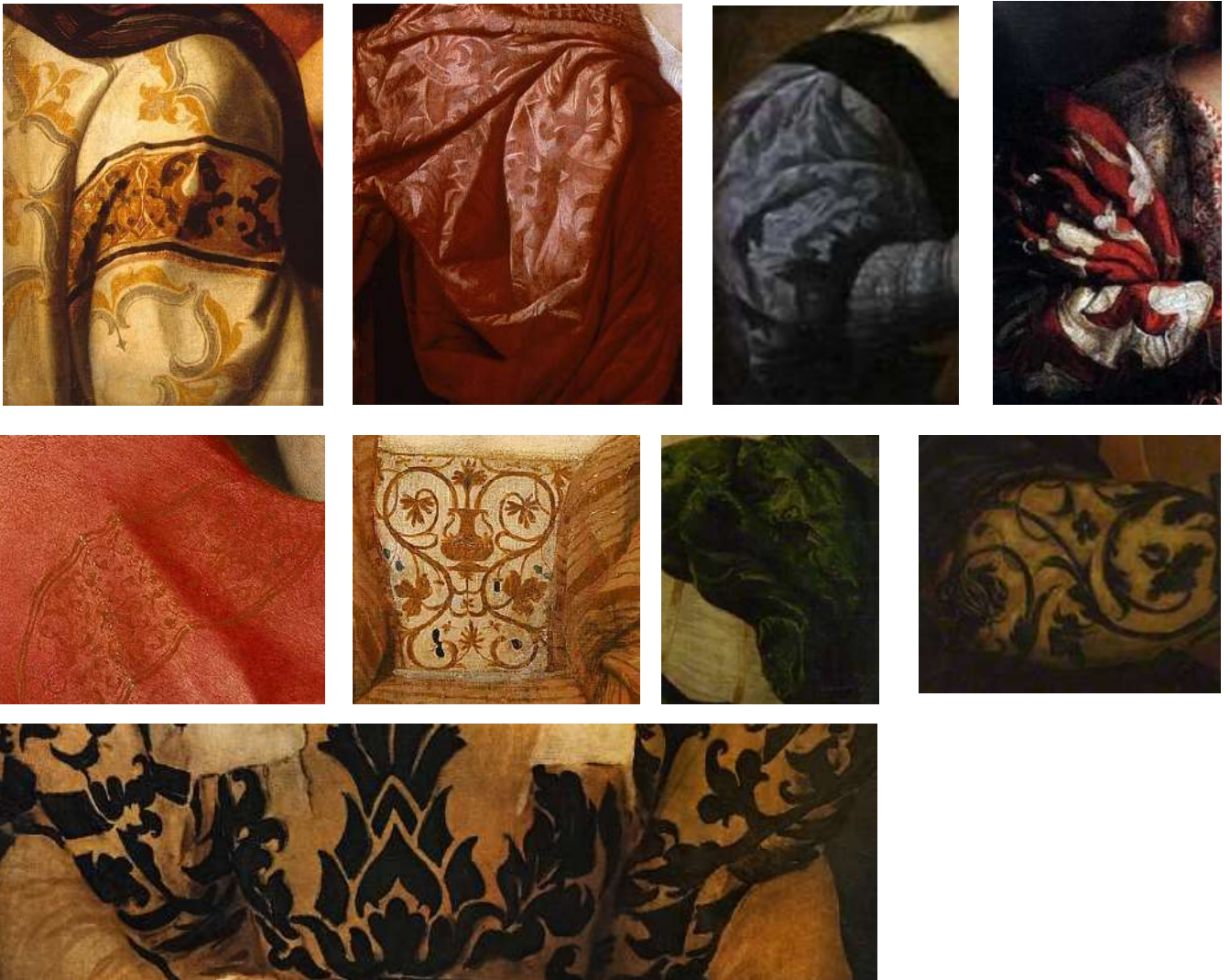
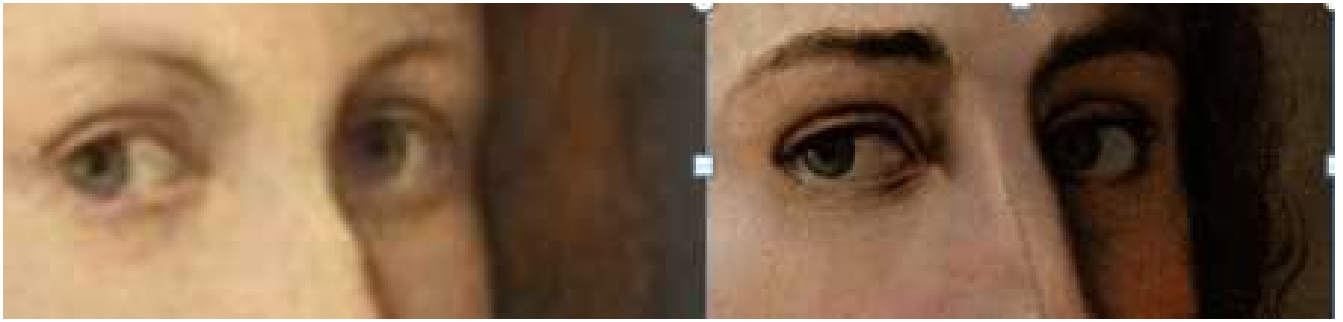


Fig. 62: Series of details of fabrics and decorations of works by Palma il Vecchio

Entering into the specifics of the comparison and pictorial technique, the analysis of the microphotograph of the male portrait reveals an extraordinary coincidence with the “grammar of the eye” typical of Palma. The palpebral modulation found in the study repeats itself in the male portrait, where the spherical rendering of the eye obeys a rigorous volumetric principle. The light point on the pupil transcends the mere reflective function, configuring itself as an optical expedient aimed at returning the “motion of the mind”, cardinal concept in the art treatises of the period. Both works present a gaze connoted by an “aristocratic distance”: the characters do not interpellate the spectator with the gaze, but rather fix a point beyond the pictorial surface, immersed in a sort of intellectual isolation. The technical compatibility detected in the color samples and in the stratigraphy confirms that the author of the Male Portrait operated with the same meticulousness as Palma. The opulence of sartorial details served as emblem of social rank, although the pictorial brushstroke remained agile, shunning from an antiquated descriptive prolixity. In the Male Portrait, the vertical development of the rectangular format leads the gaze in a progression that ascends from the ostentation of clothing to the expressive culmination of the face. Important and sign of recognition of Palma's creative gesture are also the decorations of the dresses that recall those of the painting under study.

The comparative analysis of the brushstroke in fabrics shows a hand that proceeds by superimpositions of pigment, capable of returning the weight of heavy fabrics and the lightness of silks through minimal tone variations. The dress in the Male Portrait is not only a decorative element, but an architectural structure that supports the head, just as happens in the certain portraits of the Mantuan period. The capacity to render the

dignity of the subject through the mass of cloths is a distinctive cipher that indissolubly links these two works, placing them as witnesses of a same intellectual and stylistic season. Ultimately, the superimposability of stylistic and technical elements between Palma's works and the Male Portrait under study allows advancing a solid attributive thesis. The diagnostic investigations mentioned from reflectography to color calibration confirm that the male portrait possesses a depth obtained not by academic way, but through a pictorial intelligence that dominates the technical medium for expressive ends.

21.2. Reflections on the Period and Historical Context of Palma and Conclusions

Jacopo d'Antonio Negretti, called Palma il Vecchio (Serina, circa 1480 – Venice, July 30, 1528), used a pseudonym shared with the nephew Antonio and the grandnephew Jacopo (the Younger). Venetian documents starting from 1510 attest his activity and his belonging to the School of San Marco. Wealthy, he entrusted the management of the house to his niece Margherita, while the figure of his daughter Violante, often identified as model in his portraits and in those of Titian, remains wrapped in legend. The posthumous inventory drawn up in 1528 lists 62 works, largely unfinished, faced with a scarcity of documentation relating to his pictorial production and with only one signed work, the youthful Madonna of Berlin. While hypothesizing an early transfer to Venice, there are no certainties of a direct apprenticeship with Giovanni Bellini. Rather, the Bellinian influence might have reached him through Bergamasque artists active in the provincial emulation of the master, grouped

around Francesco di Simone da Santacroce. Stylistically, Negretti approached this group, including figures like Rizzo, Previtali, Marconi (although these latter declared themselves direct pupils of Bellini), Cariani, and Licinio. Precisely this link with the Bergamasque environment distinguishes him within the Venetian Bellinian context, maintaining a predilection for clear and transparent colors, typical of the Santacroce and Previtali, a compositional simplicity, and a fidelity to the traditional triptych with isolated figures, formula particularly appreciated by Bergamasque painters, but obsolete in Venice. While the minor Bergamasque masters remained anchored to an obsolete provincialism, Palma il Vecchio adhered with agility to the evolution of Venetian art, becoming one of the first interpreters of Giorgione. This influence manifests itself in his first Madonnas, among which stands out that custodied in the Colonna Gallery. Around 1505-08, a refined cycle of small mythological paintings is dated, characterized by a lively chromy, notable executive care, landscape elements, and figures of contained dimensions. An exemplar of this cycle, conserved in Philadelphia, evokes Giorgione's *Tempest*. Subsequently, Palma enlarged the format of his mythological compositions, accentuating the centrality of the nude, as evinced by the *Adam and Eve of Brunswick*, the *Two Nymphs of Frankfurt*, and the *Venus of Dresden*. Works datable between 1512 and 1515 distinguish themselves for a clear and luminous tonality, almost Correggesque, which in the course of the second decade mutates into a deep chiaroscuro. Contemporaneously, Palma immerses himself ever more in the Arcadian and pastoral world of "Giorgionism", assuming a dreamy attitude and imbued with languid sentimentalism, as observed in the *Three Sisters of Dresden*. His forms soften and dissolve in the mature

Sacred Conversations, among which those conserved in the Louvre and Munich, while compositions evolve into freely rhythmized groupings, visible in Vienna (Liechtenstein Gallery) and Dresden. After the disappearance of Giorgione, Palma conserved and deepened his lesson for several years, until around 1520, when a new Venetian artistic current pushed him towards unexplored directions. This was the period in which the grandiose and pathetic art inaugurated by Titian with the *Assumption (1516-18)* and continued with dramaticness by Pordenone emerged. Giorgionesque lyricism gave way to an art that announced the Baroque. It was then, not before 1518, that Palma began to paint female portraits that exalted an intense beauty, with blond hair and sensual aura, in pathetic poses, like the *Judith of the Uffizi* and the portraits conserved in Berlin and at the Museo Poldi Pezzoli of Milan. The *Saint Barbara*, in the triptych of *Santa Maria Formosa* in Venice, sublime incarnation of the new Venetian ideal, was realized with certainty around 1522-23, and not in youth, as erroneously sustained on the basis of misleading interpretations of documents. The *Sacred Conversation of Venice* represents another pregevole work of the same period. However, Palma never let himself be involved in the dramaticness of Titian and Pordenone. Even in this late masterpiece, Palma conserves a serene and harmonic imprint, demonstrating a greater affinity with Brescian painters, particularly Moretto, rather than with Venetians properly so called. Although originating in the Bergamasque school, Palma soon became a prominent exponent. However, the most relevant follower of the Bergamasques was Bonifazio de' Pitati, heir of Palma also as head of the Bergamasque school, presumably exercising influence via his son-in-law Antonio Palma, nephew of Iacopo. Of notable interest and which goes in line with our study, results the attribution to

Palma il Vecchio, by an art historian, of a male portrait that denotes Giorgionesque and Titianesque influences, and which for the latter incarnates the peculiar style of Palma himself. The contribution, an article signed by Luca Brignoli edited by Vita e Pensiero, advances the hypothesis that the Portrait of Gentleman conserved at the Museo Poldi Pezzoli of Milan is work of the Bergamasque painter Jacopo Negretti, otherwise known as Palma il Vecchio. The work, previously ascribed now to the school of Giorgione, now to the first creative phase of Titian, is now reinterpreted in light of stylistic peculiarities, such as the fullness of the face, the milky complexion, and the prominence of the nose, deemed distinctive of Palma, attributes also found in the painting object of our study. Such attribution finds correspondence in comparisons with other works of the painter, like *The Lute Player* (Alnwick Castle) and the *Portrait of Man* (Hermitage), which present stylistic analogies. To corroborate such thesis, add the radiographic analyses of 2010, which revealed a first version of the painting inspired by Giorgione's *Double Portrait Ludovisi*, supporting the ascendancy of the Venetian artist on Palma. The document further deepens the historical-artistic context in which Palma il Vecchio operated, remarking his role of note in the renewal of Venetian art of the Cinquecento, alongside figures such as Giorgione and Titian. The article finally highlights the mastery of Palma in male portraiture, in addition to altarpieces and devotional works, consolidating his preeminent position in the panorama of Venetian Renaissance painting. Palma's most precious legacy resides in a notebook, meticulously drafted and conserved in the Archive of Venice. This inventory of his goods, realized with precious paper and structured in an orderly way, is a testimony of his life. Despite its apparent modesty, it represents the only primary source to

reconstruct the biography of this painter, whose works, although notable, were never signed or dated. Thanks to this document, drafted with care and precision by friends and testamentary commissioners, we can know the details of his existence, from the solemn exequies in Venice to the funeral rites in his native town, Serina. It offers us a privileged glimpse into an artist whose importance was compared to that of Titian. This account illuminates us on the oculata management of finances and debts of the deceased painter. The detailed inventory of his riches, among which gold and silver coins of various provenance, reveals a notable patrimony for the epoch. The scrupulousness in settling every debt and returning pledges to legitimate owners, evidences a strong sense of responsibility and social cohesion in a densely populated Venice, despite the difficulties of the time. Palma il Vecchio's help towards his fellows, more than a gain, was a gesture of charity towards Bergamasques in difficulty, trusting in the support of the famous compatriot. Links with the land of origin remained strong, surrounded by people from Serina, like the merchant Baieto and Zuaii de Lavalle. The dyer Fantin was related to Palma via the Tiraboschi. Strong was the link with the family of his brother Bartolomeo. In the testament, Palma remembered indigent relatives, leaving the inheritance to nephews Margarita, Antonio, and Marietta, orphans. In particular, he took care of Margarita welcoming her into his well-supplied house-workshop. The inventory of a dwelling reveals the standard of living of whoever inhabits it. Through the description of furnishings, utensils, and even work tools, the image of an affluent individual is delineated. The abundance of silverware, precious crockery, and a well-supplied wardrobe testify to an easy life and the capacity to entertain guests. The presence of a domestic and a painter boy, with his costly materials and

tools, completes the picture of an existence immersed in the artistic and commercial context of Venice. To fully understand the pictorial techniques of Palma il Vecchio, it is fundamental to observe the use of tools and artist materials. The use of wings of birds to color angelic figures and the creation of wax and plaster models to study shadows reveal a meticulous attention to realism and depth. The artist, through the analysis of shadows and glazes, conferred corporeality and subtle shades to his works, paying particular care to female anatomy, although their integrity could suffer from subsequent interventions. The house reflects the well-being of its inhabitant, Ser Iacopo, with precious furnishings and every comfort. However, the subtraction of the personal effects of Margarita, orphan niece welcomed by the uncle, is evidenced, raising questions about their fate. Despite loss and pain, the caring uncle had provided for the future of Margarita and her brothers, guaranteeing them economic support and protection with trusted friends, ensuring a dignified future, including a dowry. To deepen the figure of Jacopo Palma, called "il Palma", it is fundamental to consider not only his pictorial works, but also his personal and spiritual interests. The analysis of his "officieti", containing devotions and prayers, and of the "libereto d'amor" would offer precious information on his inner world and sources of inspiration for his celebrated female portraits. Documents like his testament, drafted shortly before death in 1528, and testimonies of those who surrounded him, contribute to reconstructing his human and artistic identity, enriching our understanding of his contribution to Venetian art.

The post-mortem inventory of Jacopo Palma highlights how, despite the rapid progression of the illness that led him to death, he received medical care and assistance. A

doctor was paid for diagnosis and recipes, another for continuous assistance, and a friend for vigil and custody of the house. The purchase of lime testifies to the hygienic precautions adopted to prevent contagion. It is important to remember that medicine of the epoch, contrary to what is believed, had analgesic, relaxing, and disinfectant remedies, in addition to practices like bleedings and purges. It is essential to understand that the inventory indicates the necessity to sanitize the house due to a suspicion of infection. The epidemic that struck Venice in that period was a fever with seven-day cycles, which could lead to death or slow healing. This fever, different from plague, manifested with symptoms such as high fever, abdominal pains, pustules, and, in the most serious cases, intestinal hemorrhages. Girolamo Fracastoro, Veronese doctor, was the first to clearly distinguish this typhoid fever from plague and other contagious diseases, contributing significantly to the history of medicine with his studies on disease transmission. In the 16th century, a new fever spread in Italy, perhaps originating from Cyprus.

Fracastoro described it as contagious and characterized by skin eruptions, internal putrefaction, and deep tiredness. It struck predominantly young people, nobles, and children, unlike common pestilences. 1528 was a fatal year, with extreme climatic events that destroyed crops and caused famines, pushing peasants towards cities. In Venice, the influx of refugees from sacked Rome aggravated the sanitary situation, making difficult the control of hygiene and the management of rampant poverty. The testamentary analysis of the deceased painter reveals the payment of a debt, sanctioned by an arbitral sentence, in favor of a boy named Alvise. The reasons for such debt and the tasks of the boy remain unknown due to lack of documentation. The age of the painter at

the moment of death is uncertain, basing solely on an affirmation by Giorgio Vasari, moreover not always reliable regarding Venetian artists. The imprecision of anagraphic data was common at the epoch, a

problem that will be solved later thanks to the norms of the Council of Trent. It is believed that Jacopo Nigretti, called Palma, was born around 1480.

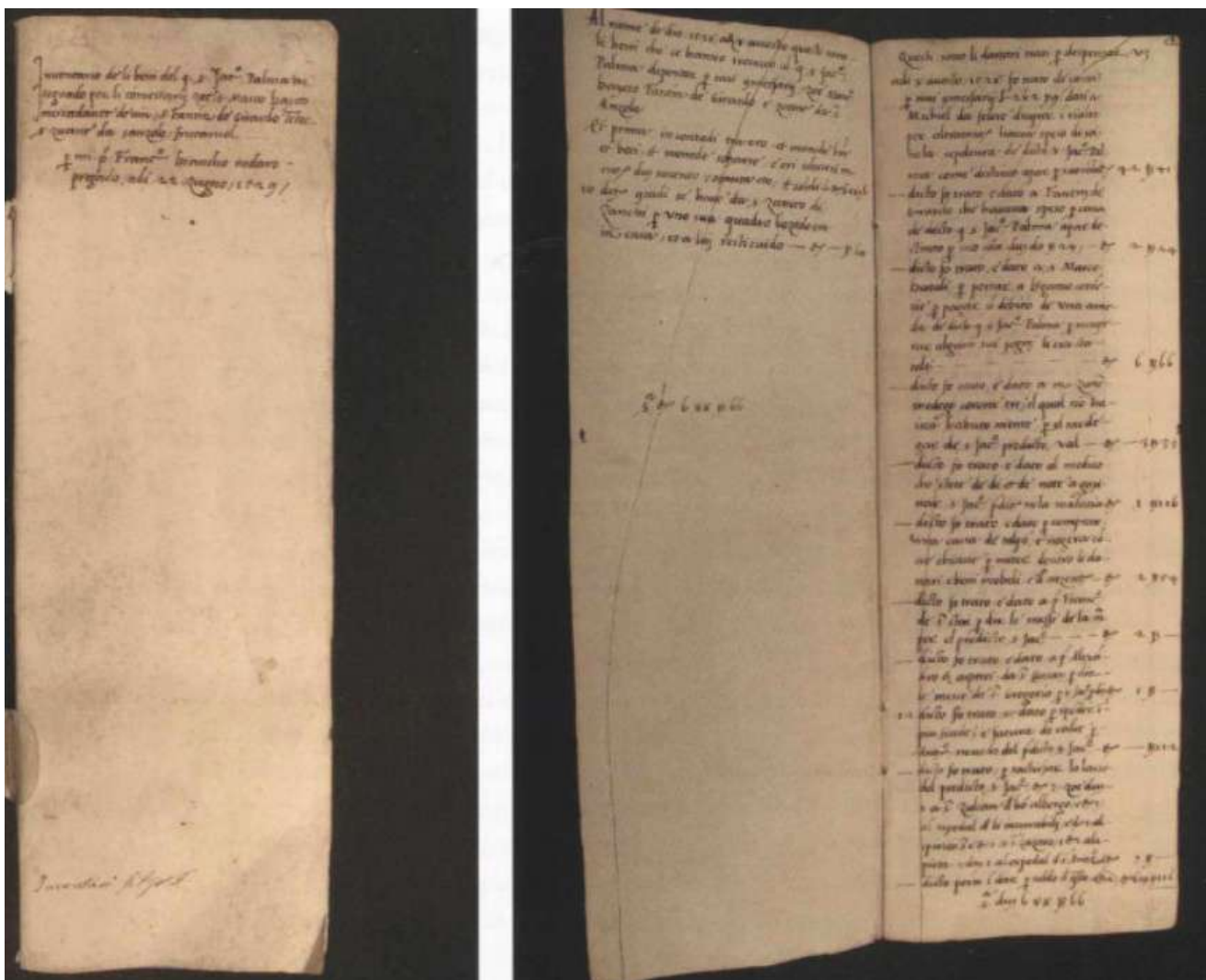


Fig. 63: Photo from the State Archive of Venice of the inventory. Renzo Villa

Such dating places him in the same generation as other important Venetian artists like Lorenzo Lotto and Giorgione. His artistic career, initially rooted in his native Bergamasque land, led him to Venice, where he became a painter appreciated by the local patriciate. Documents attest his presence and activity, confirming his success and integration in the Venetian social fabric, temporarily interrupted by the turbulences of the War of Cambrai. To understand the formation and affirmation of Jacopo Negretti, then known as Palma il Vecchio, one must

consider that he, presumably born around 1482, transferred to Venice at a young age, before 1500, to learn the art of painting. Through an apprenticeship in the workshops of masters, he integrated into Venetian society. His presence as witness in testaments from 1510, including those of wealthy figures, testifies to his integration in an elevated social class. Finally, from 1513, he appears as "Iacomo Palma depentor", sign of his artistic recognition. Giacomo Palma, known as "Palma il Vecchio" only later, signed documents with a secure graphy, sign

of an education received. His integration in Venice, sealed by admission to the Scuola Grande di San Marco, testifies to the recognition of his talent and his social ascent. Belonging to various Schools offered him opportunities of professional growth, favoring contacts with merchants, artisans, and patricians, consolidating his fortune and the diffusion of his art. Palma moved to Venice, firstly in the parish of San Moisè. Subsequently, he transferred to San Stae, a mercantile area. Documents of 1523 reveal his land investments in Montagnana. While living in Venice, Palma maintained links with Serina, returning on occasions of family events. The Nigretti family, originating from Val Brembana, participated actively in the trade of wool cloths, a prosperous activity in the region. The valley, contrary to what was believed, was economically dynamic, thanks to the production of fabrics and metals. Jacopo Palma, identified as "Magister Iacobus pictor", dealt with legal and family matters, such as the guardianship of nephews and management of inheritance. Local documents attest his active role in real estate purchases and financial transactions. In the last years of life, he was witness in legal acts. Despite his death, Palma's artistic legacy remained alive, with his works appreciated and continued. The history of a Bergamasque family reveals the importance of the transmission of surname and artistic patrimony. The son, Jacopo Palma il Giovane, while recognizing the limited artistic capacities of the father, values the family heritage. Thanks to an excellent formation and innate abilities, he reaches levels of success superior, asserting himself as prominent figure in the Venetian artistic panorama. Jacopo Palma il Giovane, Venetian artist of great talent and prolificity, was admired by contemporaries and considered the last exponent of great Venetian painting. His career began with celebratory works and continued with a huge pictorial production,

visible in many Venetian churches, and a notable corpus of drawings. A realistic portrait of Alessandro Vittoria immortalizes his distinctive traits. Palma il Giovane venerated his artist ancestors, honoring them in works like the Allegory of Fame in San Giovanni e Paolo. The importance of the father, Palma il Vecchio, resides primarily in his pictorial production. The posthumous inventory reveals a vast collection of his works, including finished paintings, sketched and unfinished. Predominate Madonnas with Child, sacred figures in landscapes, portraits, and altarpieces, evidencing his versatility. The dimensions of paintings, albeit approximate, are reported in Venetian arms and quarters, offering a snapshot on the customs of the epoch. Some works were commissioned by illustrious personalities, like Angelo Trevisan and Francesco Querini, testifying to the fame and demand of the artist. Palma's inventory includes also religious subjects, such as heads of Christ, figures of Saint John and Saint Jerome, Holy Families, demonstrating his ability in the interpretation of sacred themes. There are also large canvases suitable for decorating wide environments, depicting complex scenes like the Judgment of Solomon and compositions with nude figures. Finally, portraits of various individuals are listed, from notables to humbler figures, offering a snapshot of society of the epoch. The inventory of Palma's workshop reveals a rich collection of works in progress. We find female portraits, pastoral subjects, and landscapes, in addition to numerous sacred representations with Madonnas and saints. The canvases, some already prepared for priming, testify to a lively pictorial activity, suggesting the capacity to satisfy a vast clientele. The inventory also suggests the employment of aids in the workshop, considered the slow and stratified working technique typical of Palma, which confers to works a unique luminosity and depth. Palma

il Vecchio's work ranged from religious subjects, like Madonnas with saints, to female figures and male portraits. Some works, like the "Madonna with Child and saints" at the Pinacoteca Querini Stampalia, might have been completed by other artists, given the presence of different stylistic interventions and thus probable workshop interventions. Critical analysis suggests that the "Portrait of Gentleman" of the Querini depicts Francesco Querini. Although apparent age may raise doubts, other clues, like the glove in the right hand, confirm it.



Fig. 64: Palma il Vecchio, Portrait of Francesco Querini, 1527-1528, Oil on panel, Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia

The work is a pregevole example of Palma il Vecchio's art, characterized by an able weaving and attention to architectural details. Similarly, the unfinished portrait of Paola Priuli, promised bride of Francesco, reveals the freshness and enchantment of the young woman, caught with mastery by Palma, who exalts her figure emerging from the monochromatic background. The incompleteness of the painting constitutes a testimony of respect towards the inimitable talent of the painter. Understanding the destiny of inventoried works of art is essential. Some, passed through the collection of Bartolomeo della Nave and then through England and Vienna, are traceable in museums like the Kunsthistorisches. Others, like the "Christ and the Woman of Cana" at

the Gallerie dell'Accademia, offer clues on collaboration between artists, revealing stylistic continuity between different pictorial schools. "Christ and the Adulteress" of the Capitoline Museums, although unfinished, testifies to the practice of resuming pre-existing motifs, illustrating how artists reinterpreted popular themes, creating variants appreciated by the public. The study of Jacopo Palma il Vecchio is arduous due to the numerous works with uncertain attribution. However, some documents prove his activity: in 1514 he receives a payment for the altarpiece "Madonna of the Belt". In 1520, he is charged to realize a polyptych for Serina, with contract stipulated for gilding. In 1520-1521 he receives payments for a pala depicting the "Marriage of the Virgin". Finally, in 1523-1526 he realizes an altarpiece for the Valier chapel, with integration of figures on request of the commissioner. Palma il Vecchio, esteemed painter, in 1526 completed the "Adoration of the Magi" for the church of Sant'Elena, commissioned by Orsa Malipiero. The work was much appreciated for composition, drawing, and colors. Subsequently, Palma, member of the School of San Pietro Martire, proposed to replace the altarpiece of the School itself with a work of greater prestige, suggesting an artistic competition, as already happened, according to Paolo Pino, with Titian for a work in San Zanipolo. Studying historical sources is fundamental to understand the evolution of art. Documents like personal notebooks, inventories of private collections, and epoch attributions, although sometimes uncertain, provide precious clues. The critical analysis of such testimonies, compared with the works themselves, allows reconstructing the artistic path of figures like Palma il Vecchio and contextualizing masterpieces otherwise isolated. Accuracy in archival investigation and prudence in interpretation are essential for a correct historical reconstruction.

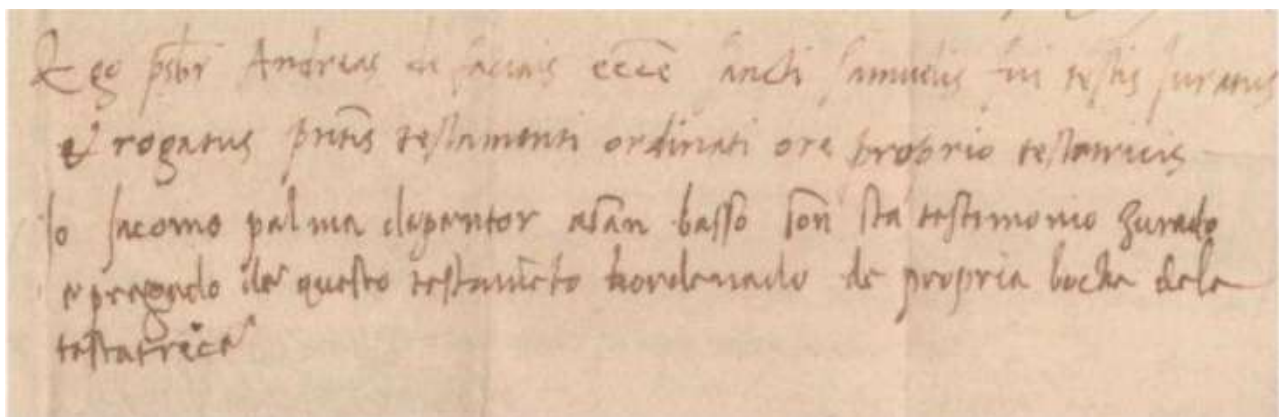


Fig. 65: Archival documents testify to the presence of Palma il Vecchio in Venice in January 1513. The artist was witness to the drafting of the testament of Elisabetta Mocenigo, as results from the State Archive. Palma's signature is conserved in the Notarial fund, Testaments section, relative to the notary Girolamo de Bossis. Renzo Villa.

The study of Marcantonio Michiel's notebook, biographer, man of letters, and Italian collector, although fragmentary and personal, reveals itself crucial to understand the success of Palma il Vecchio. Such document, rich in notes and corrections, offers a unique snapshot on Venetian painting, compensating for the scarcity of direct sources. Michiel's annotations, for date and title of works, constitute an indispensable testimony for historical and critical reconstruction of Palma's art. Marcantonio Michiel documented several works of Jacopo Palma il Vecchio in various Venetian private collections between 1521 and 1532, including paintings like "Christ and the Adulteress," "Adam and Eve," and several female figures. These data, united to public commissions like the Assumption of the Virgin and the Polyptych of the Resurrection, constitute the basis to reconstruct the catalog of the artist. However, current knowledge is insufficient to fully understand Palma's art and his role in the particularly dynamic historical context of the Venetian Renaissance. To deepen the history and art of Venice, it is advised to consult the "Reale Galleria di Firenze Illustrata" (1828) and the State Archive of Venice, in particular the Lower Chancery and the Notarial. The studies of G. Ludwig, and above all the

complete and indispensable work of P. Rylands on Palma il Vecchio, constitute fundamental sources. It is also recommended to examine the "Diarii" of M. Sanuto and publications curated by R. Fulin, F. Stefani, and others. These documents offer precious information on the economic and social context of the epoch, including salaries and working conditions. Diverse archival sources, among which chronicles, notarial registers, and acts of Venetian institutions, testify to variable graphic uses and provide information on historical figures, like Palma il Vecchio, and on social and economic practices of the time. This synthesis mainly concerns documentary sources relative to the family and artistic activity of Palma il Giovane. Mention is made of the "Historia Quadripartita di Bergamo", notarial acts conserved in the state archives of Bergamo and Venice, testaments, expense registers, and published studies, offering clues to deepen knowledge of the family and professional context of the artist. The consultation of these primary and secondary sources is fundamental for a more accurate understanding of his biography and artistic legacy. The consultation of such primary documents and critical contributions results fundamental for an accurate reconstruction of the Venetian historical-artistic context. For the study of drawing works of the 16th century, it is fundamental to consult the Notizia d'Opere di Disegno by anonymous, published and illustrated by Jacopo Morelli, and subsequent editions revised by G. Frizzoni and T. Von

Frimmel. Always keep in mind the original manuscript conserved at the Marciana. Understanding the migratory flow of Bergamasque artists to Venice is fundamental. Talented youths, pushed by economic necessities and stimulated by Venetian artistic influence diffused in Valle Brembana, sought fortune in the lagoon. They maintained a vital link with their land of origin through artistic commissions, uniting devotion and social affirmation. Such phenomenon reveals how the conjunction of economic, artistic conditions, and community links can fuel the development and diffusion of art. To become masters in the pictorial art, young Venetian artists of the time formed themselves through the study of works of the greats, like Giovanni Bellini and Cima da Conegliano. Venice offered an exceptional learning opportunity, with churches and Schools functioning as public museums, exhibiting altarpieces and innovative pictorial cycles. Observation and comparison with works of masters, united to the study of Venetian architecture, allowed rapid development and refinement of artistic style. Venetian public art, as demonstrates the monument to Bartolomeo Colleoni, established a direct dialogue with the people, molding taste and arousing immediate reactions. While private art remained prerogative of few, works exposed to sunlight defined the artistic greatness of Venice. It is fundamental, however, to understand that our current perception is inevitably filtered by subsequent history. In that context, the fame of an artist was measured also through public recognition, although some names could eclipse over time, while others, capable of emulating the ancient, aroused unanimous admiration. In Venice, art is omnipresent and manifests in diverse forms. Great masters like Bellini, Giorgione, and Titian are recognized, and banners painted in processions are appreciated, source of historical and artistic

knowledge. Art intertwines with daily life, from precious materials adorning the city to private collections celebrating beauty. Fabrics, in particular, hold a preeminent role, influenced by exotic motifs that enrich the Venetian artistic patrimony. The ability to reproduce the richness of silks and precious fabrics, as in Palma's work under study, and in others realized by him, testifies to the high value attributed to art and its capacity to imitate nature. Art, by nature competitive, generated rivalries. At the beginning of the Cinquecento, the commission of the Pala dei Milanesi to Alvise Vivarini, Muranese painter, aroused discontent among local workers, who saw Lombard stonemasons favored in public works and reluctant to share their skills. Despite protests, "foreign" workers continued to be employed, stimulating a fruitful artistic dialogue. Artists like Cima da Conegliano and Vivarini himself drew inspiration from Lombard sculpture, enriching their expressive language. Upon Vivarini's death, the Pala dei Frari was completed by Marco Basaiti, testifying to the continuous evolution and artistic contamination of the period. Let us explore the figures of Marco Basaiti and Vincenzo Catena, the latter humanist painter well documented. Catena, influenced by Giorgione and Lombards, developed a classicism of his own. We then observe Giovanni Bellini, who claimed creative freedom, refusing comparisons between artists promoted by figures like Isabella d'Este, who compared Bellini to Leonardo da Vinci, via the portrait of Cecilia Gallerani. Let us reflect on the evolution of artists and on their singular expression. Albrecht Dürer's Rosary Altarpiece, exhibited in 1506, represents an innovation in Venetian painting. The work, although inspiring itself to Bellini's models, distinguishes itself for realism of portraits, absence of architectural references, and direct presentation of commissioners. Dürer, aware

of his talent, self-portraits with a cartouche that evidences his speed of execution. The pala also reveals links between Venice and Flanders, through the figure of Domenico Grimani, collector of illuminated codices. The success of Dürer's prints stimulated imitation and even plagiarism by Venetian artists, like Basaiti and Palma, highlighting the influence of the German master on local art. The historical period here described was marked by adversities and calamities, such as fires at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi and Rialto market, devastations in Piazza San Marco, and pestilences. In this context, art, in particular the decoration of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi by Giorgione and Titian, emerged as expression of innovation and greatness, profoundly influencing the next generation of artists. Despite difficulties, art asserted itself as a beacon of modernity and cultural progress. Understanding Venetian art means recognizing its symbols and stylistic evolutions. Figures like Venetia/Justitia, declined in diverse artistic forms, represent a constant. Reciprocal influence between artists like Giorgione, Titian, and Sebastiano Luciani molded the artistic panorama, innovating techniques and styles. The episode, albeit brief, of Leonardo da Vinci's passage to Venice marked a turning point, particularly for Giorgione, who drew inspiration for the management of shadows, which he transmitted to his followers including Palma, surpassing it then with a personal and innovative style. Understanding Venetian artistic evolution implies recognizing the transit of masters like Agostino da Lodi, Solario, and "Napoletano", alongside the original Boccaccino. Humanistic influence, of figures like Pico della Mirandola and other illustrious representatives, fused with mercantile mentality, opens to new disciplines like mathematics and techniques, culminating in a renewed interest for rationality and knowledge of the world and oneself. In the

first decade of the Cinquecento, crucial period for artistic formation, note the importance of Andrea Previtali, contemporary of Palma il Vecchio and pupil of Giovanni Bellini. Other Bergamasque artists, like Girolamo and Francesco di Simone da Santacroce, emerge in this stimulating environment. Mention is also made of Francesco Bissolo, Rocco Marconi, and Bartolomeo Veneto, all active in Venice, underlining the vivacity and artistic competition of the epoch. Attribution of works, like the pala of San Cassiano, remains sometimes uncertain, highlighting the complexity of Venetian art history. The study of Venetian art of the early Cinquecento reveals how artists like Previtali and Santacroce received pictorial novelties of the epoch, assenting to the taste for landscapes. Previtali, returned to Bergamo, diffused Venetian taste, collaborating with Lotto. Local art updated thanks to Cariani, who introduced Titianesque elements. Contemporaneously, Venetian merchants, facing new commercial dynamics, invested in landed properties, transforming the patriciate and influencing also the world of art and culture. The art of Giorgione, Sebastiano, Titian, and Palma, privileging themes like pastoral landscape, female nude, and dramatic portrait, distinguished itself from traditional public commissioning, still linked to Bellini and his followers. These new artists found support in a cultured elite sensitive to naturalistic, mathematical research, and to a more interior knowledge, in line with literary and humanistic innovations of the epoch and fueling illustrious private commissions. While artists like Bellini, Carpaccio, and Cima da Conegliano proceeded on a more conservative stylistic line, Giorgione and his followers, among whom Giulio Campagnola and Palma, revolutionized artistic taste with works expressing passions, complex allusions, and a deep connection with the visible. After the disappearance of Giorgione and the departure

of Sebastiano Luciani for Rome, Titian remains dominant figure in Venice. Contemporaneously, artists of provincial origin, like Palma il Vecchio and Pordenone, reach artistic maturity. However, a period of wars profoundly marks the life of the Serene Republic, modifying lifestyles and cultural perspectives. Panic reigns in Venice, with citizens hiding their goods. Although linked to Serina, Palma il Vecchio concentrates on his artistic identity in Venice, while Venetian pictorial tradition reaches its climax. Masters like Carpaccio and Catena realize significant works, but a new generation, influenced by Giorgione, emerges with innovative tastes. Figures like Gabriele Vendramin collect works of Bellini, Titian, Palma, and Giorgione, testifying to the artistic change in act. In appreciating art, let us remember that some works, differently from religious iconographic tradition, do not intend to convey explicit meanings. Artists like Giorgione and Palma in the Cinquecento, created "fantastic" compositions stimulating personal interpretation rather than providing clear historical or theological narratives. This approach, which values fantasy and artistic ability, preluded to a new form of private collecting, where art was appreciated for its intrinsic value, inspiring itself to poetry, philosophy, mythology. It is fundamental, therefore, to welcome the interpretive freedom that these works offer. Understanding the art of these artists means recognizing their ability to translate into images poetry, evanescence of memories and dreams, surpassing simple religious narration. The influence of pastoral poetry, in particular Sannazaro's "Arcadia", widely diffused among Venetian patricians, has molded the taste for representation of landscape and amorous sentiment. Painting, therefore, explores themes like melancholy, loss, and idealized love, mirroring a modern sensibility that perceives the ancient as unreachable and

confronts the fragility of existence. In the development of poetry of the time, figures like Poliziano and Sannazaro are affianced by less known authors, but still appreciated, who try their hand at diverse poetic forms, from sonnet to eclogue, often immersed in a bucolic allegorism that soon becomes a game of society. Contemporaneously to Boccaccian prose, Petrarchism, with its spiritual readings, enjoys growing success. Not negligible, finally, is the role of Pietro Bembo, represented by Raphael, as well as the diffusion of love booklets which, although addressed to a restricted circle, enjoy a certain popularity. Literature of the Cinquecento presents two opposite filons: an Arcadian poetry, inclined to bucolic idealization and Petrarchism, and a Venetian and Paduan theater strongly expressive, culminating in Ruzante, which employs a realistic plurilingualism to represent daily life and deride dominant literary comedy. While Arcadian taste was widespread among intellectuals, comic theater aimed to unmask their vanity and incredibility, offering an authentic and lively representation of Venetian reality. Figures like Jacopo Palma place themselves halfway, shunning imitative classicism but welcoming the serene and pastoral aspect of the Arcadian environment. Cariani's work, "Young man in a landscape", illustrates with force the conflict between two realities: timeless harmony, symbolized by the serene female figure, and turbulence of the historical world, made evident by the apocalyptic scenario. Art, therefore, confronts the laceration between spiritual dimension, amorous equilibrium, and ferocity of human and natural history. It must aspire to resolve such dichotomy in a superior synthesis, elevating itself above time and history, as demonstrates the art of Palma il Vecchio, which constantly searches for an ideal of harmonic and transcendent beauty through the humanist aspect. Palma's art elevates itself

above history and worldly turbulences, aspiring to an ideal harmony. As Leone Ebreo suggests, such harmony resides in the equilibrium of contrasting elements, a universal friendship that manifests in contemplation and interior quiet. Palma's female figures, immersed in a contemplative vigil, reveal a serene truth and a beauty that transcends mere sensuality. Exposure of nudity, resuming a Boccaccian motif, becomes an occasion of spiritual elevation and virtuous commitment, inviting the observer to an experience of catharsis and to a deeper understanding of ideal beauty. In the study of Boccaccio, we observe how his descriptions provide clues to painters, codifying an ideal of beauty then transposed in visual art. The episode of Cimone, who contemplates a sleeping young woman, reveals a detailed analysis of female beauty: golden hair, forehead, nose, mouth, neck, arms, and breast. Through the protagonist's gaze, Boccaccio transforms a rough worker into judge of beauty, highlighting the power of art to elevate and transform perception. The work "Bath of the Nymphs" reveals a visual culture indebted to Boccaccio more than to classical Arcadia. Female figures, although inspired by classical statues and masters like Michelangelo and Raphael, via Raimondi's engraving, testify to an ambitious confrontation between painting and sculpture. The theme of female bath, widespread in ancient authors like Virgil and Ovid, finds in Boccaccio a primary source, as demonstrate recurrent scenes in his writings. Consider the importance of the first illustrated edition of the "Decameron", become visual repertory for Venetian artists. In interpreting works depicting nude female figures, it is essential to avoid generalizations. Representations should not be automatically labeled as "Venuses" or portraits of courtesans. Rather, observe how artists, like Palma, often aim to express an idea of ideal beauty, linked to

Platonic aspects, placed in a landscape context and devoid of explicit erotic connotations. Presence of elements like flowers or the pose itself, with an uncovered breast, can allude to concepts such as fertility, love, and passage from virginity to marriage, reflecting social and cultural values of the time rather than simple erotic objectification. Understanding of iconographic context and customs of the epoch is fundamental for an accurate and conscious analysis. Palma il Vecchio's art elevates the female figure to ideal model. We recognize in his creations, be they sacred or profane figures, an ethereal and constant beauty: clear complexion, high forehead, and blond or brown locks tending to golden, which very often configures also in male portraits like the work under study. It is an idealized image, distant from mere representation of a single model, but elevated to symbol of beauty and virtue. His figures distinguish themselves for elegance and nobility, as demonstrates the opulence of fabrics, as in the work under study rich in embroideries, and precious details adorning them, sometimes concealing symbolic meanings and allusive to condition of bride and mother. The study of "ideal portraits" in the Renaissance reveals how artists, influenced by commissioners and literary suggestions, created images of beauty inspired more by imagination than reality, an aspect that suffered the influence of Neoplatonic circles of which Pico della Mirandola was part, where vague and idealized figures, like those of Palma il Vecchio, incarnated Poetry and Painting itself, reflecting a canon of perfect beauty, minutely described by theorists like Paolo Pino. The artist, therefore, did not simply imitate nature, but transcended it, revealing through his work an Ideal Beauty, inspired by the true as in the case of our painting under study. To deepen knowledge of Venetian and Bergamasque art and society between the

15th and 16th centuries, it is essential to consult the diaries of Girolamo Priuli and Marin Sanuto, in addition to studies by G. Cozzi on justice in Venice. Deepenings on artists like Giorgione and Palma il Vecchio are found in exhibition catalogs and specialist essays. Explore dynamics of artistic collecting, arts consorteries, and religious influences on Venetian landscape, consulting works by A. Sagredo, M. Lucco, E. Battisti, and other cited scholars. This collection of bibliographical references guides the scholar through essential primary and secondary sources for historical research. It ranges from manuscript diaries to sixteenth-century art treatises, analyzing political, military events, and aspects of daily life in Venetian and Bergamasque area, with particular attention to the period around 1500 and to prominent figures of the epoch. Deepening historical knowledge via study of sources is essential. Deepen study of Leone Ebreo's Dialogues of Love for a Renaissance philosophical understanding. Investigate iconographic and literary sources, as in "Arte Veneta", which influenced Venetian painters of the Renaissance, especially in treatment of nudity theme, comparing Boccaccio, Botticelli, and Venetian painting. The study of sixteenth-century Venetian art, as demonstrated by writings of A. Gentili and other scholars, reveals a careful exploration of themes such as love, marriage, and representation of female figure. Through analysis of works by Titian, Giorgione, and Bellini, the relationship between "virtus" and "voluptas" is investigated, incarnated in iconography of portrayed women, often with references to Ovidian myths and musical allegories, offering clues to understand customs of the epoch, as testified by historical sources. Palma il Vecchio's artistic education, in the early years of the Cinquecento, is initially founded on Bellinian influences, filtered through works of Previtali, Carpaccio, and

Cima. Attribution of some Madonnas, like that conserved at the National Gallery of London, remains object of critical debate, although stylistic elements anticipating his subsequent artistic maturity are recognized, particularly in landscape rendering and delicacy of details. Examination of such youthful works results fundamental to understand the evolution of Palma's pictorial language, especially in absence of certain documentation previous to 1513. Stylistic and philological examination suggests that the Reading Madonna of Berlin is work of a young Palma il Vecchio, influenced by Alvise Vivarini and Marco Basaiti, and contemporary of Andrea Previtali. The coeval signature supports this hypothesis, indicating an artist in evolution. Contrarily, the date on the Madonna with Child of Chantilly seems apocryphal, revealing a more mature Palma, intent on synthesizing influences of Bellini, Previtali, perhaps Giorgione and Lotto, towards the end of the first decade of the Cinquecento.



Fig. 66: Palma il Vecchio (attr.), Reading Madonna, painting on panel (Berlin, Staatliche Museen). Photographic reproduction: Franz Seraph Hanfstaengl, late 19th - early 20th century. Milan, Photographic Archive of Castello Sforzesco, Frizzoni Fund. Source: Lombardia Beni Culturali - Regione Lombardia.

The study of Palma il Vecchio's work reveals a significant stylistic progression. Initially influenced by Carpaccio and Dürer, as evinced in the "Madonna enthroned in landscape", Palma develops his own identity. The "Sacred Conversation" of the Borghese Gallery, with its audacious chromatisms and careful individuation of portraits, marks a fundamental stage. Longhi highlights how Palma, although mindful of Previtali and Cima, anticipates the chromatic monumentalities of Titian. The work announces his future mastery in pure and precious use of color, characterized by net and luminous cuts, distinctive elements that will culminate in subsequent masterpieces, delineating his original imprint in the Venetian artistic panorama. To fully understand art of the early Cinquecento

Veneto, it is necessary to compare the "Portrait of young" of the Borghese Gallery with works of Budapest, noting Giorgione's influence and taste for antiquity. Serenity and intimacy of these works refer to sculpture of Tullio Lombardo. Subsequently, after Giorgione's death, demand for works in Giorgionesque style spread. In this context, some mythological and pastoral paintings, characterized by landscape settings and poetic atmospheres, can be attributed to Palma il Vecchio. Finally, the "Madonna with Child and saints" of Dresden anticipates a series of sacred scenes ambiented in landscapes, highlighting the search for a new compositional equilibrium. The "Sacred Conversation", recurring theme in Palma il Vecchio's work, represents a naturalistic dialogue between saints, Madonna, and Jesus Child. The term, deriving from Latin "conversatio" (monastic life, spiritual communion) and Greek indicating "citizenship" in celestial Jerusalem, alludes to celestial dwelling of sacred characters and their spiritual communion. Such representation reflects influence of Paul (Epistle to Philippians) and Thomas Aquinas, emphasizing transcendent nature of spiritual existence. Venetian art, from 15th to 16th century, transforms celestial visions into human experiences. Sacralty incarnates in infancy of Christ, central and fully human figure, aware of own destiny, mediated by humble and conscious Virgin. Faithful, witness of divine mystery, contemplates incarnation in a context of daily familiarity. The altarpiece, commissioned to Palma il Vecchio, is an eminent example, conserving this sacred narration for centuries. Palma il Vecchio's art reveals influences, but evolves towards a style of its own. Note inspiration from Tullio Lombardo, especially in figures of Adam and Eve, where postures and details reveal attentive study of sculptures. However, Palma transcends imitation, developing a

distinctive "manner". His search for beauty, evident in devotional scenes and female figures, testifies to an artistic coherence that persists until his disappearance. In the study of Palma il Vecchio, it is fundamental to consider stylistic coherence of artist, albeit in short but intense phases of his production. Rather than focusing on temporary evolutions, it is recommended to analyze internal logic of his artistic path. Observe how Palma, although influenced by Titian, Lotto, and also Leonardo, manages to re-elaborate influences in a personal and recognizable synthesis. In mature works of Palma il Vecchio, like *Madonna with Child between saints John Baptist and Magdalene*, a masterful chromatic harmony and deep psychological introspection of characters are observed. The artist further develops theme of *Sacred Conversation*, as in *Madonna with Child and saints Jerome, Anthony of Padua, Catherine, and Mary Magdalene*, enriching it with allegorical meanings and paying particular attention to naturalistic rendering of landscape and relationship between protagonists. It is important to recognize artistic coherence of Palma il Vecchio, culminating in work "*Holy Family with saints Catherine and John Baptist*". This latter canvas, custodied at Accademia of Venice, shows elements suggesting possible intervention of Titian, especially in figure of Saint Catherine and in background architecture. Understanding sacred art requires considering intersection between religious symbolism and profane culture. Palma il Vecchio's works, with their placidity, amplitude of figures, and rich draperies, offer excellent examples of this approach, exalting recognizability and didactic clarity through careful representation of sacred symbols and attributes. Subsequent criticism reveals an evolution of taste, rather than real artistic innovation in Palma. He obtained important commissions, like *Marriage of Virgin* for

Marino Querini. Dispersion of works following suppression of some convents contributed to the end that Palma's works ended up in Brera. Venetian art of Palma il Vecchio spread in his valleys of origin thanks to private commissions. Palma's polyptychs for Serina, although of variable quality, offer clues to understand evolution of his style, with Lombard Leonardesque and Tullian influences. Archival documents, contracts, and stylistic analyses are essential tools to unveil historical and artistic truth of these artifacts, allowing us to fully appreciate artistic value and emotional sensibility of masters of past. Restoration and correct recomposition, based on solid evidences, are fundamental to preserve and transmit beauty and historical testimony of such works to future generations. Polyptychs of Palma il Vecchio in Bergamasque valleys, although damaged, offer important clues for understanding his artistic evolution. Palma il Vecchio's art manifests in diverse works, and demonstrates greater attention to psychology of characters and dynamism of figures. Palma il Vecchio, in addition to sacred works, distinguished himself for creation of portraits and half-figures of females and males, incarnation of classical and sensual beauty, much appreciated by collectors. Although initially influenced by Bellini and then confronted with Titian and Lombard art of Leonardo, Palma developed a style of his own, characterized by more delicate forms, tenuus colors, and atmosphere of placid spirituality, distinguishing himself clearly from the Cadore master. His fame was such as to generate anecdotes and legends, testifying his role of note in Venetian artistic panorama of 16th century. Palma il Vecchio, emulating Titian, developed his own style in idealized portraiture. Analyzing works like the "*Lady in Blue*", his search for tranquil and refined beauty is evidenced, distinct from Titianesque impetus. The artist, mastering pictorial

technique, created a recurring female model, appreciated by Venetian collectors, thus asserting himself in artistic market and consolidating his prestige both in religious and profane ambit.



Fig. 67: Titian Vecellio, *Violante*, 1515–1518. Oil on canvas, 65 × 51 cm. Vienna, *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, inv. GG 65. Work in public domain; image in Public Domain (Wikimedia Commons).

In art, especially in portraiture, it is fundamental to study and understand ideals of beauty proposed by masters of past. Artists like Palma il Vecchio, through recurrent depiction of a specific type, almost a single idealized model, offer us a model of aesthetic perfection. Carefully analyze recurrent traits, like shape of face, complexion, eyes, and proportions, helps us develop a critical eye and appreciate how art seeks to sublimate reality, approaching poetic ideal of beauty, as in portrait under study. This understanding, as underscored by art theorists, is essential to elevate art of portraiture, emulating ability of great masters and poets in celebrating beauty. Works of Leonardo da Vinci, in particular portraits of Gioconda and Mona Lisa, together with those of Raphael, Andrea del Sarto,

Giorgione, Palma il Vecchio, Sebastiano del Piombo, Mazzolino, Tintoretto, and Bordone, represent excel examples of how to express beauty and expressivity, especially smile, in female portraits. Palma il Vecchio's art reveals two distinct approaches in female representation. In portraits of commissioners, as in *Sacred Conversations*, he depicts real and recognizable women. However, when he paints idealized female figures, Palma draws from his imagination, creating ethereal images of beauty without specifically identifying them. These figures, although perhaps not based on real models due to complex poses, reappear in diverse works, suggesting a recurrent ideal of beauty. His technical ability, evident in rendering of fabrics and composition, and his capacity to evoke poetic and sensual atmosphere distinguish him, highlighting a refined interpretation of beauty. Representation of eroticism in Palma, moreover, places itself in a historical context in which courtesans had not yet reached notoriety they would have subsequently in Venice. It is fundamental to preserve integrity of works of art for correct understanding of their historical and artistic value; the work under study, for importance of portrayed character, assumes historical importance. In male portraits, Palma il Vecchio, unlike Titian, excels in expressing sentiment. His subjects reveal an emotional intensity and interior "vagueness", similar to those found in poetry of epoch. The celebrated "Portrait of Poet, so-called Ariosto" is a shining example, where artist catches thoughtful nature and elegance of portrayed character, through symbolic details and refined pictorial rendering.



Fig. 68: Palma il Vecchio (Jacopo Negretti), Portrait of Poet (Portrait of a Poet), ca. 1516. Oil on canvas (transferred from panel in 1857; remounted in 1916), 83.8 × 63.5 cm. London, National Gallery, inv. NG 636. Work in public domain; image in Public Domain Mark 1.0 (Google Art Project / Wikimedia Commons).

Analysis of "Salvator Mundi" and "Christ and the Adulteress" reveals use of recurrent models in works of period. Attentive observation of details like background figures and similarity of female traits, found also in preparatory studies like "Head of Woman", evidences practice of reusing poses and models to create figures of consolidated elegance and beauty. Palma il Vecchio's "Portrait of Man with Gloves" represents an ideal of beauty and refinement, characteristics also found in painting under study. The work, cared for in details of clothing and attitude of

subject, expresses interior elegance and refined taste, which transfigure figure into eternal image, exalting, as in case of Pico, his importance. The painting offers food for thought on artistic commissioning of epoch and desire to immortalize model of perfection according to Platonic canons of beauty. Critical study on art needs accuracy and rigor. Through meticulous textual analysis and reference to documented sources, one arrives at deeper understanding of work and its historical-artistic context. Attributive research, stylistic investigation, and consultation of archives are indispensable tools for correct interpretation. Study of sixteenth-century inventories reveals how Venetian collecting, fueled by influential figures and tight family relations in patriciate, played crucial role in recognition of artists, like Jacopo Palma, and in development of art market. Such phenomenon, with deep roots, testifies importance of private commissioning and circulation of works for understanding Venetian historical-artistic context. Venice built its identity and wealth on "spoglio", practice of appropriation and reuse of goods, especially following sack of Constantinople. Such practice, however, roots itself in a founding act: presumed theft of relics of Saint Mark, key element for political autonomy of city. Venetian interest for art and archaeology, fueled by piratical acquisitions in Greek islands and rediscovery of Roman world, led to widespread collecting of antiquities. This taste for ancient profoundly influenced Renaissance culture, promoting knowledge and appreciation of works of art as social duty. Collecting of art, especially of Flemish works and artists like Jan van Eyck and Hieronymus Bosch, was widespread practice among intellectuals and wealthy Venetian citizens in 15th and 16th centuries. These collections, often left in inheritance with precise dispositions, testify to profound affective value. However, difficulty in

managing such bequests by heirs and Republic itself, as demonstrate cases of Grimani and Bessarione donations, evidences a challenge in integrating and preserving this cultural patrimony. Access to culture, even most refined, does not necessarily require direct reading of sources. Social environment, especially that frequently attended, can be significant source of learning. In case of artistic commissions, commissioners, although defining theme, often availed themselves of consultation of erudites and men of letters as could be characters like Pico della Mirandola. Figure of Taddeo Contarini, rich merchant and reader of classics, illustrates how wealth and commitments did not exclude interest for culture, although sometimes with attitudes of superiority. Taddeo Contarini, influential Venetian financier of 16th century, knew how to accumulate huge riches with unscrupulous methods, arousing distrust in political class despite his power. Contemporary of other illustrious collectors, he demonstrated avidity in possession of works of art, as testifies his desire to grab a painting by Giorgione, revealing personal interest and appreciation for artistic beauty. We learn how love for possession and enjoyment of goods was widespread, permeating diverse classes. Figures like Contarini and Gerolamo Marcello, art collectors, demonstrate attention to cultural patrimony. Analysis of inventories, like that of Taddeo Contarini drafted by Michiel, reveals a method in study and cataloging of works, testifying lively interest for their disposition and history. Biographies of collectors, like that of Gerolamo Marcello, illustrate importance of social and political role in Venetian context, highlighting link between wealth, culture, and power. Francesco di Benedetto Zio, born in 1477, figure of whom few details are known, disposed of his goods in 1523, including natural son Giacomo. Andrea Odoni, nephew

of Francesco and man of culture, inherited his collection. Odoni's dwelling, refined connoisseur of art, was renowned and frequented by intellectuals. Man of taste and esteemed collector, Odoni accumulated notable artistic patrimony. Despite however his exceptionality in corpus of Palma's works, many documentary correspondences are missing. Study of Venetian masters, Palma il Vecchio in primis, reveals complex evolution. Despite recognition of his talent in "counterfeiting of nature", his public work needed reevaluation. His fame was consolidated thanks to writings of Carlo Ridolfi, who affianced him to Titian for sweetness of color and dedication to work. Venetian art flourished thanks to contribution of exceptional masters. Pordenone cared for scenic plant, Bassano for illumination. Palma il Vecchio perfected hull. Titian, expert navigational painter, guided enterprise, affianced by Palma il Vecchio. Marco Boschini celebrated these feats, exalting uniqueness of Venetian painting, and "diligence" and "tenderness" of Palma. Considered scholar of Giorgione and disciple of Titian and in part also of Lombard Leonardesque art, Palma il Vecchio is described as attentive and "loving" painter. Attribution of works and reconstruction of his life remain object of study and caution. Luigi Antonio Lanzi has provided fundamental critical observations for Italian art historiography, evaluating with acumen work of Palma il Vecchio. Lanzi highlighted popularity of Palma, although noting certain genericness in attribution of works to his name. Subsequently, Pietro Selvatico, although critical towards Venetian painting of Cinquecento, recognized originality of Palma, placing him between Giorgione and Titian, underlining his ability in shading, color, and chiaroscuro. To form an excellent artist, it is essential to pursue compositional correctness, decorum, and nobility in figures, inspiring

oneself to Florentine and Roman masters of drawing. Study of works of Palma il Vecchio, like "Saint Mark enthroned" and "Adulteress before Christ", present at Accademia, reveals magistral harmony and expressivity. Pala of San Stefano in Vicenza and, above all, "Saint Barbara" at Santa Maria Formosa, demonstrate his ability in conjugating representation of true with grandiosity and chromatic sweetness. Although inspiring himself to Giorgione, Palma distinguishes himself for wise contrast between cold and warm tints and for fused and precise conduct of brush, reaching peaks of formal and coloristic perfection rarely equaled of almost Leonardesque glazes. Although endowed with great qualities, Palma did not obtain in life fame of other artists like Titian. This is due in part to lack of encomiums from influential critics of epoch. However, in 19th century, a process of revaluation of his figure and catalog began. His refined technique and attention to details, particularly in rendering of vests and complexions, aroused admiration. Despite eclecticism of his style, Palma demonstrated notable capacity to fuse diverse elements in unique pictorial harmony. Critical study of Palma il Vecchio evolved over time. Initially exalted as precursor, thanks also to analysis of Crowe and Cavalcaselle who underlined his originality and influence of Bellini, Carpaccio, and Cima, his figure was then downsized. Analysis of Cavalcaselle contributed to re-establish more balanced judgment, highlighting his compositional ability, precise drawing, fluid brushstroke, and quality of color. Morelli identified three stylistic periods: Bellinian/Lottesque, "powerful" influenced by Titian, and "blond" more autonomous. Venturi, although with attributions today discussed, described his expressive mutability and capacity to emulate masters, while maintaining own artistic identity, underlining his tendency to grandiose and realistic. Palma il Vecchio,

immersed in epoch of extraordinary Venetian artistic effervescence permeated for a period also by Lombard Leonardo, ambited to assimilate diverse currents, emulating Giorgione and Titian. Although manifesting stylistic uncertainty and difficulty in surpassing certain provincialism, he knew how to intuit evolution of Venetian art, participating actively. His scrupulousness in work, united to perpetual dissatisfaction, led him to leave many works unfinished like Leonardo. Despite this, Palma il Vecchio distinguished himself as prominent *comprimario* in new manner, contributing to creative fervor of his time. Historical criticism interrogates on relationship between Palma il Vecchio and Lorenzo Lotto, beyond presumed friendship. Works previously attributed to Lotto raise doubts. Palma il Vecchio was mild artist, known for harmony of colors in his works. His painting, appreciated for "diligentissima" knowledge of craft, profoundly influenced Bergamasque valleys, giving rise to local school, headed by Betino Zanchi. Although such school, sometimes, reached notable results, limited economic resources determined decline, favoring importation of works from other centers. Influence of Palma is found also in Veneto, although not always with high quality outcomes. Influence of Palma il Vecchio on Venetian painting and throughout Veneto of Cinquecento is undeniable. Artists like Licinio, Bordon, and Marconi were influenced by him. Legacy of Palma perpetuated through pupils like Bonifacio de' Pitatti, whose style, initially similar to that of master, subsequently evolved in autonomous manner. However, revolutionary impact of Tintoretto's "Miracle of Saint Mark" in 1548 marked turning point, opening new perspectives and redefining artistic legacy of Palma. Despite transformations of time, ability of Palma and his capacity to idealize female beauty and for many aspects also male

beauty especially in portraits, remain eternal and classic contribution to history of art. Also materials and techniques used by him are fortunately well documented for works that have been over years object of study. In analysis of sixteenth-century inventories of quadreria of Bartolomeo della Nave, several "portraits of young" not identified are found, problematic for attribution. Three works are signaled: a portrait attributed to Titian, one "with book" attributed to Giorgione, and third of Venetian school. Genericness of inventory descriptions, frequent attribution to Venetian masters, dispersion of works in English market, and recurrent typologies of youthful portraits make difficult certain identification of such paintings. Study of quadreria of Orsa Malipiero, Venetian noblewoman, offers us snapshot on patrician collections of time. Comprised inherited goods, dowries, family portraits, and devotional works, reflecting domestic and genealogical values. Reconstruction, based on inventories, reveals presence of portraits of ancestors, sacred works of Venetian school, and landscapes. Dispersion over time makes its complete reconstruction complex, but archival sources guide us in understanding this artistic patrimony. Eighteenth-century sources document presence of Landscape with figures of Venetian school, Woman at window of Giorgionesque inspiration, Portrait of young perhaps attributable to Palma il Giovane, and Old man with book of uncertain Savoldesque attribution. Unfortunately, due to sales, hereditary passages, and unknown locations in private collections, tracing these works, especially youthful portraits and landscapes, results particularly arduous. It is important to know how Domenico Grimani, refined cardinal and humanist, collected a quadreria of note in Venetian Renaissance. It included Flemish, Venetian, and Northern masterpieces, with precious works by Hieronymus Bosch. After his death, Republic

of Venice acquired collection, exhibiting it in Ducal Palace and constituting first nucleus of Quadreria of Doge. Studying its composition, reconstructed thanks to historical sources, illuminates artistic taste of epoch and importance of collecting for preservation of patrimony. Grimani collection, invaluable gift, offers public family portraits, ecclesiastical figures, and Flemish devotional works, also portraits of humanists, testimony of faith, beauty, and maternity. Donated to Republic of Venice, it found home in Ducal Palace and Galleries of Accademia, including masterpieces like Triptych of Temptations of Saint Anthony by Bosch. This quadreria, among first "modern" collections in Italy, represents bridge between Venice and Flanders, influencing artistic taste and offering lasting cultural legacy, custodied in historical documents and museum reconstructions. Study of quadreria of Domenico Grimani reveals important nucleus of humanistic portraits. Such collection, mirror of his erudition, included effigies of intellectuals, ecclesiastics, and humanists, divided into Flemish, Venetian, "all'antica", and prelate portraits. Despite difficulty in certain identification of works, due to vague descriptions and dispersions, presence of busts, half-figures, and full-length portraits is evident, characterized by psychological introspection, dark or landscape backgrounds, and classical references. Grimani quadreria testifies taste for antiquity and interest for humanistic culture, configuring itself as precious example of Renaissance private collection. From Grimani collection, importance of humanistic portrait as tool of intellectual celebration emerges. Three nuclei distinguish themselves: portraits of young Flemish humanists, characterized by seriousness and sobriety; hypothetical portraits of young Venetian humanists, immersed in meditative atmosphere and often linked to landscape contexts; and finally,

portraits of classical inspiration, which idealize subject through references to Roman antiquity. Despite dispersion of these works, they testify cultivated taste and interest for humanistic culture of cardinal Grimani, offering significant snapshot of society and art of Renaissance. Study of portrait of "young humanist alla Palma il Vecchio" offers essential interpretive key to understand tastes and collecting choices of cardinal Domenico Grimani. Painting of Palma il Vecchio, with its idealization of beauty, chromatic softness, and representation of cultured and worldly aristocracy, inserts itself perfectly in context of Grimani quadreria. Although no exemplar is today identified with certainty, iconographic and psychological characteristics of these portraits, united to cardinal's links with Venetian environment, make plausible and desirable presence of Palmesque works in his collection. Rediscovery of such works remains challenge for art history. According to Marcantonio Michiel, collection of Gabriele Vendramin numbered a youthful portrait attributed to Palma il Vecchio, today not yet precisely identified. Despite interest aroused by mention of said "portrait of young" in Vendramin quadreria, it is necessary to reiterate absence of its certain identification. Omission of exhaustive description by Michiel, united to copious portrait production affine of Palma and dispersion of Vendramin collection, have precluded every definitive identification. Hypotheses previously formulated have not found documental correspondence. Consequently, current location of painting remains unknown, subsisting possibility that it is lost, confused with other works, or hidden in private collection. Most recent investigations confirm impossibility of ascertaining identity of portrayed subject. Famous Vendramin collection, once shining example of Renaissance patronage, no longer exists as

unitary entity. Dispersed between 16th and 17th century through hereditary divisions and sales, its works are today in various museums and private collections worldwide, often without being possible to reconstruct original provenance. Only work whose belonging to Vendramin collection is certain is "The Tempest" by Giorgione, custodied at Gallerie dell'Accademia of Venice. Palazzo Vendramin Grimani, seat of collection, is visitable and hosts exhibitions dedicated to history of Vendramin and Grimani families. Works of Palma il Vecchio were also in collection of Taddeo Contarini, collection of great importance. Among dispersed works of collection, there were paintings by Palma, Giorgione, Bellini, and many others. Why are many works of art dispersed? Mainly for three reasons: rapid fragmentation of historical collections, uncertainty and mutability of artistic attributions, and ease with which small format works were commercialized, often without leaving trace. Attentive study of ancient sources, like testimonies of Michiel, allows us to reconstruct, albeit partially, content of prestigious collections like Contarini's. Presence of portraits of young emerges, genre much appreciated in Cinquecento Venice. Portrait by Giorgione, today lost, constitutes emblematic example, characterized by psychological introspection and poeticity. Analogously, presence of work by Palma il Vecchio is hypothesizable, renowned for his ability to render youthful beauty with delicacy and luminosity. Although precise identification of such works remains uncertain, philological research continues to illuminate taste and preferences of collectors of epoch, revealing richness of Venetian artistic patrimony. Collection of Gerolamo Marcello, as reveals "Notizia d'opere del disegno" by Marcantonio Michiel, numbered portraits of young, expression of Venetian taste for portrait "alla giorgionesca". In addition to works attributed to Giorgione

and Sebastiano del Piombo, today not identifiable, plausible presence of further youthful portraits of artists of Giorgionesque circle, such as Cariani, Palma il Vecchio, and young Titian, is plausible. Such predilection reflected intellectual collecting, inclined to enigmatic and introspective works, suitable for private spaces like studioli and camerini. Collection of Benedetto Zio, although modest in dimensions, distinguished itself for exquisite refinement, reflecting cultivated taste and admiration for "poetic" painting and Giorgionesque portraiture, in vogue among patricians of Venice of his time. He possessed, among others, youthful portrait attributed to Giorgione, works by Sebastiano del Piombo and Cariani, in addition to landscapes, female figures, and poetic compositions. Although these works are today dispersed or not identified, Zio collection testifies precise aesthetic predilection for "room" art and for youthful subjects, characteristic elements of Venetian cultural context of early Cinquecento. Numerous collectors conserved in their collections, among these cited, works also attributable to Palma; nevertheless, certain identification of subject in question, for reasons previously exposed, results particularly arduous. Hypothesis of portrait probably resumed from pre-existing subject representing Pico would thus be confirmed, with personal component of Palma idealized as in Neoplatonic style also of portrayed subject. Although direct meeting between Palma il Vecchio and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was chronologically impossible, Pichian culture exercised notable influence on Venetian context in which Palma operated. Philosophy of Pico permeated artistic and intellectual environment, and although Palma was not prominent intellectual, his art reflected Neoplatonic ideals in vogue. Meeting with Gianfrancesco Pico, nephew of Giovanni, remains plausible eventuality, making cultural

link more direct. Gianfrancesco II Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) incarnates point of convergence between fourteenth-century humanistic culture and fervent Venetian intellectual life coeval to Palma il Vecchio. Although direct documentation of frequentation is lacunose, significant indirect cultural influence is delineated, perhaps even more incisive than that exercised by Giovanni Pico. Descendant of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Gianfrancesco distinguished himself as philosopher, moralist, and author of treatises widely diffused in early Cinquecento, becoming vehicle for propagation of Pichian thought in Northern Italy. His activity developed between Mirandola, Ferrara, Mantua, and Venice, weaving links with humanists, men of letters, reforming religious figures, and Neoplatonic circles. His role, with respect to Giovanni, appears preeminent as mediator between Pichian culture and Venetian context contemporary to Palma. Presence of Gianfrancesco in Venice is attested by his local publications, relations with patrician collectors, and contacts with religious and intellectual environments, including Augustinians, Franciscans, and Hermits. This environment was shared with circle of collectors such as Taddeo Contarini, Gerolamo Marcello, Benedetto Zio, and Andrea Vendramin, commissioners and buyers of works by Giorgione, Sebastiano del Piombo, and Palma il Vecchio. Consequently, Palma and Gianfrancesco II Pico operated in same Venetian contexts, contemporaneously. Although Palma cannot be defined philosophical painter in strict sense like Giorgione, his work reveals propensity to idealization of human figure, search for harmony, equilibrium, and "intelligible beauty". His youthful portraits configure themselves as ideal prototypes, transcending mere individual representation. This aesthetics manifests itself in context of

collecting oriented towards works of Pico, Ficino, and Plotino, in line with theory of harmony propounded by Gianfrancesco, his conception of beauty as reflection of divine order, and his moral and spiritual interpretation of image. Palma, therefore, does not limit himself to illustrating thought of Pico, but shares conceptual horizon. Possibility of direct meeting between two appears plausible, given activity of Palma in Venice starting from 1510 circa and presence of Gianfrancesco in Venetian area until his death (1533), united to their frequentation of same Venetian patrician and religious environments. Hypothesis acquires verisimilitude considering network of relations of Gianfrancesco with Ferrara, Mantua, and Venice, and commissions received by Palma from Venice and Padanian plain. Hypothesis is further strengthened in light of belonging of both to Neoplatonic and reforming circles and links (direct or indirect) with families like Contarini, Marcello, and Vendramin. Although lacking incontrovertible documental proofs, historical probability of meeting configures itself elevated. Significant indirect point of contact was represented by Contarini circle, particularly Taddeo, who nourished lively interest for reading of Pichian texts and for collecting of pictorial works of "philosophical" inspiration. His collection included works of Palma, while Gianfrancesco frequented environments affine to him. Moreover, Venice of period 1510-1520 configured itself as laboratory of harmony, ideal beauty, interior spirituality, and poetic portraiture, elements that could favor cultural convergence between two characters. Existence of portrait commissioned by Gianfrancesco to unknown artist depicting his uncle, Pico della Mirandola, is hypothesized, work that could have constituted source of inspiration for realization of subsequent painting by Palma il

Vecchio. Gianfrancesco II Pico embodied continuation of thought of uncle, curating his biography and philosophical defense, perpetuating his memory through writings aimed at idealizing him as model of wisdom and virtue, although he had revised some practices, remained in him deep admiration for same. Existence of portraits of Giovanni Pico, known to Gianfrancesco, manifested in celebrated painting by Cristofano dell'Altissimo derived from fourteenth-century model, in lost work attributed to Lorenzo di Credi, and in youthful portrait attested by Florentine sources; Gianfrancesco might have desired conservation of one of these, commission of copy, or creation of new image according to canons of Cinquecento. Figure of Palma il Vecchio emerges as active in Venice starting from 1510, portraitist appreciated for idealization of subjects, rendering of youthful figures, and harmonic and "intellectual" beauty; his closeness to collectors intruded with Neoplatonic and Pichian culture like Contarini, Marcello, Zio, and Vendramin, made him participant of same environments frequented by Gianfrancesco. Palma could have executed posthumous portrait of Giovanni Pico, widespread practice in Cinquecento, basing on descriptions, pre-existing drawings, miniatures, and iconographic models, strong of his ability in idealization of figures; alternatively, he could have updated stylistically fourteenth-century prototype, modernizing its image and inserting it in tonal and poetic Venetian pictorial language. Despite lack of works identified with certainty as portraits of Pico in Venetian area, there subsist Palmesque youthful portraits characterized by "philosophical" and idealized traits, male figures immersed in reflection that evoke Pichian typology, and mentions of lost portraits in Venetian patrician collections, opening to possibility that portrait of Pico was dispersed, reattributed, or still existing under

generic title. Commission, although not documented, results highly plausible, supported by strong cultural motivation of Gianfrancesco, custodian of memory of uncle, by favorable Venetian context, with Palma as ideal portraitist for philosophical image, and by possibility of lost portrait, in line with dynamics of dispersion and reattribution of Cinquecento. Biographical information on Palma il Vecchio is fragmentary. Precise date of birth remains uncertain, as well as identity of mother. It is presumed he arrived in Venice around 1500, attracted by artistic opportunities offered. Although not reaching level of his contemporaries Giorgione, Titian, and Sebastiano del Piombo, Palma il Vecchio inserted himself in Venetian artistic context. His nickname "Palma" appears for first time in 1513, while appellation "Vecchio" was adopted to distinguish him from nephew homonymous. His Bergamasque origin was confirmed subsequently, correcting previous errors. Palma il Vecchio, artist of Venetian school and influenced by Titian, reached fame in Venice thanks to altarpieces and, above all, to "infinite pictures and portraits" commissioned by private individuals. Despite his notoriety, scarce biographical information made difficult complete reconstruction of his life and work. Archival research contributed, but zones of shadow persist. Attentive study of works of 16th century artist reveals initial path marked by attributive uncertainties, despite enrollment in School of S. Marco and commission for School of S. Maria Maggiore. Reconstruction of this formative phase is based on critical and comparative analysis, considering influences of masters such as Carpaccio, Bellini, and Dürer, filtered through experience of Lotto. Verification of signatures and datings remains fundamental element for correct attribution and understanding of stylistic evolution. In youthful works, although discussed, influences of Carpaccio are traced. Subsequently, echo of Sacred

Conversation of Giorgione is noted. Painting evolves, hinting at Titianesque chromatisms and recalling Dürer and Lotto in composition and portraiture. Subsequent Sacred Conversations confront with Lotto, although deriving from Bellini. Portraits show links with Previtali and recall Bellini, with hints to Giorgione. After Giorgione, artist dedicates himself to mythological and pastoral paintings, characterized by landscapes, intimacy, languid poses, and conception of female nude in evolution, confronting with models of Giorgione, Titian, and Sebastiano del Piombo. Critical analysis attributes to Palma il Vecchio series of homogeneous works, among which "Two nymphs in landscape", "Cimon and Iphigenia", "Family of halberdier", and "Girl with shepherd playing flute". "Sacred Conversation with s. Catherine of Alexandria" represents important transition towards landscape Sacred Conversations, genre in which artist excelled, inspiring himself to Titianesque models and reaching notable success. Stylistic analysis of payment of 1514 for altarpiece commissioned to Palma il Vecchio reveals important phase of artistic transition. Work, although maintaining links with style of Bellini, shows evolution towards more modern monumentality and spatiality, influenced by Titian and Sebastiano del Piombo. This study allows attributing and dating other works of artist, like palas of Zerman and Zogno, and contextualizing coeval Sacred Conversations and Holy Families, highlighting dialogue between Palma and masters of his time. Work of Palma il Vecchio reveals progressive assimilation of style of Titian, evident in composition and emotional expression. His draperies and use of color, although ample and sure, maintain clarity that differs from dramatic vibrations typical of Titian. Sacred Conversations show greater spatial opening and chiaroscuro animation influenced by Titianesque works, confronting also with art

of Lotto. Monumentality and light characterize his sacred works, like pala of S. Pietro in Fontanelle. Parallely, Palma excels in portraits and female figures, which incarnate ideal of classical and sensual beauty, deriving from influence of Titian. Numerous works, inspired by Titianesque models, testify his ability in portraying female figures of great charm and refinement. Palma il Vecchio knew success thanks to portraits of female figures "all'antica", appreciated since 1535 by illustrious collectors like Ippolito II d'Este. He asserted himself in Venetian private collecting, benefiting from influence of Titian. Nobles like Francesco Priuli, his patron, introduced him in influential environments. His works, as testified by Michiel, adorned prestigious collections of Francesco Zio, Taddeo Contarini, and Girolamo Marcello. From '20s, Palma consolidated his fame receiving commissions for altarpieces in important Venetian churches, like Marriage of Virgin for S. Antonio di Castello and pala for S. Maria dell'Orto. His economic well-being grew, so much as to allow him purchase of land in Montagnana, near Padua. Artist, although operating in Venice, maintained solid links with his land of origin, Serina, in Val Brembana. His family affections, economic interests, and realization of works of art commissioned for local churches testify to this. Polyptychs like those for Serina and Peghera, and subsequently for Gerosa, demonstrate how artist knew how to conjugate his Venetian formation with needs and tastes of provincial commissioning, offering artistic solutions suited to context. Documents also attest his frequent returns to Serina for family matters, such as marriages and inheritances. Polyptych of Palma il Vecchio for School of Bombardieri, with its S. Barbara, reflects influence of Titianesque classicism and stylistic innovation of first twenty years of Cinquecento, as evidenced by

works like Venus of Dresden and Adoration of Shepherds of Louvre. Evolution towards freer drawing, chromatic attenuation, and protagonist landscape is noted, elements that culminate in Adoration of Magi of Brera, commissioned in 1525, highlighting maturation of painter. Work analyzed, compared with youthful works, shows monumental ambition due both to importance of its destination, and to influence of Pesaro Pala by Titian. Sacred Conversation of Galleries of Accademia of Venice is more evident example, standing out for richness of color. Artist participated in competition for altarpiece in church of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo, won by Titian. Discarded sketch might have inspired Killing of s. Peter martyr of Alzano Lombardo. Initially attributed to Lorenzo Lotto, work shows influence of latter. Annunciation, once part of complex, is now conserved in Newport. After 1527, Palma il Vecchio realized significant works like Sacred Conversation of Naples, Judith at Uffizi, and Saint John Evangelist of Vienna, revealing influences of Pordenone. He also executed portraits, among which that of Girolamo Capra, commissioner of Madonna enthroned in Vicenza. Dating of latter is debated. Despite economic success, Palma died suddenly in 1528 in Venice, leaving testamentary dispositions for his family. Artistic legacy of Palma il Vecchio, estimated in early August, was inventoried in spring of 1529. Inventory reveals prolific workshop, specialized in Sacred Conversations, portraits, and religious works, among which commissions for nobles like Francesco Querini. Among his graphic works, worthy of note are pencil and pen studies conserved in prestigious museums like Louvre, Hermitage, and British Museum, testifying his mastery and influence of Titian, Giorgione, and for a period also of Leonardo.

The panel on which the work under study was realized is a single poplar panel with thin gypsum preparation (0.05–0.09 mm) and organic priming; stratigraphy shows thin paint layers and construction by glazes. XRF analyses and microsections indicate use of lead white and cinnabar in flesh tones, cupreous pigments with presence of arsenic in vest (compatible with mineral malachite), and presence of lead-tin yellow in decorations; halo was identified as metallic gilding. These materials and application technique are fully coherent with Padanian and Venetian practices of late 1400s until first twenty years of Cinquecento and with what documented for circle of Palma: clear preparations, construction by glazes, and use of cupreous greens and lead-tin based yellows. From material point of view, no anachronistic or incompatible elements emerge with dating late fifteenth century or first twenty years of sixteenth century; stratigraphic sequence and choice of pigments place work in technical tradition of Jacopo Palma il Vecchio. More decisive for attribution are stylistic traits: construction of flesh tone by subtraction and thin glazes, compositional measure of portrait (half-bust, three-quarters, neutral background), rendering of drapery with elongated folds and pinpoint highlights, and care of ornamental details. These characters correspond to creative styleme of Palma: painting that receives Leonardesque elements (sfumato and tonal softness) but tempers them in courtly measure, attentive to dignity and composure of effigy. Presence of preparatory incisions combined with brush traits, documented in reflectogram, falls within mixed practice. Convergence between micro-gesture (light point, palpebral modulation, treatment of hair), stratigraphic sequence, and chromatic choice makes plausible proximity of hand with Palma; cohesion between technique and style is such as to place work within his operative sphere. Stylistic analysis

highlights real but selective Leonardesque influence. It is not total adhesion to Leonardesque expressive psychology — Palma does not aim to reproduce "motions of soul" with same intensity — but technical transfer: use of sfumato, thin glazes, search for tonal softness. In Male Portrait this influence is evident in construction by glazes of flesh tone and in management of light as "field" that crosses layers. Influence is therefore operative (technical) more than rhetorical (expressive): Palma assimilates tools of Leonardo, Giorgione, and Titian to obtain presence and softness, without changing his compositional setting. Hypothesis that portrait represents Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is formulated on basis of three orders of argumentation: iconographic, chromatic, and contextual. Hypothesis is strong from interpretive point of view and coherent with hybrid function (lord and philosopher) that work seems to want to communicate also at humanistic level, distinctive characteristics of Palma's production in portraits. On basis of technique, pigments, and stylistic language, period proposed for realization of painting goes from end of 15th century to first decade of 16th; Period indicated as hypothesis is compatible with observed technical practices and with transition phase in which Palma assimilates Leonardesque elements but conserves Venetian settings. In conclusion, in light of all scientific and stylistic elements examined, currently in our possession and on basis of our knowledge and competences, we can hypothesize that Male Portrait of young man, places itself to Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, pseudonym of Jacomo Nigretti de Lavallo and his workshop; Leonardesque influence is present and operative, as well as that of Giorgione and Titian; identification with Pico della Mirandola is coherent hypothesis; dating and geography proposed are compatible with evidences.

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