

# OTTAVIO FARNESE

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Among the varied objects of art left to the Museum by Mary Stillman Harkness is a portrait bust in bronze of the Italian Renaissance. Small in scale—it is only eight and a half inches high—it gives us, we believe, a vivid likeness of one of the fabulous characters of that age—Ottavio Farnese. Furthermore, it offers evidence to show that one of Titian's best-known paintings, the so-called *Portrait of an Englishman* in the Pitti Gallery in Florence, is in reality a likeness of that same Italian.

Ottavio Farnese was a true son of the Renaissance. As soldier, courtier, and ruler his life was spectacular, even by the standards of the turbulent age in which he lived. Born in 1524, the second son of Pier Luigi Farnese, it was his good fortune also to be the grandson of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, who in 1534 became Pope Paul III. That pontiff, the last of the great renaissance popes, succeeded in raising his family to lasting eminence. In 1538 Paul had Ottavio made Duke of Camerino and soon afterwards saw his grandson married to Margaret of Austria, daughter of Emperor Charles V, a woman who was to become renowned as Margaret of Parma, Regent of the Netherlands. In 1546 the pope bestowed upon Ottavio's father, Pier Luigi Farnese, the duchy of Parma and Piacenza—with strings attached, however, for the duchy remained a papal fief. In 1546

also Ottavio, who was then twenty-two years old, was placed in command of an army sent to northern Italy in support of Charles V.

Ottavio's subsequent military successes—to say nothing of his family connections—led to his receiving the collar of the Golden Fleece from Charles, who was himself Chief and Sovereign of that most chivalric of orders. Ottavio was formally installed as a chevalier during the chapter meeting held in January of 1547.

Soon afterwards an event occurred that profoundly altered the course of Ottavio's life. Late in 1547 Pier Luigi Farnese was assassinated. As his father's successor, Ottavio immediately



*Bronze bust of Ottavio Farnese, made between 1547 and 1552, possibly by Francesco Pastorino of Siena. Bequest of Mary Stillman Harkness, 1950*

claimed the dukedom of Parma and Piacenza, a claim contested both by his grandfather, the pope, and by his father-in-law, the emperor. Despite this opposition Ottavio maintained his position and, in so doing, embittered the pope's last days, for, with all his intense family feelings, Paul was determined to keep the duchy a papal fief. Ottavio's stand also placed him in open opposition to Charles, whom, indeed, Ottavio considered to be behind the plot that led to his father's murder. In his hatred for the emperor he went so far as to return the collar of the Golden Fleece to the emperor's surprised ambassador at Venice in 1552, an action unprecedented in the annals of the order.

Shrewdly making the most of every oppor-

tunity, Ottavio eventually achieved his goal. In 1552 Paul's successor, Pope Julius III, recognized his claim, and in 1556 Ottavio made his peace with Charles's successor, Philip II. His was the triumph of a singularly bold operator.

As Duke of Parma and Piacenza Ottavio showed himself to be just and effective and won the love of his subjects. He lived until 1586. In the political history of Europe he stands as the founder of a ducal house that for two centuries exercised an influence in international affairs.

One of Titian's great paintings, today in the Naples museum, represents Ottavio with his grandfather, the pope, and his brother Cardinal Alessandro. It was painted in Rome in 1546. Titian gives us a profile view of Ottavio, a tall, powerfully built man bowing ceremoniously before the pontiff. Although it has been generally interpreted as a portrait of a cunning, subservient courtier, it was surely far from Titian's interest or purpose to represent Ottavio unflatteringly. Let us concede that the man bold enough to return the Golden Fleece to Charles was far from being a lackey.

This profile view of Ottavio is of fundamental importance for our story: it enables us to identify the Harkness bronze as being another portrait of him. When we compare the two (p. 236) we see at once that they have much in common. The shape of the head is the same in each instance, and it is a curiously formed head, massive in the back, covered with thick, curly hair with a highly distinctive hairline. The ears actually seem identical, and the conformation of ears, it may be noted, can be as revealing as fingerprints. The facial features also show undoubted similarities, both the line of the profile and the bone structure seeming the same in the two works.

Granted, there are differences. The Titian profile shows a beardless man with only the trace of a mustache; the bronze depicts a man with a fully developed mustache and a slight beard. Yet these differences seem merely to be the normal ones resulting from the difference of age when the two portraits were made. We know that the Titian likeness was made in 1546 when Ottavio was about twenty-two years old. The bronze is clearly somewhat later. Not much later, however, for the subject wears the Golden

Fleece, and Ottavio wore that insignia only between January of 1547 and April of 1552.

The evidence of the Golden Fleece in itself seems incontrovertible, for up to the moment when Ottavio rudely turned in his badge in 1552 only three other Italians were entitled to wear it. These were Cosimo de' Medici, Andrea Doria, and Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy. We know from contemporary portraits what these men looked like, and the bronze most definitely represents none of them. We conclude, then, that it must represent Ottavio and that it was, therefore, made between 1547 and 1552.

Such a conclusion conforms with tradition. Although the bronze has never before been published it was described by Wilhelm von Bode in a document written in 1922 as a portrait of Ottavio coming "from an Italian noble family in Calabria who were indirect descendants of the Farnese family." The evidence of a South Italian provenance fits neatly into our story, for in 1737 the Farnese collections were brought to Naples, where a number of the pieces eventually found their way into various hands.

The bronze itself does not seem to be the work of any major sculptor of the Italian Renaissance. The impressionistic treatment, as in the representation of the hair, and the concern with ornamental detail, as shown on the cuirass, in our belief point rather to the style of a medalist. Particularly they recall the work of Francesco Pastorino of Siena (1509-1592), who, according to Vasari, was one of the most gifted and fashionable makers of portrait medals of his time. A number of Pastorino's works, such as the medals of Ercole II d'Este (1554) and Ercole Trotti (1555), display the same mannerisms of style observed in the Farnese bronze.

Other evidence, aside from that of style, would seem to support such a theory. Pastorino was actually in Parma in 1552 working for the mint established there by Ottavio. Vasari tells us that he "made a portrait in stucco of Ottavio Farnese," and this may possibly have been the model for an existing bronze medal of him that is dated 1552. Unfortunately it is a tiny medal—one and five eighths inches in diameter—and offers no stylistic evidence to further our attribution of the Harkness bronze to Pastorino. Also,



*Portrait of Pope Paul III (Alessandro Farnese) and two of his grandsons, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and Ottavio Farnese. Painted by Titian in 1546, when Ottavio was twenty-two. In the National Museum in Naples*

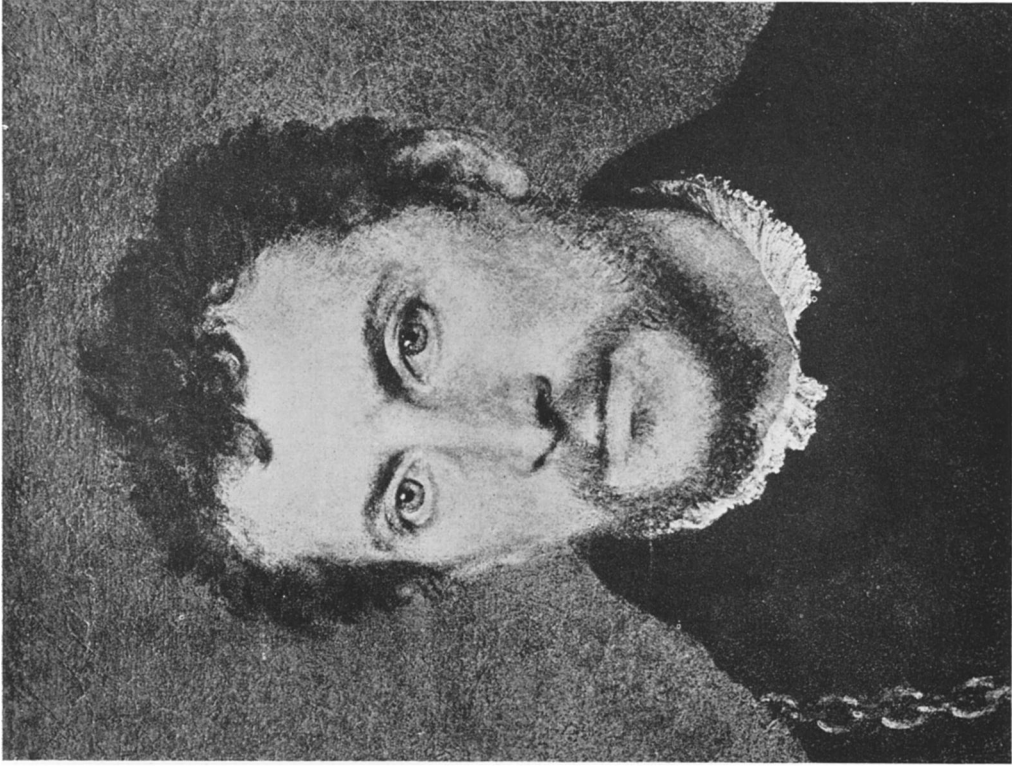
it is so generalized a portrait that it gives no additional evidence in the identification of the subject of the bronze.

When we come to observe the bronze closely in full face—so far we have considered it only in profile—we are immediately struck by its re-

semblance to Titian's so-called Portrait of an Englishman. This well-known work is somewhat of a mystery piece. It came, perhaps, to the Medici collections from Urbino, for a description of it seems to appear in a list of the best paintings inherited in 1631 by Vittoria della

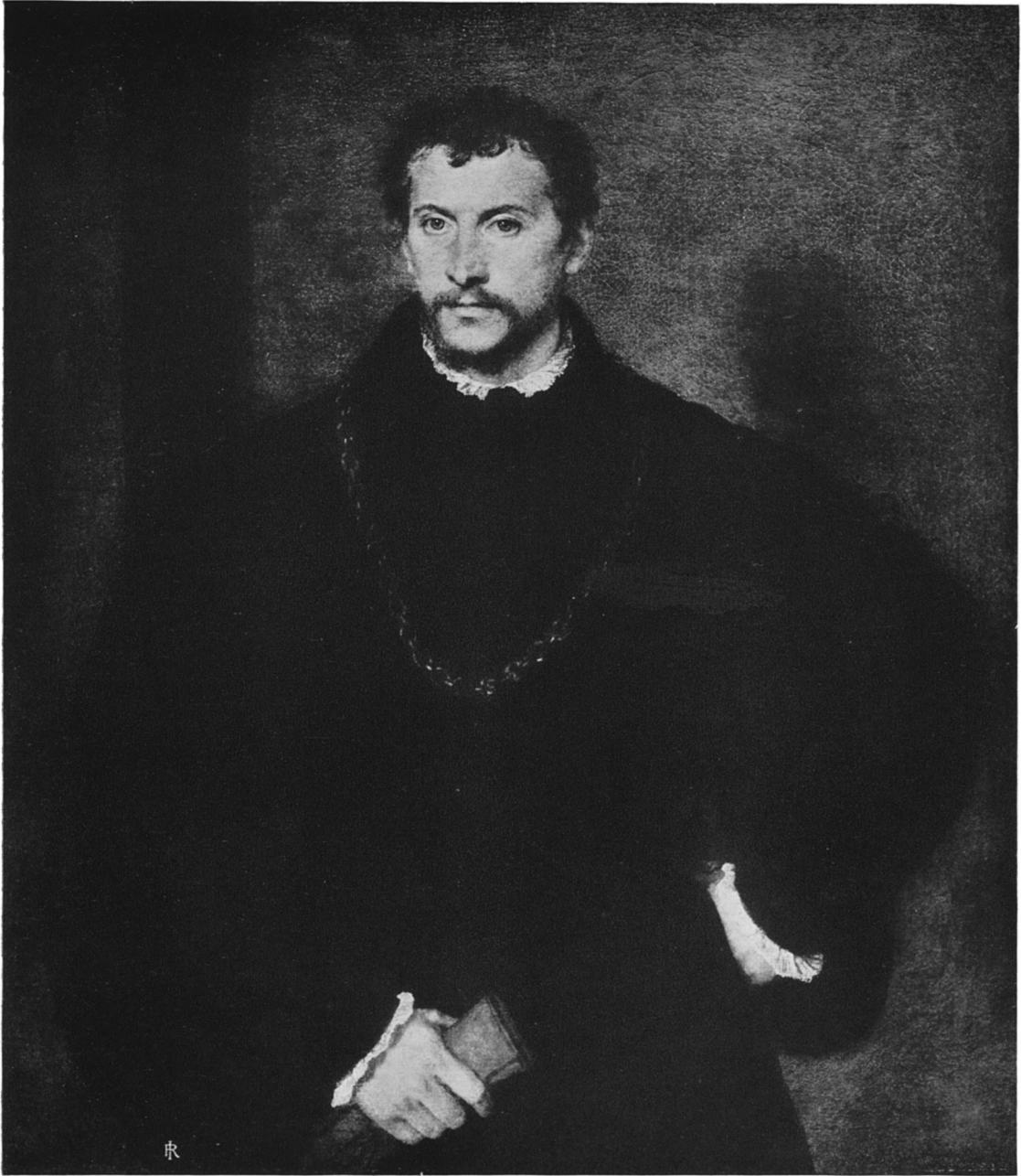


*Details of the bust of Ottavio and the portrait by Titian on page 235*



*Details of the bust and the portrait by Titian shown on page 238, here identified as that of Ottavio Farnese*





*Ottavio Farnese, by Titian, formerly called Portrait of an Englishman. In the Pitti Gallery in Florence*

Rovere, wife of Ferdinand II de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. In various nineteenth-century guidebooks it was described as a portrait of the Duke of Norfolk (evidently so handsome a man could only have been an Englishman to the connoisseurs of that era); in 1900 Georg Gronau

suggested that it might be the likeness of Guidobaldo II della Rovere of Urbino, a theory now discarded as we have since come to know other portraits of Guidobaldo. Then in 1928 Adolfo Venturi connected the Pitti portrait with another by Titian of Ippolito Riminaldi, a jurist



*Portrait of Ippolito Riminaldi by Titian. In the Academy of Saint Luke in Rome*

of Ferrara. Recent scholars have generally concurred with this latest of suppositions.

We feel, however, that Venturi's identification cannot be valid, for, although there are superficial resemblances to the portrait of Riminaldi, the differences are fundamental. Not only

are there basic differences of anatomical structure but the two subjects seem to us psychologically quite unlike. The "Englishman" is a courtier: arrogant, high-spirited, and affluent (he is fashionably dressed, his collar and cuffs are of lace, and his great golden chain is hardly the badge of

a commoner, much less of a man of the law). The Riminaldi portrait is that of a soberly dressed jurist, a man of reflection; and a book is in his hand. The "Englishman" would answer an affront with an oath and swordplay; Riminaldi would be content to produce a legal citation.

When, however, we compare the features of the bronze with those of the Pitti portrait we note resemblances point by point. Despite the fact that the bronze was worked with far less care than the Titian portrait these would seem to be fully evident. We need not catalogue the numerous similarities in the treatment of features, hair, mustache, and beard. These may be seen in the comparative illustrations. In our opinion they add up to one conclusion: the Pitti portrait is that of Ottavio Farnese.

It is, we believe, a reasonable conclusion. It gives us a likeness that expresses the nature of the man as he is known in the pages of history, for all the qualities that Ottavio possessed—shrewdness, boldness, and gallantry—may be read into the portrait. And when we compare the profile of Ottavio in the Titian painting at Naples with the Pitti portrait we observe that, despite what at first glance seems a general discordance, there is in fact a very real harmony between the two.

Our identification, furthermore, fills a gap in the history of Titian's works. The great Venetian was the preferred portraitist of the Farnese family. In addition to the triple portrait of Paul III and his two grandsons he made several single portraits of the pope. He also painted portraits of Ottavio's father, Pier Luigi, his brothers Alessandro and Ranuccio, his sister Vittoria, who married Guidobaldo II of Urbino in 1547 (it may have been through his sister that the portrait in the Pitti Gallery found its way

to Urbino), and his wife, Margaret of Parma.

It is curious, therefore, that until now we have had no single portrait of Ottavio by Titian. It would, indeed, be surprising if such a portrait had not been painted. For although Ottavio was not especially known as a patron of the arts it was he who commissioned Titian to make the famous Danaë, which is today one of the masterpieces in the Naples museum. So it is with a sense of the fitness of things that we propose the return of this painting to Titian's gallery of Farnese portraits.

As to its probable date, it could hardly have been made during Titian's great era of activity for the Farnese family, which extended from 1545 to early in 1546, when he was staying in Rome, for the Pitti canvas shows a man more mature than the Ottavio of the Naples portrait of 1546. In 1547 Titian went to Augsburg, where for the next five years he passed a great deal of his time in the service of the emperor. It seems quite likely that he may have portrayed Ottavio shortly after he returned to Venice in 1552. The lack in the Pitti portrait of the Golden Fleece, which Ottavio had possessed ever since 1547, is understandable since it was in 1552 that this insignia was returned to Charles's Venetian ambassador. It may finally be pointed out that the painting is in the style of other works then being produced by Titian. In particular, it seems to us closely similar in spirit to that of Cardinal Ludovico Beccadelli in the Uffizi, painted in Venice in 1552.

*The paintings on pages 235 and 238 are reproduced from photographs by Anderson, that on page 239 from "Tizian," by Wilhelm Suida (Zurich and Leipzig, 1933), pl. CXCIII. The authors are also indebted to Professor Suida for various helpful suggestions.*