

Three men and an abbey: the Cornaro triple portrait[☆]

RACHEL HEALY 

A painting housed in the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., attributed to Titian and his workshop, c.1520–5 (Fig. 1), has been recognised as a portrait of three members of the Cornaro family due to its provenance, and the extensive, though unpublished, notes compiled on it by the Gallery's former Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, Douglas Lewis, in 1972.¹ Despite Lewis' thorough research, and for reasons explored elsewhere, its current title, *Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Cornaro investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara with his Benefice*, is arguably dubious. Lewis identified the centre and left-hand figures as Girolamo Cornaro (1485–1551), and his son, a younger Marco (c.1513–1546), abbot of Carrara. This paper will propose new identifications, and will argue that these figures portray Giacomo (1482–1542), and his son, Andrea (1511–1551), abbot of San Zeno. These alternative identifications arise from fresh analysis of other comparative portraits of the sitters, an examination of documentary evidence, and consideration of historical circumstances. The one indisputable, however, is that Cardinal Marco (1482–1524) is the ecclesiastic figure depicted at the right.

Giorgio Cornaro 'il Grande' (1452–1527) began a tradition whereby at least one son, often the eldest, or second eldest, in each successive generation of his branch of the family, would attain the office of cardinal, or at least secure a bishopric in the process. Giorgio's first success, with regard to the ecclesiastical ambitions he harboured for his sons, was the election of his second-eldest son, Marco, who swiftly ascended to the rank of cardinal on 28 September 1500, at the age of merely eighteen. This rapid success

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¹ Douglas Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family" (unpublished manuscript), 1972, registrar files, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Fig. 1 Titian and Assistant, *Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Cornaro, investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara, with his Benefice* c.1520/25 – here proposed as *Giacomo and Cardinal Marco, investing Andrea, Abbot of San Zeno, with his Benefice*, c.1524, oil on canvas, 99.8×132.1 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Timken Collection. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

came at quite a cost to the Cornaro treasury: Giorgio Cornaro made a substantial payment of 15,000 ducats to the papacy of Alexander VI (1430–1503) to secure Marco's cardinalate.² With this contribution, Giorgio firmly cemented the reputation of the Cornaro as a formidable and affluent power in the world beyond the Serenissima. Following Marco's early death in 1524, Giorgio's eldest son, Francesco (1478–1543), was then successfully advanced towards the same rank as his late brother, to compensate for this premature ecclesiastical loss. It is widely believed that Marco died on 24 July 1524 somewhere on the journey from Rome to Venice, having decided to hastily journey on horseback to see his father, who he believed to be gravely ill from a severe attack of gout. Another theory is that Marco succumbed to his illness after his arrival in the city due to complications arising from the gout that he himself, despite his youth, had begun to suffer, and it seems that these symptoms appear to have been exacerbated

² Giandomenico Romanelli, *Ca' Corner della Ca'Granda: Architettura e Committenza nella Venezia del Cinquecento* (Venice: Albrizzi Editore, 1993), 78.

by Marco's over consumption of rhubarb syrup.³ At the time of his death, Marco was resident in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome and serving as Cardinal-Presbyter of San Marco since 14 December 1523.⁴

Cardinal Marco features as the right-hand sitter of the triple portrait which is mentioned in a letter of 1788 from Gavin Hamilton (1723–98) to the art dealer, Giovanni Maria Sasso (1742–1803).⁵ In this, we learn that the painter, Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), had in her possession in Rome:

...a beautiful painting of portraits of the house of Cornaro by Titian. It is very damaged and has been much repainted, but was once in a fine state. It formerly belonged to Mr Udny, who acquired it without difficulty from the family...⁶

The painting in the Hamilton letter is also mentioned in Kauffman's will of 1803 as a 'fine painting by Titian, three half-figures, portrait of the old family Cornaro of Venice'.⁷ In addition to these documents, a reference to the triple portrait was recently uncovered: at the sale in Venice of works from the collection of one descendant of the branch in question, Andrea Cornaro, on 8 December 1773, item 10 was catalogued as a painting of three portraits – 'Tre ritratti in un quadro'.⁸ This was mistakenly interpreted in the accompanying English translation as 'The Three Ages of Man'. The theory that this description refers to the triple portrait is augmented by the fact that the beneficiary of the painting was named as 'Giovanni Udny' – John Udny (1757–1800) – a British consul resident in Venice, and the agent who is referred to in Hamilton's aforementioned letter of 1788. The painting subsequently passed through the hands of Kauffman, and the sculptor, Antonio Canova, who gifted it to another Hamilton, the collector, William Richard Hamilton (1777–1859), in Paris

³ Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 183; William Barcham, *Grand in design: the life and career of Federico Cornaro, prince of the church, patriarch of Venice and patron of the arts* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2001), 32; Giorgio Padoan, "Ruzante e le 'merdologie' di Domenico Grimani", *Lettere Italiane*, Vol. 20, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1968), 491.

⁴ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 6 and 20.

⁵ Francesca Del Torre, "Gavin Hamilton a Giovanni Maria Sasso" in *Lettere artistiche del Settecento Veneziano*, ed. Alessandro Bettagno and Marina Magrini (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2002), 450–1.

⁶ "Un bel quadro di ritratti di casa Cornaro di Tiziano...Era di mister Udny, e facilmente è uscito da questa casa". Ibid., 450–1.

⁷ Peter Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/*Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Corner Investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara, with His Benefice*/c. 1520/1525," *Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/46062> (accessed January 2025).

⁸ Item 10: "Tre ritratti in un quadro", Sale of Andrea Corner, 8 December 1773. "The Getty Provenance Index"; Wendy Wassyng, "Angelica Kauffman: The Acquisition and Dispersal of an Artist's Collection, 1782–1825" in *London and the Emergence of a European Art Market, 1780–1820*, ed. Susanna Avery-Quash and Christian Huemen (Yale: Getty Publications, 2019), 139.

in 1816.⁹ The painting was passed down through Hamilton's descendants during the twentieth century, and was sold in 1930 to William Timken of New York. It finally reached the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. in 1960.

As to the attribution, the triple portrait was accepted as a work by Titian by Detlev von Hadeln, Walter Heil, Wilhelm Suida, Lionello Venturi, Burton Fredericksen and Federico Zeri.¹⁰ It was later excluded from Titian's oeuvre by Hans Tietze, Francesco Valcanover, Rodolfo Pallucchini, and Harold Wethey.¹¹ Lewis reattributed the painting to Titian, while Paul Joannides has categorised it as a painting by an "Associate of Titian".¹² The National Gallery's own recent online catalogue entry on the work opted for "Follower of Titian". However, the author of the painting's accompanying essay, Peter Humfrey, suggested that there must be 'at least some direct involvement by Titian in the commission, even if he delegated the execution to an assistant', if only because 'the Cornaro family was one of the wealthiest and most influential in Venice'.¹³ The present author would admit that, in its present repainted state, the right-hand figure in this painting cannot be ascribed to Titian himself with any great confidence. However, the portrayal of the youth at the left and the mature male in the centre exhibit superior quality and more sensitive handling, and it is here one might most forcefully argue for Titian's personal involvement. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that portraits from Titian's early career are largely undated, and the exact chronology of his early development is contentious. Mindful of Humfrey's earlier comments, a range of circumstantial evidence would suggest that Titian had some involvement with the triple portrait. In fact, there are several incidents which connect Titian personally to the Cornaro. Crowe and Cavalcaselle noted that Titian painted at the Casa Cornaro in 1511.¹⁴ Additionally, as an overseer of its decoration, Giorgio il Grande would have encountered Titian when he was commissioned to paint works for the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Ducal Palace. Ridolfi was emphatic that Titian had painted a portrait of 'Giorgio

⁹ Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/*Girolamo and Cardinal Marco*...".

¹⁰ Detlev von Hadeln, "Ein Gruppenbildnis von Tizian" *Pantheon* 3 (1929): 10–11; Walter Heil, "A Titian Portrait Painted about 1520", *International Studio* 95 (1930): 21, 88; Wilhelm Suida, *Tizian* (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), 78, 148; Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, Vol. 3: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century (New York and Milan, 1933) no. 512; Burton Fredericksen and Federico Zeri, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 203, 522, 647.

¹¹ Hans Tietze, *Tizian: Leben und Werk*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1936); Hans Tietze, *Titian: The Paintings and Drawings* (London, 1950); Francesco Valcanover, *Tutta la pittura di Tiziano*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1960); Francesco Valcanover, *L'opera completa di Tiziano* (Milan, 1969); Francesco Valcanover, *Tiziano: I suoi pennelli sempre portarono espressioni di vita* (Florence, 1999); Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Tiziano*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1969); Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, vol.2 (London, 1971), 170.

¹² Paul Joannides, "A Portrait by Titian of Girolamo Cornaro", *Artibus et Historiae* 34, no. 67 (2013), 247.

¹³ Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/*Girolamo and Cardinal Marco*...".

¹⁴ Crowe & Cavalcaselle, *Titian, his life and times*, Vol. 1 (London: J. Murray, 1877), index.

Cornaro in a golden robe'.¹⁵ Queen Caterina was painted posthumously by Titian in 1542, and it is possible that this commission came from one of her nephews. Girolamo showed Titian a painting of a gazelle by Giovanni Bellini in the palace of his brother, Giovanni, in the summer of 1520.¹⁶ Giovanni Cornaro would surely have been well acquainted with Titian, as it was Titian who introduced Giovanni Cornaro to Giorgio Vasari.¹⁷ As Titian had numerous encounters with the Cornaro, their commissioning of him on multiple occasions is likely.

The left and central figures bear a distinct Titianesque style. The treatment of the left-hand figure's face is strikingly similar to 'Ariadne' in Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1520–23, from the same period. Comparing the two figures, one can discern a comparable approach to paint handling, especially in the depiction of youthful flesh, with pale skin and rosy cheeks and nose. In relation to the central figure of the triple portrait, the sitter in Titian's *Man with a Blue Sleeve* (Fig. 2) has been painted in a similar manner. Both sitters share similarly hooded eyelids, dark shadows in the inner corners of their eyes, and comparable under-eye creases. Their beards are also rendered in an analogous manner, where the hairs of the beard merge seamlessly with the skin on the cheeks. The most striking shared feature is the portrayal of both sitters' lips.

As early as 1929, Detlev von Hadeln recognized that the right-hand figure of the cardinal is conferring a benefice on the youth at the left, in the presence of his father in the centre. The act of conferral is suggested by the inclusion of the folded paper with pendant seal, although Hadeln acknowledged that the event depicted did not necessarily take place in such a formal or ceremonious manner.¹⁸ In 1972, Lewis highlighted the fact that the profile portrait of the cardinal is derived from a portrait medal of Cardinal Marco (Fig. 3).¹⁹ Titian used a portrait medal, in another case, by Cellini, to copy a likeness in his painting of *King Francis I of France*, despite the two having never met. Freedman also proposed that Titian's posthumous *Portrait of Pope Sixtus IV* (c.1545–6) in the Uffizi was copied from a now lost medal as the pope in question had died before Titian was even born, in 1484.²⁰ In the triple portrait, the notion that Titian, or an assistant, copied Cardinal Marco's likeness from his portrait medal would have similarly arisen from the fact that the sitter had already died when the painting was commissioned.

¹⁵ Carlo Ridolfi, *Le Meraviglie Dell'arte ovvero vite dei pittori veneti e dello stato*, vol. 1 (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore 2002), 203.

¹⁶ Giuseppe Campori, "Tiziano e gli Estensi", *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere, ed arti*, Vol. 27 (1874), 590.

¹⁷ Andrea Fasolo, *Palaces of Venice* (Arsenale – Editore, 2014), 94.

¹⁸ von Hadeln, "Ein Gruppenbildnis von Tizian", 12.

¹⁹ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 21; George Francis Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini*, vol. 1: Text (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 136.

²⁰ Luba Freedman, *Titian's Portraits through Aretino's Lens* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1953), 95.



Fig. 2 Titian, *Portrait of Gerolamo (?) Barbarigo*, about 1510, oil on canvas, 81.2 × 66.3 cm, Bought, 1904. © The National Gallery, London

This would also explain the sitter's blank stare, rigid stance, and disconnection with the other figures in the painting. This figure lacks the realistic form and three-dimensionality in the other two figures, due to the absence of convincing modelling. The portrait medal of Marco and his likeness in the triple portrait are orientated in the same way, showcasing curly hair protruding from the cardinal's biretta, and both have a hooked nose and double chin, although the painted likeness is slightly idealised, with the nose and



Fig. 3 Unknown, *Portrait Medal of Cardinal Marco Cornaro*, c. 1523, UIT.P.54, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques

chin slightly less pronounced. In comparison to the x-rays of the triple portrait (Fig. 4), Marco's chin was originally more tucked in and his dewlap (flesh that hangs below the jaw) larger. In the final portrait, Marco's nose has been straightened and shortened, and the tip of the nose has been reduced. The wings of the nostril have been made smaller, while the dorsum (or bridge) has been smoothened, as has the nasal root. Lewis observed that Cardinal Marco's features have been thinly painted, and this would corroborate with the idea that Marco was not present for the portrait, thus returning us to the likelihood that the painting was reliant on the medal, rather than the contrariwise. The reverse of the portrait medal in question names the sitter as Marco Cornaro, Cardinal of San Marco, the title which was bestowed on him on 15 December 1523, only seven months before he died on 24 July 1524. This yields a *terminus post quem* for the painted likeness in the triple portrait, which was also, therefore, very probably posthumous.²¹

According to Lewis, the elder of the two, the bearded man in the centre must represent one of Cardinal Marco Cornaro's younger brothers,

²¹ 'Mar.cor.æpi.Cardi.titv.Sancti.Marco'. Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals*; Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/*Girolamo and Cardinal Marco*...".



Fig. 4 Titian and Assistant, *Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Cornaro, investing Marco, Abbot of Carrara, with his Benefice* (x-radiograph), c.1520/25, oil on canvas, 99.8×132.1 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Timken Collection

Girolamo (1485–1551), who was the fourth legitimate son of Giorgio il Grande. Girolamo was commander in Crete between 1511 and 1536.²² During his twenty-five-year period of service abroad, Girolamo was seemingly perpetually absent from Venice, making Crete his permanent residence and operational base. However, Lewis states that Girolamo did experience a sabbatical in Venice between the autumn of 1517 (on 20 October of that year he received the *balla d'oro*) and the summer of 1520.²³ As ambassador, he returned to Candia (presently Heraklion), Crete, on 30 July 1520, and thereafter served as Captain of the island from 24 June 1526 until 9 November 1527 and, according to Lewis, remained there until 1535.²⁴ It was during his residence on Crete that Girolamo also became renowned for fostering an elite trade in raising and selling falcons. In accordance with his father's will, Lewis claims Girolamo returned to Venice only in 1535. In Giorgio il Grande's will of 1524, drawn up three years

²² Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 7.

²³ Skoufari, "Alberi genealogici", 569.

²⁴ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 10.

before his death, he had stipulated that his son, Girolamo, would lose his inheritance if he did not return to Venice:

I leave all my assets to all of you, four legitimate sons of mine, Francesco, Giacomo, Girolamo, and Giovanni. Since Girolamo is not going to stay here in Venice, I do not want him to have anything other than what I promised him in the wedding contract, and I give him those in Cyprus every year.²⁵

However, in the months following his father's death in July 1527, Girolamo informed his brother of his impending departure from Cyprus in a letter to his brother, Francesco, on 7 August 1528, and asked his brother to prepare the palace at San Cassiano for his return.²⁶ It remains unclear whether this visit ever transpired. For instance, Girolamo was not present in Venice in 1532, as he wrote to his brother Francesco, to say that he had heard about the fire at the Cornaro palace in the Venetian district of San Maurizio.²⁷ Nevertheless, Girolamo claimed his inheritance in 1535 and the division of Giorgio's will was finalized on 8 June 1538.²⁸ A document, which records Girolamo's presence in Venice, is a deed of transfer concerning lands at Piombino Dese, near Padua (where his son, Zorzone, would eventually reconstruct the Cornaro family villa), dated 27 September 1537.²⁹ Girolamo also inherited the Ca' Cornaro della Regina palace in the Venetian district of San Cassiano, and as a result became head of the San Cassiano branch of the family.

It is well-documented that Girolamo had two sons, Giorgio/Zorzone (1517–74) and Andrea (1515–64), neither of whom pursued ecclesiastical careers. However, Lewis identified a *third* son, whom he discerned to have been the eldest, who was christened Marco (1513–46), and Lewis believes that this Marco is the youth at the left of the triple portrait. However, this younger Marco is not prominently featured in conventional accounts of Girolamo's lineage, or clearly corroborated by other authorities. Lewis argued that this Marco carved out a (crucially undistinguished) career within the Church, and Marin Sanudo claimed that Marco di Girolamo

²⁵ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 48–9 and note 36; 'Io lasso tutti li miei beni stabili, mobili, quomodocumque presenti et futuri, casali de Cipri, possessione, et ogni altra cosa mi trovo, arzenti, oro, zoie, mobila, debitori, et sopra tutto contadi a tutti voi quattro miei fioli legittimi cioè e M. Francesco Giacomo Hieronimo et Zuanne. Non vegnendo Hieronimo con la sua fameia a stare qui a Venezia non viggio huj habbia altro del mio di quello gli ho promesso nel contratto delle nozze, et quello gli dò de presenti in Cipri ogni anno'.

²⁶ '...mi sia preparata la casa da san Cassan'. Letter from Girolamo to Francesco, 7 August 1528. Giandomenico. Romanelli, *Ca'Corner della Ca'Granda: Architettura e Committenza nella Venezia del Cinquecento* (Venezia: Albrizzi Editore, 1993). 120, note 13.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Douglas Lewis, "The Rediscovery of Sanmicheli's palace for Girolamo Corner at Piombino", *Architectura* (1976), 29–35, 32.

²⁹ Romanelli, *Ca'Corner della Ca'Granda*, 106.

received the abbey of Carrara after the death of the Cardinal Marco.³⁰ To make this suggestion cohere, Lewis suggested that the painting was painted in stages; the central likeness of Girolamo being completed in the summer of 1520, towards the end of Girolamo's three-year sabbatical in Venice, and before he returned to Crete. The two Marcos – uncle and nephew – would have been executed over the next few years, and in a way that suggests that the evolution of the work was gradual and protracted. Certainly, due to the date of the portrait medal from which it was sourced, the figure of Cardinal Marco would have been rendered at the earliest in December 1523, or sometime after.³¹

However, in his recent catalogue entry on the triple portrait, Humfrey questioned the validity of Lewis' evidence, noting that the younger Marco is conspicuously absent from the Barbaro genealogies of patrician families in Venice.³² The *Barbaro Family Trees* name Girolamo's sons as Andrea (b.1515) and Zorzi (b.1517), with no Marco listed at all. Lewis made the connection between Marco di Girolamo and the Carrara benefice based on a comment by the diarist, Sanudo. On 27 May 1519, Sanudo refers to Girolamo's son: 'that of Carrara... the first born of Hironimo... who was born in Candia and came here a little while ago'.³³ In inferring that Sanudo was referring to the *benefice* of Carrara, Lewis also claimed that Marco lived in Carrara and Padua for most of his life and that he died in Padua in 1546. In order to support his theory, Lewis highlighted a small parchment on the verso of Girolamo's will from 2 December 1546, which stated that Marco Cornaro had died in Padua without a will.³⁴ Lewis suggests that *this Marco* is Marco di Girolamo. Lewis notes that nothing is known of the younger Marco's (di Girolamo) life, studies, or physical characteristics.³⁵

To expand further, Lewis' followed Sanudo in stating that this Marco di Girolamo was born in Crete in 1513, and accompanied his father to Venice in the autumn of 1517. However, his name does not appear in the *Libro d'Oro* (as was Girolamo's third son, Zorzzone, born that year).³⁶ When Girolamo returned to Venice in 1537, he registered his other son, Andrea, but not Marco. According to Lewis, in 1517–20, Girolamo and his son, Marco, resided in the Venetian family palace at San Maurizio, with the patriarch, Giorgio il Grande. Giorgio then served as his grandson's guardian in the absence of Girolamo from the mid-summer of 1520. Lewis claims

³⁰ Marin Sanudo, *I Diarii (1496–1533): Pagine Scelte* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1997), 26 July 1524, 495.

³¹ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 16.

³² Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/*Girolamo and Cardinal Marco*...".

³³ 'Quella di Carrara al primogenito di sier Hironimo Corner... nato in Candia et venuto in questa terra poco fa'. Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", note 47; Sanudo, *Diarii*, Vol. 27, 323.

³⁴ 'Marco Corner defonto in Padova senza testamento'. Biblioteca Museo Correr, MSS, P.D.c. 2686/2.

³⁵ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", note 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8, 54.

that it was, therefore, Giorgio who commissioned the triple portrait as a form of pictorial surrogacy: it would have been commemorative of Girolamo's absence in Crete, and an expression of his own fondness towards a cherished grandson now left in his care.³⁷ Lewis believes that sometime after Titian had captured Girolamo's likeness, work proceeded on the painting to include a portrayal of the young Marco receiving his benefice from his late cardinal uncle and namesake. However, this younger Marco would only have been eleven years old in 1524, and this raises the question of whether the youth shown in the portrait really is that young. Lewis asserts that the only two occasions in which the young Marco may have encountered his uncle and benefactor fell between the cardinal's presence in Venice between August and November 1521, and around the time of the same cardinal's death between 16 and 24 July 1524.³⁸ However, it was not crucial, either for the completion of the painting or the allocation of the benefice depicted therein, that the two Marcos should ever have met. Consequently, there is no portrait of this younger, elusive Marco di Girolamo to test the veracity of the likeness of the youth in the triple portrait.

It has been recorded that Girolamo had a daughter within his first year of marriage in 1512. This would mean that the young Marco would have, instead, been Girolamo's second child, born soon after in 1513. However, in the "Oratione a Girolamo Cornaro Capitano di Padova" authored by Sperone Speroni (1500–1588) in 1539, Speroni claimed that Girolamo had *two* children who died in infancy.³⁹ Of Girolamo's other registered children who lived past this date, Andrea married in 1542 and died in 1565; Zorzone married in 1554 and died in 1570/1571; Cattarina married in 1535 and again in 1549; Maria married in 1541. As a result, it is possible that Girolamo's first daughter and the young Marco were the two offspring who died in childhood. Marco's existence is therefore credible, even if a prominent career or role within the family's affairs, ecclesiastical or otherwise, remains unsubstantiated.

Where no corroborative portraits of the young Marco di Girolamo exist, there is however, a likeness independently associated with Girolamo Cornaro, which complicates Lewis' identification of the central figure in the triple portrait. Girolamo's likeness is evident in his portrait medal by Giovanni di Cavino (1500–1570) dated to 1540 (Fig. 5), when the sitter would have been 55 years old, and it was designed to commemorate the

³⁷ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 10–11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18, 27.

³⁹ 'Due... morte dei vostri cari...la peridit  de figliuoli'. Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", note 40.



Fig. 5 Giovanni da Cavino, *Portrait Medal of Girolamo Cornaro*, 1540, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection

conclusion of Girolamo's tenure as *Capitano* of Padua. The medal shows Girolamo in profile with short curly hair, a dorsal humped nose (an elevated bump on the central bone of the nose), long beard and moustache, with a furrowed brow and wrinkled forehead, and the inscription states that Girolamo was the 'Guardian of Poverty' in Padua in 1540.⁴⁰ Shapley rightly asserts that the profile portrait medal of Girolamo bears no striking resemblance to the central figure of the triple portrait (portrayed with long hair and a short beard) – an observation also acknowledged by Humfrey in his

⁴⁰ Hier(onymous) Cornelivs Pavperatis Patavina Tvtor Deo Opt(timo) FAV (evnte), MDXXXX. Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 51; John Graham Pollard, *Renaissance Medals*, vol. 1: Italy (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), no. 447.

response to Lewis' identification.⁴¹ The medal, however, is certainly later than the triple portrait (possibly by fifteen years), and it is not impossible to imagine that if they represented the same person, their hair was cut shorter and beard had grown longer with age. However, the shape of the forehead and the *type* of hair are markedly different – the central sitter's hair in the painting is far more rounded, while the sitter's hair in the medal is far curlier. The triple portrait portrays a man with an aquiline nose, whereas it is more hawk-like in the medal. The way in which Girolamo is depicted in his portrait medal would therefore suggest that Lewis' identification of the central figure in the triple portrait is incorrect. There is also evidence to suggest that Girolamo Cornaro may well be the sitter in Titian's *Portrait of a Man with a Falcon*, and if so, this would preclude his appearance as the central figure in the triple portrait, as the figures clearly represent different men.⁴²

To reinforce the identification of Girolamo and his son Marco as two of the sitters in the triple portrait, Lewis highlighted the catastrophic fires at the two Cornaro family palaces in San Maurizio and San Polo in Venice in 1532 and 1535, and the subsequent impact this would have had for the survival of contemporary family portraits. Lewis noted that the only major Cornaro residence which was not affected by fire during this period was the one in which Girolamo resided in the district of San Cassiano. Consequently, Lewis wrote of the central figure in the triple portrait, that one can 'guarantee the identification... only of Girolamo'.⁴³ This was based on the assumption that any artworks that had pertained to the ownership of the other brothers (Giacomo at San Maurizio, Giovanni at San Polo), had perished in the fires at those Cornaro residences at which Girolamo did not reside.

Sanudo commented that the San Maurizio palace's collections of paintings belonging to Giacomo's late father, Giorgio, and much of that which belonged to his sons and to Giorgio's sister, Caterina of Cyprus, were lost in the fires.⁴⁴ These included some works which, in all probability, were pictures associated with Giacomo (1483–1542), and Francesco (1478–1543). However, it is also highly plausible that some of the paintings in question were salvaged from the fires and were likely to have been transferred from palace to palace – moving from the palace in the district of San Maurizio, to that in San Polo, and finally to Girolamo's residence at San Cassiano. After the fires, Giacomo lived with Girolamo, alongside the youngest brother, Giovanni (1493–1551), in the remaining family palace at San Cassiano. However, by 1538 only Girolamo was

⁴¹ Fern Rusk Shapley, "Catalogue of the Italian Paintings", ed. National Gallery of Art (Washington, 1979), 497; Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/*Girolamo and Cardinal Marco*...".

⁴² Forthcoming article.

⁴³ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 43.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Sanudo, *Diarii*, Vol. 56, 751–4.



Fig. 6 Follower of Titian and Follower of Bellini, *Portrait of Giorgio and Francesco Cornaro*, 1520s, oil on panel, 96×63 cm, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. Courtesy National Gallery of Ireland

domiciled there. Howard states that the sharing of this Cornaro household had become inconvenient, and this prompted the division of their father's estate. The youngest brother, Giovanni, wrote in his will of 'the bodily and spiritual pains and the misery one feels fighting with one's relatives in forums and public places' and the trauma that resulted from the break-up of the family.⁴⁵

There are, in fact, several key works likely to have been part of the collection housed at the palace at San Maurizio which survived the fire. One example is the Dublin Cornaro double portrait (Fig. 6) which was probably commissioned by one of the sitters depicted, either Giorgio or Francesco, and it would therefore have been housed at the palace at San Maurizio.⁴⁶ Indeed, the fact that the work seems to have sustained damage and was partly repainted by another hand, very early on in its history may well have been due to an early exposure to fire or water. In fact, Sanudo alludes to the survival of contents from the palace fire when he states that almost all of the items from the first

⁴⁵ Martina Frank, "Fondazione Prada: Ca' Corner della Regina" (Milan: Progetto Prada Arte, 2011), 30; Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice*, 137, 140.

⁴⁶ Rachel Healy, "A Portrait of two Venetian Gentlemen in the National Gallery of Ireland: A Question of Identity," *Artefact*, no. 8 (2016).

floor and the mezzanines were saved.⁴⁷ Therefore, the fire at San Maurizio should not preclude the possibility that Giacomo is included in the triple portrait.

Cardinal Marco's accumulation of benefices and how they were, in turn, bestowed on his relatives is, admittedly, a complex matter for the reader. However, some understanding of who received which benefice, and when, is essential to a better appreciation of the likely identities of the other sitters in the triple portrait. When the Venetian cardinal, Giambattista Zen, died on 8 May 1501, Giorgio Cornaro, requested that Zen's benefices be passed on to his son, Cardinal Marco. Lewis claims that these benefices comprised the abbeys of San Zeno at Verona, Santo Stefano at Carrara in Padua, and San Stae near Nervesa in Treviso.⁴⁸ At a later date, a specific legal device, a *renuncia cum regressu*, allowed Cardinal Marco to then bequeath his benefices to his nephews.⁴⁹

At the time of Cardinal Marco's death in 1524, Sanudo noted that Cardinal Marco had 'the abbey of S. Zen of Verona, the abbey of Carrara, the abbey of Vidor, the abbey of Santa Trinità in Verona, the abbey of S. Gervasio in Brescia.... and an abbey in Cyprus'.⁵⁰ The benefice of Vidor went to one of Marco's other nephews – also called Marco (d. 1566), who was the illegitimate son of Cardinal Francesco (1478–1543). As the central figure in the triple portrait bears no resemblance to Francesco (depicted as a cardinal in waiting in the Dublin double portrait), the youth depicted at the left cannot be Marco di Francesco. The abbey in San Zuane di Monfor, Cyprus, went to Alvise (1517–1584), son of Giovanni (1493–1551).⁵¹ In 1524, Alvise was far too young (at seven years old), therefore, to be represented as the youth in the triple portrait, and we can be reasonably confident, that it does not portray this particular father and son pairing. Lewis argued that the abbey of Carrara, Santo Stefano, was promised to Marco (1513–1546), son of Girolamo. The abbey of San Zeno at Verona passed to another nephew, Andrea (1511–1551) – son of Giacomo (1483–1542).⁵² It is this father and son pairing which the present writer argues, is actually depicted in the triple portrait.

To complicate matters further, the references to the beneficiaries of each abbey are inconsistent throughout the literature. Anna Pizzati, who gives

⁴⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, Vol. 56, col. 752.

⁴⁸ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 3.

⁴⁹ Sarah Ferrari, "The Role of Cardinals' Portraits in Venice: The Case of the Grimani Family and Some Thoughts on the Correr MS Morosini Grimani", *Portrait Cultures of the Early Modern Cardinal*, ed. Piers Baker-Bates and Irene Brooke (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 124, note 37.

⁵⁰ Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Marco. 'Questa morte – annota il Sanuto – è stata di un gran personazo, havea de intrada da ducati 20milia ... et havia li infrascripti benefici: lo episcopato di Padoa, lo episcopato di Verona, l'abatia di S. Zen di Verona, l'abatia di Carara, l'abatia di Vidor, l'abatia di Santa Trinità di Verona, l'abatia di S. Gervasio di Brexa, il patriarcà di Costantinopoli, la legation di Viterbo, et uno priorà in Spagna et una abatia in Cypro'.

⁵¹ Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 5.

⁵² Humfrey, "Anonymous Artist, Titian/ Girolamo and Cardinal Marco...".

the most detailed overview of the transferals, noted that the abbey of San Zeno, Verona, was transferred to Cardinal Marco's nephew, Andrea di Giacomo.⁵³ With regard to the benefice of Carrara (which Lewis claims went to Marco di Girolamo), Pizzati noted that this was actually transferred to Cardinal Marco's brother, Francesco, in 1524, and *not* to Marco di Girolamo, and that it was Francesco who held it until his death in 1543.⁵⁴ In opposition, but consistent with Lewis, a diagram of the Cornaro family tree included in Giuseppe Liberali's *Dinastie Ecclesiastiche*, states that Marco di Girolamo received the abbey of Carrara on 27 April 1529.⁵⁵ Despite this, elsewhere in the text, Liberali argues that after the death of Cardinal Marco, his brother, Cardinal Francesco, was in possession of the abbeys of Carrara and Vidor, which is consistent with Pizzati.⁵⁶ Liberali also errs in claiming that Marco di Girolamo was born in Candia on 27 May 1519.⁵⁷ However, this cannot be the case as Girolamo was in Venice between 1517–1520, therefore, Marco di Girolamo could not be his son. The idea that the abbey of Carrara went to Cardinal Francesco, rather than Marco di Girolamo, is also corroborated by Giovanni's will from 1551, where he wrote that Cardinal Francesco received the abbey of Carrara '...dell'Abbatia di Carrara ...Rev.mo Cardinal che era patron della ditta Abbatia'.⁵⁸ This is also coherent with Sanudo, who wrote in 1519 that Cardinal Marco's benefices were passed to the sons of Giacomo and Francesco.⁵⁹ Due to the contents of Giovanni's will, it is probable that the abbey of Carrara was transferred to Cardinal Francesco. This would mean that Marco di Girolamo did not receive the abbey of Carrara, and therefore, Marco di Girolamo and his father, Girolamo, cannot be the left-hand and central figures of the triple portrait.

Giacomo, the progenitor of the San Maurizio line, was Giorgio's third legitimate son, born in 1483, and only a year younger than Marco. After Francesco

⁵³ Anna Pizzati, *Commende e Politica Ecclesiastica nella Repubblica di Venezia tra '500 e '600* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1997), 335.

⁵⁴ Pizzati, *Commende e Politica Ecclesiastica*, 309.

⁵⁵ Giuseppe Liberali, *Le Dinastie Ecclesiastiche nei Cornaro della Chà Granda from Documentaria sulla riforma Cattolica pre e post Tridentina a Treviso (1527–1577)*, vol. I (Treviso: Editrice Trevigiana, 1971). Family Tree insert.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Family Tree insert.

⁵⁸ 'Il ditto misier Zuabantonio die dare per possessione dell'Abbatia di Carrara, intrato in loco di alcuni contadini, le quale esso possiede come è la possessione di Symone mergia et altri per li quali paga per l'ordinario mozzi vintiotto de formento a la ditta Abbatia, più et meno secondo che appare nelli libri tenuti da ser Domenego Carauzzo; et perchè io come herede del quondam Rev.mo D. Francesco, il Cardinale mio fratello di bo.me., debbo havere li resti che restano da esser scossi dalli coloni et debitori della ditta Abbatia per il tempo suo, non havendo esso misier Zuanantonio pagati molti affitti al ditto quondam Rev. Mo Cardinale che era patron della ditta Abbatia, il resta debitore mio et non pagando avanti la morte mia, vi farete pagare voi, ponendo tutto nella mia commissaria a beneficio di quella'. Liberali, *Le Dinastie Ecclesiastiche nei Cornaro*, 45.

⁵⁹ Linda L. Carroll, ed., *Angelo Beolco (il Ruzante): La Prima Oratione, Critical Texts*, vol. 16 (Cambridge: MHRA, 2009), 25. Sanudo, *Diarii*, Vol. 27, 323.

became cardinal in 1527, Giacomo assumed the role of head of the family.⁶⁰ In fact, he was the first of Giorgio's sons to get married (in 1509, to Marina Morosini di Orsatto) and the first, too, to have a child – in 1510, also called Giorgio, referred to as Zorzi-however, the young Zorzi tragically passed away, much to his grandfather's distress, on 11 December 1521 at the age of eleven.⁶¹ Lewis suggests that the San Zeno benefice was conceivably first promised to Zorzi, then aged nine. At Zorzi's early death in 1521, it was granted instead to Giacomo's second-born son, the future cardinal, Andrea.⁶² Giacomo had a third son, named after his late brother, Zorzi (or Zorzetto) (1523–1586). What is highly significant, in the context of any painting that might record Cardinal Marco's bequest of a benefice to a young nephew, is the pivotal role that Giacomo played in successfully negotiating all the various inheritances that were in Cardinal Marco's possession and their distribution. In April 1519, Giacomo went to Rome to discuss the matter in person with Cardinal Marco. On 26 May 1519, Giacomo delivered the news in Venice that some of Cardinal Marco's benefices were to be passed on to his relatives.⁶³ Giacomo was, therefore, the brother most closely involved in these circumstances which prompted the commissioning of Titian's triple portrait.

One of Lewis' arguments against Giacomo being a sitter in the painting is based on his theory that Giacomo would not have been dressed in the attire worn by the central figure. Giacomo was Governor of Udine and a senator by 1519, and Sanudo mentioned that Giacomo wore a blue senator's toga six months after the confirmation of the benefices.⁶⁴ However, the triple portrait conveys the transferal of the benefice as one that occurs between the cardinal and his nephew. Although the father is the central figure in the *painting*, he is not the leading figure in the *event*. Therefore, it makes sense, if the central figure is Giacomo, that his costume, and even his rank, should be deliberately understated as witness to the transferal. The costume worn by the central figure was common dress in male portraits of the 1510–20s. Sebastiano del Piombo's *Portrait of a Man*, 1515, shows a figure wearing similar costume, as does Titian's *Portrait of a Man wearing gloves*, 1517–20, his *Portrait of Jacopo Sannazaro*, 1518, and Paris Bordone's *Portrait of a Man*, 1525. Another painting associated with Titian, known as *The Commander* (Fig. 7), displays a sitter which has been suggested to be similar to the central figure of the triple portrait. Joannides hypothesised that the sitter in *The Commander* is shown between 25 and 30 years old, and that Girolamo Cornaro is the sitter in *The Commander* because he must be the

⁶⁰ Patrizia Lucci and Anna Pietropolli, "Ca' Corner la Ca' Granda Itinerario tre Ieri e Oggi", January 2017, <http://web.provincia.venezia.it>, 9.

⁶¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, Vol. 32, 208.

⁶² Lewis, "Titian's Portraits of the Corner Family", 14, note 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.



Fig. 7 Titian, *Portrait of a Man (The Commander)*, c.1520, oil on canvas, 84.5×70 cm, private collection

same figure shown centrally in the triple portrait, but seven or eight years older.⁶⁵ However, as the likelihood that Giacomo is the central figure of the triple portrait has been argued, and *not* Girolamo, then Giacomo must also be the sitter in *The Commander*.

⁶⁵ Joannides, "A Portrait by Titian of Girolamo Cornaro", 247.



Fig. 8 Unknown Artist, *Portrait of Cardinal Andrea Cornaro*, MS.1700, Vita di alcuni Cardinali della S.R. Chiesa assunta a questa dignità dall'anno 1504 al 1553, Biblioteca Angelica (on concession from the Ministero della Cultura), Rome

Giacomo's son, Andrea, was born in 1511 and was the eldest surviving legitimate grandson of Giorgio il Grande (Francesco's illegitimate son was the first grandson).⁶⁶ Andrea was appointed Bishop of Brescia in 1542 and was subsequently promoted to Cardinal of St. Theodore by Pope Paul III in 1544, thereby becoming the third Cardinal Cornaro, following the precedents set by his uncles, Marco and Francesco.⁶⁷ A portrait of Andrea exists, where he is shown in later life as a cardinal in a manuscript in the Angelica Library (Fig. 8).⁶⁸ Andrea's pinched features, high cheekbones, unusually pale blue eyes, and suggestion of auburn colouring to the hair are consistent with the portrayal of the youth on the left of the triple portrait. Additionally, there is a reference to a portrait of Andrea Cornaro by Titian in a sales catalogue in 1806.⁶⁹ This description may be synonymous with a portrait of Cardinal Andrea Cornaro which was included in the inventory of the property belonging to Catterino Cornaro (1732-c.1802) from two years prior on 27 June 1804.⁷⁰ Andrea is also implicated in one of Titian's renowned portrait commissions: Andrea was a tutor to Ranuccio Farnese, grandson of Pope Paul III. In August 1541, the eleven-year-old Ranuccio came to study in Padua and was put in the care of Andrea and another Venetian patrician, Marco Grimani. Ranuccio's older brother, Cardinal Alessandro, requested a portrait of Ranuccio for their mother, Giroloma Orsini. Through the intercession of Andrea Cornaro, Titian was given the task in question, and completed his famous portrait of Ranuccio in the summer of 1542 (Fig. 9). It is tempting to assume that Andrea's own portrayal as a youth in the Cornaro triple portrait was implicated in his thought processes in seeking to involve Titian.

Within the context of family group portraiture, the Cornaro work appears to have been pioneering in its documentation of a benefice transfer and, by extension, hereditary succession. Rather than capturing a literal event, the painting serves as a visual record of the benefice's transfer from Cardinal Marco to his nephew, intended both as commemoration and as a statement of the family's enduring ambitions. Hierarchy is communicated through compositional arrangements, gestures, and costume, reinforcing the status of each figure and their roles within the family's broader aspirations. To establish a broader context within Renaissance family group portraiture, it is useful to examine Andrea Mantegna's *The Meeting*, 1465–74, which features a dynastic portrait of the

⁶⁶ Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma: Fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 1983). Andrea Corner.

⁶⁷ Aldo Berruti, *Patriziato Veneto: I Cornaro* (Torino: La Nuova Grafica, 1953), 63.

⁶⁸ Underneath Andrea's portrait in the manuscript reads, 'Andreas Cornelius Venetus – Ex tabula apud Abbatem Cornelium Romae'. *Vita di alcuni Cardinali della S.R. Chiesa assunta a questa dignità dall'anno 1504 al 1553*. Biblioteca Angelica, Rome, 169.

⁶⁹ Sales Catalogues Cornaro: "Tiziano, Portrait of Andrea Cornaro", 31 May 1806. "The Getty Provenance Index".

⁷⁰ Item 282: "Ritratto Cardinal Andrea Corner", Sale of Catterino Corner, 27 June 1804. Palazzo Corner, Calle della Regina. "The Getty Provenance Index". Catterino Cornaro was from the San Cassiano branch (with Girolamo as its progenitor), thereby also demonstrating how paintings were moved between palaces.



Fig. 9 Titian, *Portrait of Ranuccio Farnese*, 1541–42, oil on canvas, 89.7 × 73.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Samuel H. Kress Collection

Marquis of Mantua, Ludovico Gonzaga (1412–1478), positioned at the left. His eldest son and heir, Federico (1441–1484), appears at the far right, while his second son, Francesco (1444–1483), attired in cardinal's robes, occupies the central position. Francesco initiates a linked chain of hands with his younger brothers, Ludovico (1460–1511), and their cousin, Sigismondo (1469–1525). The figures are arranged in a hierarchical manner, with height reflecting both

relative age and dynastic succession.⁷¹ This compositional strategy parallels that of the Cornaro triple portrait, where the male line of inheritance is similarly emphasized, reinforcing the family's aspirations for ecclesiastical power. Another painting that illustrates how the clerical ambitions of a wealthy family relied on close familial networks is Raphael's *Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi*, 1518–29. In this work, the pope appears in close confraternal proximity to his two cousins, both cardinals, with all three figures presented in their official vestments. Such depictions of power dynamics between high-ranking clerics and their male relatives anticipate Titian's *Pope Paul III and His Grandsons*, 1545, where familial ambition is underscored through the prominent placement of papal and cardinal robes. The third figure in the composition, Ottavio Farnese (1524–1586), though not depicted in religious attire, is deferentially positioned. His subsequent rise to the title of Duke of Parma attests to the advantages conferred by powerful ecclesiastical kinship. In a Venetian context, Bellini's *Portrait of the Loredan Family*, 1507, encapsulates both political and dynastic aspirations. Doge Leonardo Loredan (1436–1521) is centrally positioned in his ducal robes, which, despite their secular function, exude a ceremonial sanctity akin to ecclesiastical vestments. He is flanked by his four sons in senatorial attire, their formal dress reinforcing the family's political stature. Another relevant Venetian group portrait is Titian's *Vendramin Family*, 1543–1547, which, similar to the Cornaro portrait, employs a horizontal format. Though ostensibly a family portrait, the *Vendramin Family* is imbued with religious devotion, in contrast to the Cornaro work, where piety is subtly suggested through the presence of cardinal attributes. Instead, the Cornaro painting prioritizes a display of wealth and influence. In the Cornaro work, the central focus is the transfer of a benefice, an event that not only elevated the family's status but also secured additional income. A further work that may have been influenced by the Cornaro triple portrait is Tintoretto's *Group Portrait* (c.1575), recently identified as a depiction of the Maggi family following the discovery of an inscription during restoration.⁷² The painting spans three generations: the seated elder figure on the left is likely the father of the central figure, Carlo Maggi, while the young boy by his side, Antonio, is his stepson. The document held by the patriarch echoes the scene in the Cornaro painting, symbolizing the transfer of hereditary rights. Similarly, in the Cornaro painting, the figure of the youth receives a benefice from his uncle, a transaction signified by the presence of a legal document.

Returning to the triple portrait, the following reasons assist the theory that the painting should be retitled: Giacomo's direct intercession in negotiating the benefices with his brother, Cardinal Marco, in Rome in 1519; the absence

⁷¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "The Genius of Andrea Mantegna", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (2009), 28–30.

⁷² Joanna Pawis, "Family ties? Tintoretto's newly discovered Portrait of the Maggi Family, 1575, at the Alte Pinakothek, Munich", *Venetian Art History Research Group Online Conference*, 28 October 2023.

of verifiable historical evidence regarding the enigmatic figure of Marco di Girolamo, including his potential survival into adulthood; Girolamo's absence from Venice after 1520, particularly in 1524; the significance of the San Zeno abbey to the Cornaro family; Andrea's role as the eldest legitimate grandchild and his eventual destiny to become a cardinal, as well as the evidence which suggests that it was actually Francesco (Giorgio il Grande's son), and not Girolamo's son, Marco, who received the Carrara benefice. Additionally, Cardinal Marco's likeness within the picture was taken from his portrait medal that was created after December 1523, and his benefices were only passed to his nephews *after* his death. Therefore, a *terminus post quem* for the triple portrait would be 1524.

Lewis claimed that the triple portrait depicted the *promise* of the transfer of the benefice of Carrara from Cardinal Marco to his nephew and namesake, which he claims occurred in 1519. However, this promise took place several years *before* the painting's completion, probably in 1524/25. In respect of this, Sarah Ferrari has recently posed the question, 'Why was the bestowal of a benefice that occurred several years before chosen to commemorate the deceased cardinal?'.⁷³ The response would be that the painting actually depicts the *transferal*, rather than the *promise*, of a benefice immediately *after* the death of Cardinal Marco in 1524. If so, it could not have been Girolamo who commissioned the triple portrait during the period he was in Venice in 1517–20, unless he had precognition of the early death of Cardinal Marco, and therefore the premature transferal of the benefices in 1524.

The painting, which we should now recognize as *Giacomo and Cardinal Marco Corner Investing Andrea, Abbot of San Zeno, with His Benefice*, exemplifies the Cornaro family's deliberate efforts to document their evolving status, hereditary rights, and the perpetuation of their lineage within the ecclesiastical and political spheres of Venetian society. This work, alongside other artistic commissions, underscores their strategic use of portraiture as a means of dynastic affirmation. The Cornaro family's patronage of both painting and sculpture reflects a sustained engagement with genealogical memory, reinforcing their heraldic status and the prominence of their name. This commitment is evident in their commissioning of father-and-son portraits in the sixteenth century, most notably in the Dublin double portrait and the Washington DC triple portrait, which further emphasize the importance of lineage and continuity. Similarly, their heritage was immortalized through sculptural works in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including Gian Lorenzo Bernini's decoration of the Cornaro Chapel in Rome, Camillo Mariani's stucco figures at the Villa Cornaro at Piombino Dese, and the sculpted busts at San Niccolò da Tolentino in Venice. Across these artistic representations, a consistent theme emerges: the portrayal of the Cornaro family as a powerful and cohesive patrician dynasty. Rather than commissioning individual likenesses, these

⁷³ Ferrari, "The Role of Cardinals' Portraits in Venice", 126.

works function collectively to assert the family's historical significance and the continuity of its influence. Through these visual narratives, the Cornaro not only celebrated the achievements of their ancestors but also reinforced their political and religious authority, ensuring the endurance of their legacy within the broader context of Venetian aristocracy.

University College Dublin

Abstract

This paper builds on the author's recent identification of an early sixteenth-century painting in the National Gallery of Ireland as containing rare portraits of Giorgio Cornaro (brother of Caterina, Queen of Cyprus) and his son Cardinal Francesco. It resolves similar long-standing confusion regarding the identities of sitters in a related work by Titian and his workshop, the Cornaro triple portrait in Washington D.C. In so doing, it will cast new light on Titian's development as a portraitist and the extent to which important paintings commissioned by the Cornaro survived fires at two family palaces in Venice in the 1530s. The current title of the Cornaro triple portrait is 'Girolamo and Cardinal Marco Cornaro, investing Marco, abbot of Carrara, with his benefice' based on unpublished notes by Douglas Lewis in 1972. This paper presents evidence to suggest that the painting should be retitled to 'Giacomo and Cardinal Marco Cornaro, investing Andrea, abbot of San Zeno, with his benefice'.