

Appendix: The Discovery of the Missing Portrait of Mancio Itō, one of the Japanese Ambassadors

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Before the advent of the internet, in the ‘analogue’ age of research, it took a great deal effort, both mental and physical, to conduct research. Sir Keith Thomas, a self-confessed ‘analogue’ researcher recently remarked, somewhat playfully: “The sad truth is that much of what it has taken me a lifetime to build up by painful accumulation can now be achieved by a moderately diligent student in the course of a morning.”¹ Sir Keith may remain an ‘analogue’ researcher, perhaps never having crossed the digital divide, but, unlike many ‘digital’ researchers, he is a great historian. Nevertheless, his stocktaking reminds us of what we can achieve quickly and with far less physical effort in the digital age than was the case in the analogue one.

I was reminded of this one Friday afternoon this spring when a colleague in Chuo University drew my attention to an article from the 22 March edition of the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, the Japanese equivalent of the *Financial Times*, about a newly discovered painting. The article was entitled ‘Shozōga Itarea-de hakken’ or ‘Discovery of a Portrait in Italy’. Much to my surprise, the portrait turned out to be that of Mancio Itō, one of the young Japanese who travelled to Europe 1582–90, the subject of my volume for the Hakluyt Society.²

We already know that during the boys’ visit to Venice, 26 June to 6 July 1585, the celebrated artist known as Tintoretto had been commissioned by the Venetian Senate to paint portraits of the four boys who made up the Japanese embassy. According to both Diogo de Mesquita, the boys’ Jesuit chaperone, writing to the Jesuit general, Claudio Aquaviva, on 6 July 1585, and the chronicler, Guido Gualtieri, the Senate intended that the portraits, together with appropriate inscriptions in Japanese and Italian, should be hung in the Doge’s Palace in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio. We also know from Carlo Ridolfi’s life of Tintoretto, published in 1642, that Ridolfi had seen the completed portrait of Mancio in the deceased painter’s studio, and, from Daniello Bartoli’s history of the Jesuits, that sketches of the other boys had been made. As for Mancio’s portrait, after Ridolfi’s sighting it was presumed to be no longer extant.³

¹ Hilary Mantel, ‘The Magic of Keith Thomas’, *The New York Review of Books*, 7 June 2012.

² Derek Massarella, ed., *Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth Century Europe*, Hakluyt Society, third series, vol. XXV, Farnham, 2012.

³ Yūki Ryōgo, ‘Atarashiku hakken shita Itō Manshio no nitsū no tegami’, *Nagasaki Dansō*, 67, 1983, p. 17; Guido Gualtieri, *Relationi Della Venuta De Gli Ambasciatori Giaponesià Roma, sino alla partitia di Lisbona*, Venice, 1586, Rome, pp. 125–6; Carlo Ridolfi, *Vita di Giacomo Robusti detto il Tintoretto, celebre pittore Cittadino Venetiano*, Venice, 1642, p. 89; Daniello Bartoli, *Dell’Historia della Compagnia di Giesu. Il Giappone. Seconda parte dell’Asia, libro primo*, Rome, 1660, repr. in *Dai Nihon Shiryō*, edited by the Historiographical Institute, the University of Tokyo, 1901–, XI:2, Tokyo, p. 64; Massarella, ed., *Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth Century Europe*, p. 360 n. 2.

My curiosity duly aroused by the newspaper article, I found a more detailed account of the discovery, and a better quality reproduction of Mancio's portrait, online.⁴ This article, from the Japanese daily newspaper, *the Yomiuri Shimbun*, mentioned Dr Paola Di Rico of the Trivulzio Foundation in Milan and an article she had written about the discovery. A quick Google search provided me with Dr Di Rico's e-mail address at the Foundation, and, by return of mail, she generously sent me, as an attachment, a copy of her article.⁵



Tintoretto, Portrait of Mancio Itō. Courtesy of Dr Paola Di Rico.

⁴Alas, the webpage (<http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/001132197>) is no longer available, a highly regrettable aspect of research in the digital age.

⁵*Aldèbaran. Storia dell'arte*, II, 2014, pp. 1–6. I am extremely grateful to Dr Di Rico for sending me her article, from which I draw heavily in what follows, and for securing permission to reproduce the portrait itself.

In the article, Dr Di Rico mentions that the portrait, the dimensions of which are 430 mm x 540 mm, is now in the possession of a long-established Lombardian family which prefers to remain anonymous. The inscription on the back of the portrait says ‘D. Mansio Nipote del Re di Figenga Amb.^e Fra.^{co} Bvgnocingva a sva Sana’ (Don Mancio, nephew of the King of Hizen, Ambassador of Francis Lord of Bungo to His Holiness). Dr Di Rico points out that artist is not in fact Tintoretto but his son, Domenico, and that the overlarge ruff, not in keeping with the dimensions of the painting, was superimposed over a less showy one, reflecting early-seventeenth century taste, presumably to make the portrait more marketable.

The portrait had remained in the possession Domenico Tintoretto’s heirs. In 1678, however, Antonio Saurer, acting as agent for the Spanish statesman and renowned art collector, Gaspar de Haro y Guzmán, Seventh Marques of Carpio, then ambassador to Rome, inspected the Tintoretto studio in Venice, which he found in a sorry state, and made arrangements to purchase the remaining paintings. According to a list he drew up on 24 December, these included Mancio’s portrait. As a result, the portrait passed into one of the most important European art collections of the seventeenth century.

After the marques’s death in 1687, his daughter had to put up the collection for sale to pay off debts. Coincidentally, one of the individuals who snapped up some of the items in the collection, but not Mancio’s portrait, was Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna, Grand Constable of Naples, whose ancestor, Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, had met the Japanese ambassadors.⁶ Among Carpio’s creditors was the Florentine banker, Giovanni Francesco del Rosso, who acquired some of the objects in the collection. In turn, Rosso had to dispose of some of the artwork, including Mancio’s portrait, to satisfy some of his bank’s creditors. Among the latter was the Florentine gallery, Rinuccini. A catalogue of the gallery, published in 1845, includes the Mancio painting, described as “an unknown painting by Domenico Tintoretto”. Following the death of the last proprietor, Pierfrancesco Rincuccini, Mancio’s portrait passed into the hands of the present owner where, until recently, it has remained, unknown to scholars and the wider public.

While I am extremely happy that the portrait has resurfaced to the public view after more than three centuries in obscurity, I feel somewhat dejected that its re-emergence did not happen sooner, not least because its handsome features, which are in no way ‘Orientalist’, would have made an excellent frontispiece in my Hakluyt Society volume!

⁶ Leticia de Frutos Sastre, ‘Galerías de ficción. Mercado de arte y de prestigio entre dos príncipes: El VII Marqués del Carpio y el Condestable Colonna’, *Tiempos Modernos*, 14:2, 2006, pp. 1–20; Massarella, ed., *Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth Century Europe*, p. 383.