

= Pope Paul III and His Grandsons =

Pope Paul III and His Grandsons (Italian : Paolo III e i nipoti Alessandro e Ottavio Farnese) is a painting in oil on canvas by Titian , housed in the Museo di Capodimonte , Naples . It was commissioned by the Farnese family and painted during Titian 's visit to Rome between autumn 1545 and June 1546 . It depicts the thorny relationship between Pope Paul III , born Alessandro Farnese , and two of his grandsons , Ottavio and Alessandro . Ottavio is shown in the act of kneeling , to his left ; Alessandro , wearing a cardinal 's dress , stands behind him to his right . The painting explores the effects of ageing and the manoeuvring behind succession ; Paul was at the time in his late seventies and operating within an uncertain political climate as Charles V , Holy Roman Emperor , came into ascendancy .

Paul was not a religious man ; he viewed the papacy as a means to consolidate his family 's position . He appointed Alessandro as cardinal against accusations of nepotism , fathered a number of illegitimate children , and spent large sums of church money collecting art and antiquities . Around 1545 Charles took the political and military advantage , weakening Paul 's hold on the papacy . Aware of the changing tides of influence , Titian abandoned the commission before completion , and for the next 100 years the painting languished unframed in a Farnese cellar .

Pope Paul III and His Grandsons ranks as one of Titian 's finest and most penetrating works . Although unfinished and less technically accomplished than his Portrait of Pope Paul III of a few years earlier , it is renowned for its rich colouring ; the deep reds of the tablecloth and the almost spectral whites of Paul 's gown . The panel contains subtle indications of the contradictions in the character of the Pope , and captures the complex psychological dynamic between the three men .

= = Background = =

Alessandro Farnese , as Paul III , was the last of the popes appointed by the ruling Medici family of Florence . He was socially ambitious , a careerist and not particularly pious . He kept a concubine , fathered four children out of wedlock and viewed the throne as an opportunity to fill his coffers while he placed his relatives in high positions . A talented and cunning political operator , Paul was precisely the sort of man the Florentines needed to assist them in their defence against French and Spanish threats .

He became pope in 1534 when he was 66 years old , and immediately appointed members of his family to key positions . He anointed his eldest grandson Alessandro , the eldest child of his illegitimate son Pier Luigi , cardinal at the age of 14 , marking a break with the Farnese tradition of marrying off the first @-@ born to carry on the family name . This move was considered necessary because the next oldest grandson , Ottavio , was then just 10 years old ; such a young cardinal would have been politically unacceptable . Paul 's advanced years meant that the family could ill afford to wait until the younger brother was of age . Thus Alessandro became a cardinal deacon ; this appointment did not necessitate taking major orders , but it compelled him to celibacy and to forgo the rights of primogeniture , which instead went to Ottavio . Alessandro was to bitterly regret the obligations . Paul appointed Ottavio as Duke of Camerino in 1538 , and in the same year married him to Charles V 's daughter , Margaret , later Margaret of Parma . Both of Paul 's grandsons ' advancements were widely criticised as evidence of nepotism .

Ottavio 's marriage troubled Alessandro ; he struggled with the burden of chastity and entertained fantasies of marrying a princess . He resented his younger brother 's arrangement ; during the wedding ceremony he " became more deathly pale than death itself , and , so they say , is unable to bear this thing , that he , the first @-@ born , should see himself deprived of such splendid status and of the daughter of an Emperor . " In 1546 Paul gave Pier Luigi the duchies of Parma and Piacenza as papal fiefs , a highly political move by the pope : in doing so he gave titles and wealth to Pier and appointed a lord who was subservient and owed a debt of gratitude , guaranteeing that the duchies would remain under papal control . At the same time , Ottavio was posted to the North of Italy to support Charles . By 1546 Ottavio was 22 years old , married to Margaret of Austria and an accomplished and distinguished individual . In 1547 his father was assassinated and Ottavio

claimed the dukedom of Parma and Piacenza against the express wishes of both Charles , his father @-@ in @-@ law , and Paul . In doing so , Ottavio acted in opposition to the pope 's desire to maintain the duchies as papal fiefs , and to Charles , whom he believed responsible for the plot to assassinate Pier Luigi .

Titian was a personal friend of Charles ; the commissioning of the portrait was most likely intended by Paul as a signal of allegiance to the emperor . Pressure from reforming monarchs in France and Spain , coupled with a general shift of influence in France 's favour , ended the Farnese hold on the papacy soon after Paul 's death . Ottavio excelled as a military commander and was awarded the Golden Fleece by the emperor . While the post had been given as a means to strengthen the family position , it did not come without cost . His success bred resentment amongst his family , as he began to see himself unaccountable to Rome .

At the time of the portrait Paul had convinced Alessandro to retain the post , hinting that he would later succeed him as pope ? an aspiration that was ultimately frustrated . As Alessandro realised the emptiness of the promise he lost confidence in both his grandfather 's word and political credibility .

= = Commission = =

The painting was commissioned in 1546 after Titian had made a number of portraits of Paul . He had already depicted Pier Luigi and three of his children ? Vittoria , Alessandro and Ranuccio . Ottavio was perhaps again portrayed by him in 1552 , and most likely commissioned the original Naples panel in Titian 's Danaë series , although Lodovico Dolce believed it was Alessandro who had approached Titian .

The artist 's reputation was such that he had already been called to Rome a number of times in the early 1540s ; first by Cardinal Pietro Bembo and then by the Farnese family . By the mid @-@ 1540s Titian was the preferred portraitist for the Farnese . Following a number of earlier portraits of Pier Luigi and Paul , they commissioned a set to mark their ascendancy after Paul 's papacy , all of which were ? given their political awareness and ambition ? clearly intended as public statements on their social elevation . Paul was aware of Titian 's influence in Venice , and after 1538 allowed only Titian to portray him .

Titian disliked travelling and refused the offers . When Paul travelled to northern Italy for negotiations with Charles in 1543 he met Titian for the first time and sat for Portrait of Paul III without a Cap . Around this time , Titian 's son Pomponio decided to enter the clergy , and the painter sought to use his contacts with the papacy to gain a church and lands for him . Working through his contacts with Cardinal Alessandro , he asked that in return for the Farnese portraits Pomponio be granted the abbey of San Pietro in Colle Umberto , in grounds bordering Titian 's own in Ceneda . Charles respected Titian and so the painter had influence in negotiating with the Farnese . When he received their offers of a commission and invitation to Rome , he made it clear he would only undertake the patronage in return for the grant of the benefice . This was at first rejected , but on 20 September 1544 Titian seemed assured enough to send a message to Cardinal Alessandro that he would visit to " paint Your Honor 's illustrious household down to the last cat " . Even so , Titian made no move until October of the following year . When he did finally arrive in Rome , he was treated as the most important guest to the city and given an apartment at the Belvedere . In the end the portrait was not completed . Probably once the benefice was granted , he no longer felt there was any reason to remain in Rome and abandoned the composition .

= = Description = =

The portrait depicts the tensions and manoeuvrings of 16th century court politics . The deep red background and heavy brushstrokes establish an anxious and tense atmosphere , and the uneasy relationship between the Pope and his suitors . The pope is old , ill and tired , and glares at Ottavio in an accusatory manner . His hat or camauro cloaks his baldness , but there are tell @-@ tale signs of age in his long nose , dark beady eyes , stooped shoulders and long uneven beard . He is noticeably older than in the second Naples portrait of 1543 . This fact is reinforced by the clock

placed on the table beside him , which serves both as a memento mori and a reminder that time is running out . Given this , the presence of his grandsons indicates that the commission was prompted by thoughts of succession .

Nevertheless , Paul retains elements of a powerful and alert patriarch . The painting is set at a curious angle , so that although Paul is positioned low in the pictorial space , the viewer still looks upwards towards him as if in respect . He is dressed in full pomp , wearing wide fur @-@ lined sleeves (a typical Venetian device to convey status) , and his cape is laid across his upper body to suggest physical presence .

The work is often compared to Raphael 's Pope Leo X with Cardinals of 1518 ? 19 and the 1511 ? 12 portrait of Julius II for its colouring and psychological dynamic . Titian follows the older master in some respects , emphasising the pope 's age and showing him in a naturalistic , rather than reverential , setting , but Titian goes further : while Raphael 's portraits show a high @-@ minded and introspective pope , Titian presents his subject glaring outwards , caught in a moment of fearful but ruthless calculation . His piercing glare has been described by art historian Jill Dunkerton as having captured his " small bright eyes , but ... missed his genius " .

The canvas is dramatically divided in two by a diagonal line separated by colour and tone . The lower two @-@ thirds are dominated by heavy red and white pigments ; browns and whites are prominent in the upper right @-@ hand section . This division is delineated by a diagonal reaching from the upper edge of the curtain down to Ottavio 's leggings in the right mid @-@ ground . Other echoes of the colours and patterns include the red of Paul 's robes against the velvet of his chair and the overhanging curtain . This dramatic colour and luminosity can be in part attributed to this design , and to the manner in which Titian reverses the usual painterly technique in building tone : he began with a dark background , then layered the lighter hues before the darker passages . The effect has been described as a " tour de force of symphonic colourism " , and a high point of his blending of red and ochre pigments . Titian uses a variety of brushstrokes . While the pope 's robes are painted with very broad strokes , his cape (mozzetta) , ageing face and visible hand were captured in minute detail with thin brushes , with his hairs rendered at the level of individual strands .

Ottavio , shown as tall and muscular , is about to kneel to kiss the Pope 's feet , a contemporary manner of greeting a pope : a guest would make three short bows followed by the kissing of the papal feet . Titian indicates this step in the ceremony by showing Paul 's shoe decorated with a cross , poking from underneath his gown . Ottavio 's head is bowed , but his stern facial expression conveys that he is acting as protocol dictates , rather than with genuine diffidence .

The grandsons are depicted in very different styles : Alessandro acts in a formal manner and wears clothes of similar colour and tones to Paul . Ottavio , by contrast , wears the browns of the upper right @-@ hand passage , an area of the painting that cuts him physically from the pope . His pose is awkward and difficult to interpret , but he is rendered in a more naturalistic manner than his brother . Alessandro has a distracted , brooding expression . He holds the knob of Paul 's backrest , in an echo of Raphael 's portrait where Clement VII holds the chair of Leo X as an indicator of his ambitions of succession . Thus Alessandro seems better placed politically , standing to Paul 's right in a pose that recalls traditional depictions of Paul the Apostle , and his hand is raised as if in blessing . In the end , Paul was unable to influence his succession after Charles V weakened the Medici hold on the office .

The work is unfinished ; a number of details , most noticeably the pope 's right hand , are missing . Other passages are bland and uniform , with some key areas still blocked by the underdrawing . Many of Titian 's characteristic finishing touches are missing ; Paul 's fur @-@ lined sleeves do not contain the polishing white strokes of the 1543 portrait , or his usual final overglaze or glossing .

= = Interpretation = =

Although the work is often thought of as an unflattering and cold look at an ageing pope besieged by cunning and opportunistic relatives , the reality is more complex and the artist 's intention more subtle . It is certainly a very unguarded portrait of one of the most powerful men of his day , and in

stark contrast to Titian 's two earlier portraits of Paul , both of which were deferential . It is widely accepted as one of the most politically difficult portrait commissions in art history , requiring an understanding of the interplay of relationships with a depth " worthy of Shakespeare " , in the opinion of art historians Rodolfo Pallucchini and Harold Wethey . However , it was one Titian seems to have resolved ; while the complexity of the relationships is all on the canvas , it may have been intended as an indicator to Charles that Paul retained his position as the dominant patriarch ? old and frail but still a man of vitality , and in control of his squabbling descendants .

Moreover , working under commission from the Farnese family , Titian would not have sought to portray the sitters in an obviously unsympathetic manner . While Paul is shown as old and frail , he is given a broad chest and cunning eyes that indicate his intelligence and guile . Ottavio is presented as cold and impervious , but this was probably a device to show his strength of character and conviction . Alessandro is favoured by his positioning closest to the Pope , yet x @-@ ray analysis reveals he had originally stood to the left of the pope and was moved , probably on request by Alessandro himself , to a position where his hand was resting on the papal throne , indicating his claim on the papacy .

= = Provenance = =

Titian abandoned the painting before completion and for the next hundred years it was kept unframed and unhung in a Farnese cellar . Alessandro 's large collection of art and antiques , which included the Titian portraits commissioned by Paul , was eventually inherited by Elisabetta Farnese (1692 ? 1766) . Elisabetta , who married Philip V of Spain in 1714 , passed on the collection to her son Carlos , who became Duke of Parma and later King of Spain . In 1734 , he conquered the kingdoms of Sicily and Naples , and the collection was transferred to Naples . In 1738 Carlos built the Palace of Capodimonte , which includes the Museo di Capodimonte , in part to house the Farnese art collection . The painting remains there today , hanging in the Farnese Gallery section . The Museo di Capodimonte was designated a national museum in 1950 .