

THE PRESENCE OF THE IMPERIAL PAST:  
VAN DYCK'S EQUESTRIAN PORTRAIT OF  
CHARLES V OF SPAIN AND THE CRISIS  
OF VALTELLINA (1621-1622)

LA PRESENCIA DEL PASADO IMPERIAL:  
EL RETRATO ENCUESTE DE CARLOS V DE  
VAN DYCK Y LA CRISIS VALTELLINA (1621-1622)

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**ABSTRACT:** The representations of Charles V (1500-1558) made during his lifetime have been more thoroughly studied than those made after his death, perhaps because the imperial character of posthumous representations is less evident. Nonetheless, some of these representations could still convey such a character to respond to a political necessity. At the time of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), this was the case of Anton van Dyck's *Charles V on Horseback*. This article sheds new light on the origins, the commissioning and the date of execution of this painting by deciphering the imperial ambition which is inscribed in it.

**Keywords:** Thirty Years' War, Charles V, Van Dyck, Valtellina, equestrian portrait

**RESUMEN:** Las representaciones de Carlos V (1500-1558) realizadas durante su vida han sido estudiadas más que las elaboradas tras su muer-

te, quizás por el hecho de que el carácter imperial de las representaciones póstumas es menos evidente. No obstante, algunas de estas representaciones podrían transmitir este carácter con un fin político. Este fue el caso, durante la Guerra de los Treinta Años (1618-1648), del retrato de Carlos V a caballo de Anton van Dyck. Este estudio arroja luz sobre los orígenes, la ejecución, la datación y el significado político de esta pintura.

Palabras claves: la guerra de los 30 años, Carlos V, van Dyck, Valtellina, retrato ecuestre

“Portraits of Charles V were a political necessity. They symbolized his dynastic power and omnipresence as head of a vast empire ‘on which the sun never set,’ extending from Hungary to Spain, from Flanders to North Africa, and including the new colonies in America.”<sup>1</sup> This observation by Yvonne Hackenbroch explains why the representations of the ruler made during his lifetime have been extensively studied by scholars, both art historians and historians.<sup>2</sup> A particular focus has been put on the equestrian portrait done by Titian showing *Charles V at the Battle of Mühlberg* (1548). This depiction of the emperor celebrates the victorious sovereign who defeated the Schmalkaldic League of protestant princes at Mühlberg on 24 April 1547.

Titian’s work is commonly considered to be one of the main sources of inspiration for early modern artists who painted or engraved equestrian portraits of the Holy Roman Emperor not only during his lifetime, but also after his death. The posthumous portraits of Charles V have not interested as many researchers, maybe because their “political necessity” no longer had any concrete imperial character. Nonetheless, some of these representations could still convey such a character. At the time of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), this was the case of Antoon van Dyck’s *Charles V on Horseback*, on permanent display in Florence, at the Uffizi Gallery (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

According to Gloria Fossi, “the origin of this imposing equestrian portrait” is still “unknown.”<sup>4</sup> The first mention regarding the presence of Van Dyck’s

1. YVONNE HACKENBROCH: “Some Portraits of Charles V”, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 1969, t. xxvii, p. 323.

2. The list of scholars includes, but is not limited to: HACKENBROCH, *art. cit.*, pp. 323-332. PETER BURKE: “Presenting and Re-presenting Charles V”, in HUGO SOLY, WIM BLOCKMANS (ed.): *Charles V and His Time, 1500-1558*, Mercatorfonds, Antwerp, 2000, pp. 393-477; JUAN CARLOS D’AMICO: *Charles Quint, maître du monde: entre mythe et réalité*, Presses Universitaires de Caen, Caen, 2004; BJÖRN-OLAV DOZO: “Représentations de la figure de Charles Quint: des espoirs suscités aux traces dans une chronique française de la fin de sa vie. Comparaison de trois représentations: Molinet, Ladam, Le Blond”, in *Le Moyen Français*, v. 57-58, 2005, pp. 123-138; DIANE H. BODART: *Pouvoirs du portrait sous les Habsbourg d’Espagne*, CTHS-INHA, Paris, 2011.

3. Room 55: Flemish painters of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, 191 cm x 123 cm.

4. GLORIA FOSSI: *The Uffizi Gallery: Art History Collections*, Giunti Editore, Florence-Milan, 2001, p. 282.



Fig. 1. ANTOON VAN DYCK: *Charles V on Horseback*, 1621, Uffizi Gallery (Florence)

*Charles V on Horseback* in Florence dates from 1713, when it belonged to the collection of Ferdinando de Medici (1663-1713), son of Grand Duke Cosimo III (1670-1723).<sup>5</sup> Cosimo Mogalli (1667-1730) made an engraving of the portrait around that time. The catalogue published in 2013 about the art collection of Ferdinando does not mention the purchase of the *Charles V on Horseback*, even if it indicates that Carlo Rinuccini, Florentine ambassador to Spain between 1705 and 1709, was in charge of acquiring artworks, including paintings of Van Dyck.<sup>6</sup> Although the future Cosimo III de Medici purchased a number of artworks during his travels in Spain (1668-1669), a couple of years before becoming Grand Duke (1670-1723) the *Charles V on Horseback* was not among them, according to the study published by Miguel Taín Guzmán in 2014.<sup>7</sup>

If the possibility of a purchase by Cosimo III or Ferdinando III cannot be completely dismissed,<sup>8</sup> the lack of documentation about such a purchase increases the probability of an earlier arrival to Florence. Based on Van Dyck's biography and on the chronology of the painter's other well-known works, art historians assign the painting's date of creation to the first half of the 1620s, when religious conflicts fuelled the war between the Catholic and Protestant powers of Europe. This article argues that the deciphering of the imperial ambition which is inscribed in the painting can help us to date and to more precisely discern the context of the portrait's commissioning.

#### THE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF IMPERIAL AMBITION

The emperor's equestrian portrait by Van Dyck has always been more described than analyzed. The Uffizi Gallery's catalogue summarizes that:

this typical commemorative portrait shows him on horseback, on the shore of a stormy sea. In a sky swollen with clouds the imperial eagle soars high, a branch of laurel in its beak. The composition seems freely inspired by two of Titian's works: *Charles V at the Battle of Mühlberg* (c.1558, Madrid, Prado), copied at Madrid by Rubens in 1603 (now at Chatsworth), and *Charles V in Armor*, known through an engraving by Lucas Vorsterman.<sup>9</sup>

5. *Ibid.*

6. FRANCA PALIAGA: "“Mi trovo talmente preso da un vivo amore alla nobil arte della pittura”. I dipinti di Ferdinando de' Medici del “gabinetto d'opere in piccolo” della villa di Poggio a Caiano”, in *Il Gran Principe Ferdinando de' Medici (1663-1713)*, Giunti, Firenze, 2013, p. 99.

7. MIGUEL TAÍN GUZMÁN: “De España a Florencia. Obras de arte y artículos de lujo adquiridos por Cosimo III de' Medici durante su viaje hispánico”, in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 2014, vol. 56/2, pp. 192-213.

8. Susan J. Barnes writes that “possible clients for such a painting would include Charles V's descendants in Turin and Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy in Palermo, who owned at least two large paintings of his great-grandfather”. SUSAN J. BARNES, NORA DE POORTER, OLIVER MILLAR, HORST VEY (ed.): *Van Dyck: a complete catalogue of the paintings*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London, 2004, p. 95.

9. *Ibid.*

The research about Van Dyck's sources of inspiration can be completed by the equestrian portrait of Francisco Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, Duke of Lerma. The painting is now part of the permanent collection of the Museo del Prado in Madrid,<sup>10</sup> and its description allows us to understand that, in the case of the *Charles V on Horseback*, Van Dyck was indirectly influenced by Titian:

Basing his composition on Titian's *Portrait of Carlos V in Mühlberg* (P00410), Rubens depicts the duke facing forward, advancing toward the viewer. This creates a very baroque effect, which is multiplied by the palm tree that frames the figure. With this painting, Rubens created a model for equestrian portraits that would prove very influential later on, especially in works by Van Dyck and Gaspar de Crayer.<sup>11</sup>

This influence is obvious in Van Dyck's *Charles V on Horseback* wherein the position and the direction of the portrayed rider are similar to those of Lerma in Ruben's portrait. However, Van Dyck made the horse's posture more dramatic, and changed the environment by introducing the sea in the background instead of the battlefield and by introducing the seashore in the foreground.

Mentioned in the Uffizi Gallery's catalogue, the imperial eagle – which is that of Jupiter – places Charles V in the continuity of Julius Caesar and, especially, of Augustus, founder of the Roman Empire.<sup>12</sup> The sunrise that we perceive on the horizon, in the left part of the background, projects the empire in time: the artist's goal is not only the representation of the foundation of the empire in the present, but the empire's development in the future and its permanent defence. Painted sixty years after the death of Charles V, the defensive dimension of the emperor's mission had to be emphasised in an allegoric way. This is why Charles V appears in armour and receives the laurel, symbol of his victorious undertakings. The accent is not on the result, but on the actions leading up to it: the laurel is not (yet) above the head of the emperor, but above the left hand that controls the movement and the direction of the horse. As the amplification of the emperor's force, the imperial mount dominates the painting and the stability of its massiveness contrasts with the chaotic instability of the dark clouds and the stormy waves.

10. Oil on canvas, 290.5 cm x 207.5 cm, inventory number P003137.

11. <https://cutt.ly/6e7hTFX> (visited on 02 october 2019). The figure and the posture of Charles V in the frontispiece of Antonio Francesco Oliviero's *La Alamanna* (1567) may have inspired those of Lerma, and indirectly those of Van Dyck's Charles V. The arch above the equestrian portrait of the aforementioned frontispiece may also have inspired the triumphal arch in the *Charles I with M. de Saint-Antoine* (1633) conserved at Windsor Castle, as explained by GUDRUN RAATSCHEN: "Van Dyck's Charles I on Horseback with M. de St Antoine", in HANS Vlieghe (ed.): *Van Dyck 1599-1999: Conjectures and Refutations*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2001, p. 144. Based on Oliver Millar's research, the description by the Royal Collection Trust <https://cutt.ly/te8dFU5> (visited on 03 october 2019) of the English King's equestrian portrait underlines that a "direct influence" on this work "was Rubens's 1603 portrait of the Duke of Lerma (Madrid, Prado) which Charles I would have seen on his visit to Spain as Prince of Wales in 1623."

12. JUAN CARLOS D'AMICO: *Charles Quint, maître du monde*, pp. 81-82, 88, 250.

Visually, the sunrise is in front of the emperor because the artist had to indicate that, despite the obstacles, the emperor is headed in the right direction, as is the ship that symbolizes his government and represents his maritime power and his control of overseas territories. The fact that the emperor masters the elements is translated by the position of the ruler's right leg which appears on top of a stormy sea-horizon. In this painting, the control of the elements is clearly emphasized by the continuity between the right leg and the baton that the emperor's right hand has poised against his thigh.<sup>13</sup> The spear that Titian portrays in the hand of Charles V in his equestrian portrait is replaced by a baton in Van Dyck's painting. This replacement may also be observed in the equestrian portrait of Philip IV by Rubens. Speaking of the comparison between this work and Titian's *Charles V at the Battle of Mühlberg*, Frederick A. de Armas quotes Erwin Panofsky, according to whom

the major iconographic change is the substitution of the spear for the baton. The spear was the *hasta, summa imperii*, symbol of the power of the Roman Empire. It was also the weapon of the *miles christianus*. But the empire had been divided and the Christian knight metamorphosed into a king who could wage war only through his revenues from the Indies.<sup>14</sup>

Although Titian's Charles V holds a spear and Van Dyck's Charles V a baton, Panofsky's explanation is not applicable when examining these two portraits that were created more than eight decades apart. At the beginning of the 1620s, Van Dyck depicted the baton because every artist of his time did the same in royal portraiture. Van Dyck's Charles V was as imperial as Titian's, despite the replacement of the spear by the baton. Only the historical context changed and, with it, the use of the emperor's portrait.

#### DATING THE IDEA OF VAN DYCK'S EQUESTRIAN PORTRAIT OF CHARLES V

According to Erik Larsen, "this painting could be dated between two other equestrian portraits from the Italian period [of the artist]: the 'Antonio Giulio Brignole Sale' and the 'Cornelius de Wael.' This would bring us to *c.* 1623",<sup>15</sup> because Larsen dates the portrait of Brignole-Sale (Genoa, Galleria di Palazzo Rosso)<sup>16</sup> and that of Cornelis de Wael (Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor

13. Regarding the position of the right hand on the baton, see GODEHARD JANZING: "Le pouvoir en main. Le bâton de commandement dans l'image du souverain à l'aube des Temps modernes", in THOMAS W. GAETGENS and NICOLE HOCHNER (ed.): *L'image du roi de François I<sup>er</sup> à Louis XIV*, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, 2006, pp. 245-280.

14. FREDERICK A. DE ARMAS: "Lope de Vega and Titian", *Comparative Literature*, 1978, vol. 30, n.º 4, pp. 343-344.

15. ERIK LARSEN: *The paintings of Anthony van Dyck*, Düsseldorf, Luca Verlag Freren, 1988, t. II, p. 428, A 54.

16. *Ibid.*, t. II, p. 136, n.º 331. Oil on canvas, 288 cm x 201 cm.

Schone Kunsten)<sup>17</sup> from around 1622. Since Larsen's study, scholarship has made progress in more precisely dating the aforementioned paintings, which enables us to situate the equestrian portrait of Charles V with more accuracy among Van Dyck's early equestrian production.

In 1994, Bénédicte Schiffers indicated that Cornelis de Wael's equestrian portrait was painted between 1621 and 1623.<sup>18</sup> Another equestrian portrait, that of Giovanni Paolo Balbi (Fondazione Magani Rocca, Parma), was thought to be dated from those years,<sup>19</sup> but, in 1997, Susan J. Barnes suggested that the Balbi and the Brignole-Sale portraits are probably from 1627.<sup>20</sup> This opinion has been recently shared by Anna Maria Bava and Maria Grazia Bernardini<sup>21</sup> as well as Alison Stoesser.<sup>22</sup> Van Dyck also painted an equestrian portrait of Bartolomeo Balbi, brother of Giovanni Paolo, in the first half of the 1620s, but this work has not been identified.<sup>23</sup> The fact that the Dutch painter portrayed several members of this family is a good illustration of the Balbis' key role in mediating between Antwerp and Genoa: Gerolamo Balbi (1546-1627) was Genoese consul in Antwerp (1585-1595) and his nephew Giovanni Agostino Balbi (1582-1621) held the same position between 1610 and 1611. Alison Stoesser writes that "it seems likely" that the Balbis "were responsible for encouraging Van Dyck" to visit Genova.<sup>24</sup>

As for the equestrian portrait of Charles V, the Uffizi Gallery's catalogue – issued in 2001 and revised several times – indicates that this portrait "may have been painted by the young Van Dyck sometime before his arrival at Genoa in November 1621" and this possibility probably explains why the catalogue dates the painting from "c. 1620".<sup>25</sup> In the complete catalogue of Van Dyck's paintings released in 2004, Susan J. Barnes argues that "the impasto and the brushwork of the armor and sash resemble Van Dyck's handling in painting of c.1621" and that, "if autograph, it is the artist's earliest surviving equestrian subject".<sup>26</sup> The

17. *Ibid.*, t. II, p. 142, n.° 346. Oil on canvas, 263 cm x 164 cm. The RKD (Netherlands Institute for Art History) <https://cutt.ly/7e8dL4R> (visited on 29 september 2019) gives a slightly larger dimension: 266.5 x 167.5 cm.

18. BÉNÉDICTE SCHIFFLERS: "Antoon van Dyck", in ÉDITH GREINDL, MARIE-LOUISE HAIRS, MICHEL KERVYN DE MEERENDRÉ, MARGRET KLINGE, BÉNÉDICTE SCHIFFLERS and YVONNE THIERY: *De Rubens à Van Dyck: L'âge d'or de la peinture flamande*, La Renaissance du Livre, Brussels, 1994, p. 39.

19. In 1622 according to JAN K. OSTROWSKI: *Van Dyck et la peinture génoise du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle. Aux sources du baroque dans un milieu artistique italien*, Nakladem Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracovie, 1981, p. 53.

20. SUSAN J. BARNES: "Van Dyck a Genova", in SUSAN J. BARNES, PIERO BOCCARDO, CLARIO DI FABIO, LAURA TAGLIAFERRO (eds.): *Van Dyck a Genova: Grande pittura e collezionismo*, Electa, Milan, 1997, p. 73.

21. ANNA MARIA BAVA, MARIA GRAZIA BERNARDINI (ed.): *Van Dyck, pittore di corte*, Arthemisia Books, 2018, p. 137.

22. ALISON STOESSER: *Van Dyck's hosts in Genoa: Lucas and Cornelis de Wael's lives, business activities and works*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2018, t. I, p. 92.

23. SUSAN J. BARNES: "Marchesa Balbi", in ARTHUR K. WHEELOCK, SUSAN J. BARNES, JULIUS S. HELD (ed.): *Van Dyck, Paintings*, National Gallery of Art (Washington) in association with Thames and Hudson, London, 1991, p. 144.

24. ALISON STOESSER: *Van Dyck's hosts in Genoa*, t. I, p. 30.

25. G. FOSSI: *The Uffizi Gallery*, p. 282.

26. SUSAN J. BARNES, NORA DE POORTER, OLIVER MILLAR, HORST VEY (ed.): *Van Dyck: a complete catalogue of the paintings*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London, 2004, p. 95, n.° I.101.

same catalogue also describes an Andalusian horse (canvas, 130.8 x 105.4 cm) in a private collection, which is the sketch for the horse in the equestrian portrait of Charles V. Oliver Millar estimates that “the bravura displayed in the handling of the horse and the grey ground indicate that it was painted before Van Dyck left for Italy”.<sup>27</sup> This opinion can rely on the fact that studies of horses attributed to Van Dyck are known from the first – pre-Italian – period of the painter.<sup>28</sup> In 2016, Stijn Alsteens considered that there are only two “known” equestrian portraits “from Van Dyck’s Italian period”<sup>29</sup> (those of Antonio Giulio Brignole-Sale and of Giovanni Paolo Balbi) and, by doing so, he implicitly dates the *Charles V on Horseback* from before November 1621 (arrival of the artist to Genoa).

However, Walter A. Liedtke has already stated in 1985 that “the artist’s first equestrian portraits and his first full-length family portraits” date from the Italian period,<sup>30</sup> and, in 2016, when situating the *Portrait study of a Commander on Horseback Triumphant over Evil, and Crowned by Victory* in Van Dyck’s career, Stijn Alsteens gives the time span “1621-*ca.*1627”<sup>31</sup> which corresponds to the artist’s Italian period before which no equestrian representations done by Van Dyck have been attested.

This observation is to be taken into account when assessing the years that scholars have suggested as the possible date of creation of Van Dyck’s *Charles V on Horseback*. To advance our inquiry into this matter, the historical context of the beginning of the 1620s provides us with valuable information to more precisely date the idea of the painting in question, before determining the possible time of the painting’s execution. Among the possible creation dates of the painting, 1621 was the one during which major events could create a favourable conjuncture for the commissioning of Van Dyck. These events will be listed here in a chronological order, and their study suggests that the idea of *Charles V on Horseback* can be dated from the last quarter of 1621.

The first major event of note in 1621 is the death of Cosimo II de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, on 28 February, and the beginning of the reign of Ferdinando II – at the age of twelve years old under the regency of his mother, Maria Madeleine of Austria (1589-1631), and his parental grandmother, Christine de Lorraine (1565-1637) – over the wealthy northern Italian principality. A month later, on 31 March 1621, a second event occurred: the death of Philip III, King of Spain. At the age of sixteen years old, Philip IV became the new king of the still-mighty intercontinental empire governed

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96, n°1.102.

28. One study kept in Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum, inv. N°1884.A302) is from 1617-1621. Another one, belonging to the Christ Church Picture Gallery at Oxford (inv. JBS 246), is from 1617-1618. ALEJANDRO VERGARA, FRISO LAMMERTSE (ed.): *El joven Van Dyck*, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2012, pp. 276-279.

29. STIJN ALSTEENS, ADAM EAKER (ed.): *Van Dyck: The anatomy of Portraiture*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2016, p. 100, footnote 8.

30. WALTER A. LIEDTKE: “Anthony Van Dyck”, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, 1984-1985, vol. 42, n.º 3, p. 23.

31. S. ALSTEENS, A. EAKER: *Van Dyck*, p. 99.



from Madrid. For our purposes, this dynastic succession is important because Philip IV was compared to Charles V in the 1620s,<sup>32</sup> reflecting the aspiration of the Spanish Habsburg Empire to a new golden age by regaining, in a different context, the same strength that it had under Charles V. In July 1621, Maria Madeleine of Austria and Christine de Lorraine, acting as regents, sent Ottaviano Medici to the Spanish royal court in order to greet the new king, to pay tribute to the former king and to obtain, for Ferdinand II, the confirmation of the investiture that Charles V gave to Cosimo I de Medici regarding the possession of Siena in 1554, after the victory of Florentine-Imperial troops over the republic and its French ally at the battle of Marciano-Scannagello.<sup>33</sup> In 1621, the cooperation with Florence could help Spain to maintain its positions in north of the Italian peninsula while once again fighting the Dutch.

The third event is the end of the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621)<sup>34</sup> between Spain and the United Provinces, the future Netherlands, leading to the eruption of a new long war between these powers from 1621 to 1648. The truce was over in August 1621, and the hostilities started in September, approximately one month before the departure of Van Dyck to Genoa in October.<sup>35</sup>

The fourth event, almost simultaneous to the third one, is the outbreak – at the end of 1621 – of an armed conflict in Valtellina, an Alpine valley in northern Italy, occupied by Spanish troops since July 1620 to help the catholic inhabitants of the land to gain independence from the protestant-majority-led League of Grisons. The Austrian Habsburgs supported the Spanish intervention while the league received military aid from the Swiss cantons and diplomatic support from France.<sup>36</sup> The control of Valtellina was strategic for Spain to secure what was nicknamed the “Spanish road” between its possessions in northern Italy and those in the Low Countries. Van Dyck had already arrived in Genoa when the conflict over Valtellina became one of the central issues in European diplomatic relations. The fact that Juan Vivas, Marquis of Villena, Ambassador of Philip IV to Genoa (1603-1622), was sent to Rome as the Spanish negotiator illustrates the importance of Genoa in the Spanish diplomatic management of the crisis of Valtellina.<sup>37</sup>

32. This comparison is especially well studied by FREDERICK A. DE ARMAS (“Lope de Vega and Titian”, pp. 341-344) regarding the parallel between Titian's *Charles V at Mühlberg* (1548) and Rubens' *Philip IV on Horseback* (1628), both having been on display in the same room (Pieza Nueva) of the Alcázar castle in Madrid during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (D. H. BODART: *Pouvoirs du portrait*, p. 270).

33. FRANCESCO MARTELLI, CRISTINA GALASSO (eds.): *Istruzioni agli ambasciatori e inviati medicei in Spagna e nell'“Italia spagnola” (1536-1648)*, t. II (1587-1648), Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali Direzione generale per gli archivi, Rome, 2007, pp. 338-342.

34. RANDALL LESAFFER (ed.): *The Twelve Years Truce (1609). Peace, Truce, War and Law in the Low Countries at the Turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, Brill, Leiden, 2014.

35. 3 October 1621 according to JAN K. OSTROWSKI: *Van Dyck et la peinture génoise*, p. 9. 20 October 1621 according to MARIA GRAZIA BERNARDINI: *Anton van Dyck, riflessi italiani*, Skira editore, Milano, 2004, p. 57.

36. RÉMY PITHON: “La Suisse, théâtre de la guerre froide entre la France et l'Espagne pendant la crise de Valteline (1621-1626)”, *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte / Revue suisse d'histoire / Rivista storica svizzera*, 1963, vol. 13, pp. 33-53.

37. F. MARTELLI, C. GALASSO (eds.): *Istruzioni agli ambasciatori*, p. 220.

The combination of these four events in 1621 created a context in which the figure of Charles V was the most propitious one that Spain could use in order to assert its political and military ambitions. As the new king in charge of the major part of the empire inherited from Charles V, Philip IV had to obtain the support of Ferdinando II, new Grand Duke of Florence, to strengthen the position of Spain in northern Italy regarding the new crisis in Valtellina.<sup>38</sup> The best way to illustrate this objective was a major reference to the glorious past of both Spain and of the Medici: the time of Charles V's rule during which the Medici supported the emperor's undertakings in Italy.<sup>39</sup>

The link between the crisis of Valtellina and the resumption of war in the Low Countries was the "Spanish road" and the soldiers who used it under the command of Ambrosio Spinola (1569-1630), head of the Spanish troops in the Low Countries. This general came from a very illustrious noble family installed in Genoa, "headquarters" of Van Dyck during his Italian period and where the painter portrayed the son and the daughter of Spinola before having the occasion to paint the general's portrait after his return to the Spanish Netherlands in 1627.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that Van Dyck was already in contact with Spinola before going to Genoa, and probably he went to Genoa precisely because of the strong political, economic and artistic relations between this Italian city, an ally of Spain since 1528,<sup>41</sup> and the Spanish Netherlands. 1621 was also an important year for the Spinola family: Philip IV granted the title of Duke of San Pietro in Galatina to Giovanni Battista Spinola, brother-in-law of Ambrosio Spinola, on 6 April,<sup>42</sup> and the title of Marquis of Los Balbases to Ambrosio Spinola on 17 December. These titles and other benefits were the results not only of the military services, but also of financial ones, given the fact that several members of the Spinola family played a key role in the Spanish financial system during the 1620s<sup>43</sup> as money lenders, changers and traders.<sup>44</sup> The economic weight of Genoese bankers was so increased at the time that,

38. The intensification of diplomatic relations between Spain and the Grand Duchy of Florence in May and July 1621 indicates this phenomenon. *Ibid.*, pp. 334-342.

39. However, the message could also imply a certain pressure on Florence given the fact that the pope, Clement VII, was a Medici, when Charles V sacked Rome in 1527.

40. ERIK LARSEN (ed.): *La vie, les ouvrages et les élèves de Van Dyck. Manuscrit inédit des Archives du Louvre par un auteur anonyme*, Académie Royale de Belgique (Mémoires de la classe des Beaux-Arts), Brussels, 1975, t. XIV, n.º2, p. 140.

41. ALAIN HUGON: *Philippe IV. Le siècle de Vélasquez*, Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2014, p. 160.

42. ANDREA LERCARI: "Gli Spinola duchi di San Pietro Dalla Repubblica Aristocratica di Genova alla Corte di Madrid", in ROBERTO SANTAMARIA (ed.): *Palazzo Doria Spinola. Architettura e arredi di una dimora aristocratica Genovese. Da un inventario del 1727*, Provincia di Genova, Le Mani-Microart's Edizioni, Genova, 2011, p. 161.

43. MANUEL HERRERO SÁNCHEZ: "La finanza genovese e il sistema imperiale spagnolo", *Rivista di Storia Finanziaria*, vol. 19, July-August 2007, pp. 27-60.

44. CARLOS ÁLVAREZ NOGAL: *Los banqueros de Felipe IV y los metales americanos (1621-1665)*, Banco de España, Servicio de Estudios, Estudios de Historia Económica, Madrid, 1997, pp. 23-25, 53-60. CARLOS ÁLVAREZ NOGAL, LUCA LO BASSO, CLAUDIO MARSILIO: "La rete finanziaria della famiglia Spinola: Spagna, Genova e le fiere di cambio (1610-1656)", in *Quaderni Storici*, 2007, vol. 124/1, pp. 97-110.

on 1 December 1621, they “decided in a high-ended manner to transfer” the seat of the Piacenza exchange fair, which was the most important one, to Novi, territory belonging to the Republic of Genoa. As analysed by Claudio Marsilio:

Some Italian financial operators, first of all the Tuscans and Lombards, did not participate in the fair of Novi, they rather decided to continue to hold their meetings in Piacenza, thus actually creating secession in 1622.<sup>45</sup>

Genoa justified the move of the fair to Novi by the necessity of protecting Genoese traders from Spanish and French military operations in the context of the crisis in Valtellina.<sup>46</sup> In 1622 and 1623, there were negotiations to bring back the Genoese traders to Piacenza, but they failed and the Genoese maintained their meetings at Novi. Van Dyck's travels between Genoa, Rome and Florence took place in those years and maybe the sunrise in the equestrian portrait of Charles V could also be interpreted in Florence as the promise of a future economic development that the strengthening of the Spanish influence in the north of the Italian peninsula could enable. In the treaty of Milano (29 January 1622), Spain obtained from the League of Grisons authority over Valtellina, providing a convincing illustration of its imperial sunrise on a strategically important religious borderland between Catholics and Protestants.

#### HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE EXECUTION AND THE COMMISSIONING OF THE PAINTING

More difficult to determine than the idea of the portrait is the date of its execution. It is unlikely that the painting was done “some time” before Van Dyck's “arrival at Genoa in November 1621”, as it is suggested by the Uffizi Gallery's catalogue. Archival discoveries might one day tell us more about the date of execution. Until then, the probability of the different scenarios can merely be evaluated. Thanks to an anonymous French author who wrote Van Dyck's biography in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we know that the painter spent one month in Florence studying the Grand Duke's art collection and painting a portrait of Lorenzo de Medici, uncle of Ferdinando II, who commissioned him.<sup>47</sup> According to scholars, the sojourn of Van Dyck in Florence took place at the end of 1622 or at the very beginning of 1623,<sup>48</sup> and was facilitated by the presence of Justus Sustermans or Suttermans (1597-1681), the only court portraitist of

45. CLAUDIO MARSILIO: “The Genoese exchange fairs and the Bank of Amsterdam: Comparing two Financial Institutions of the 17th Century”, in *IX Congreso AEHE*, 2008, pp. 3-4. <https://cutt.ly/me8d9gL>

46. C. MARSILIO: “Le fiere di cambio tra il XVI e il XVII secolo: Piacenza nel cuore della finanza internazionale”, *Bollettino Storico Piacentino*, 2007, vol. 102/2, pp. 266-267.

47. ERIK LARSEN (ed.): *La vie, les ouvrages et les élèves de Van Dyck*, pp. 54-55.

48. October 1622 according to JAN K. OSTROWSKI: *Van Dyck et la peinture génoise*, p. 10. January 1623 according to M. G. BERNARDINI: *Anton van Dyck, riflessi italiani*, p. 58.

Ferdinando II at the beginning of the 1620s,<sup>49</sup> who started his apprenticeship along with Van Dyck at the guild of Saint Luke of Antwerp in 1609.

In this author's opinion, the *Charles V on Horseback* was not painted in Florence, because the painting was not a portrait of a living sitter, but that of a deceased rider whose memory was still vivid and, as such, provided a good subject for a political gift. Therefore, it is this author's belief that the painting was probably painted elsewhere and brought to Florence later as a gift, maybe at the occasion of Van Dyck's visit. The work might have been done in Genoa after the arrival of the painter, in December 1621 or during the following year. The painting's dimensions favours this hypothesis. When we compare the *Charles Von Horseback* to the other equestrian portraits of the Italian period, it appears – as indicated below – that the emperor's posthumous representation is much smaller, both in height and width, than the others:

<b>Subject of the equestrian portrait</b>	<b>Date of realisation according to scholarship</b>	<b>Dimension of the portrait</b>
Charles V	1621	191 x 123 cm
Cornelis de Wael	1622 (between 1621 and 1623)	266.5 x 167.5 cm
Giovanni Paolo Balbi	1627	266 x 198 cm
Antonio Giulio Brignole-Sale	1627	288 x 201cm

The size of this equestrian portrait of the emperor could be relatively smaller because the subject represented in it was long-deceased and so the commission clearly came neither from the sitter nor his close entourage. Such a reduced-sized painting was also easier to transport. All the other equestrian portraits of Van Dyck depicted living sitters and were done to be exhibited on site rather than being transported over long distances for display.

## EPILOGUE

Created in the first years of the 1620s, it is highly unlikely that it was a purchase by the Medici family because of the nature of the topic and because of the historical context. Until the discovery of further historical data, we can only guess who commissioned Van Dyck. The commission could have been

49. ELENA FUMAGALLI: "Florence au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle : la cour et les artistes", in *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études (EPHE), Section des sciences historiques et philologiques*, 2013, n.° 144, p. 181. The painter's activity in Florence has been covered by MARCO CHIARINI, CLAUDIO PIZZORUSSO (ed.): *Sustermans, sessant'anni alla corte dei Medici*, Centro Di, Florence, 1983. His work for Cosimo III de Medici in the 1670s has been studied by LISA GOLDENBERG STOPPATO: *The Grand Duke's portraitist: Cosimo III de' Medici and his Chamber of paintings by Giusto Sustermans*, Sillabe, Livorno, 2006.

given by Philip IV or the archducal family of the Spanish Netherlands to which Van Dyck had close ties, especially after his return from Italy.<sup>50</sup> Spinola and his network present in the Spanish Netherlands, in Spain and in Genoa might have played a key role in the commissioning process.

It is possible that Van Dyck might not have been the first choice of painter for the *Charles V on Horseback*. After all, the most famous Flemish painter of the period was Rubens, but he was busy with a major commission, destined to the Luxembourg palace in Paris, containing a series of twenty-four paintings about the life of Marie de Medici, queen mother of the French King Louis XIII. Rubens was contacted during the summer of 1621 and, after long negotiations, he signed the contract with Marie de Medici on 26 February 1622.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, Van Dyck, the most brilliant disciple of Rubens, was probably given the commission for *Charles V on Horseback*. This might have been his first commission (or one of his first ones) for an equestrian portrait, as indicated by Susan J. Barnes. This possibility was not taken into account by Erik Larsen in 1988 when he wrote that

This is a work that demands great prudence in the attribution. The execution is rather weak, as well as the colors, as already stated in reservations that go back to the eighteenth century. [...] The rather mediocre state of preservation of the Uffizi painting stands in the way of a final judgment, but in spite of its comparative fame, the chances of its being an authentic Van Dyck are, in my opinion, slim. It lacks quality, especially when compared to the previously mentioned equestrian portraits; and one should not allow iconographic data to take precedence over the requisite level of craftsmanship and execution.<sup>52</sup>

Firstly, if one can judge the “execution” weak, it is maybe because of the fact that this might have been the first equestrian portrait done by Van Dyck and that the other portraits of the Genoese period were done later. This chronology seems to be similar to that of Rubens approximately fifteen years earlier. As Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen notices, Rubens was commissioned in 1603 to paint the equestrian portrait of the Duke of Lerma and only received commissions for equestrian portraits of Genoese patricians later, in 1607, when he was already considered as the “official painter” of the Duke.<sup>53</sup> The latter’s equestrian portrait is significant not only in the chronology of Rubens’s equestrian paintings, but, as we have seen, among Van Dyck’s inspirations for the *Charles V on Horseback*.

50. MATÍAS DÍAZ PADRÓN: *Van Dyck en España*, Editorial Prensa Ibérica, Barcelona, 2012, p. 23-32.

51. JACQUES FOUCART, JACQUES THUILLIER: *Rubens, la galerie Médicis au palais de Luxembourg*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1969, p. 98. ALEXIS MERLE DU BOURG: *Peter Paul Rubens et la France (1600-1640)*, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, Villeneuve d’Ascq, 2004, p. 27. JEAN-FRANÇOIS DUBOST: *Marie de Médicis. La reine dévoilée*, Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2009, p. 655. SARA GALLETTI: “Rubens et la Vie de Marie de Médicis, 1622-1625”, in Dominique Jacquot (ed.): *Rubens. Portraits princiers*, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux – Grand Palais, Paris, 2017, pp. 16-37.

52. E. LARSEN: *The paintings of Anthony van Dyck*, t. I, p. 218.

53. NADEIJE LANEYRIE-DAGEN: “Notre inventif Rubens’ : Invention et codification dans le portrait d’apparat rubénien”, in DOMINIQUE JACQUOT (ed.): *Rubens. Portraits princiers*, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux – Grand Palais, Paris, 2017, p. 55.

Secondly, Larsen speaks about “reservations” in plural, while the only judgment that he quotes from the 18<sup>th</sup> century is about only one precise “reservation”: the French engraver Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715-1790) wrote that, in Florence, “a portrait of Charles V, on horseback, by Van Dyck can be seen; this painting is not very beautiful and the horse is of a feeble color”<sup>54</sup>

Thirdly, the “rather mediocre state of preservation” is a surprising remark because, according to the Uffizi Gallery’s catalogue, the painting was restored in 1986, two years before the publication of Larsen’s book.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, Larsen’s opinion is based on a comparison between the equestrian portraits that Van Dyck painted in Genoa, but he does not explain the differences that set apart the *Charles V on Horseback*: this painting is not only the unique attested posthumous equestrian portrait done by Van Dyck in Genoa, but also one of the few portraits of a ruler that he produced at the beginning of the 1620s. This portrait that symbolizes “the dream of world hegemony” according to Matías Díaz Padrón was not the only representation of Charles V that accompanied Van Dyck from the beginning: in Antwerp, at the entry of the house of Cornelis van der Geest (1575-1638), a wealthy patrician who funded art and had a large collection of paintings, a bust of Charles V welcomed artists and presided over their meetings.<sup>56</sup>

From an artistic point of view, the legacy of the *Charles V on Horseback* can perhaps be found in a famous equestrian portrait done by the painter a decade later. In a much less dramatic environment but with a similar seashore and a similar cloudy sky, the figure of the King of England recalls that of the Habsburg Emperor in Van Dyck’s *Charles I on Horseback with M. de Saint-Antoine* (1633) and this resemblance – never before mentioned in Van Dyck-related studies to the best of this author’s knowledge – might confirm that Van Dyck is behind both paintings, whether the work was done by the artist himself or by his workshop under his direction. Christopher Brown writes that “there seems little doubt that in his patronage of Van Dyck Charles I was consciously emulating Charles V’s patronage of Titian and that he saw in his Flemish court painter Titian *redivivus*”<sup>57</sup> Between the 1620s and the 1630s, the nature of imperial imagery had evolved, and Van Dyck’s long-standing artistic ambition of rivaling Titan had been realized. The painter’s equestrian portraits were at the heart of this double metamorphosis.

54. CHARLES-NICOLAS COCHIN: *Voyage d’Italie ou Recueil de notes sur les ouvrages de peinture et de sculpture, qu’on voit dans les principales villes d’Italie*, Antoine Jombert, Paris, 1758, t. II, p. 19: “On voit un portrait de Charles-Quint, à cheval, par Van Dyck: il n’est pas fort beau, et le cheval est d’une couleur foible”.

55. G. FOSSI: *The Uffizi Gallery*, p. 282.

56. M. D. PADRÓN: *Van Dyck en España*, p. 23.

57. CHRISTOPHER BROWN: “Van Dyck’s Pembroke Family Portrait: An Inquiry into Its Italian Sources”, in ARTHUR K. WHEELOCK, SUSAN J. BARNES, JULIUS S. HELD (ed.): *Van Dyck, Paintings*, National Gallery of Art (Washington) in association with Thames and Hudson, London, 1991, p. 41.

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