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Jacopo and Domenico Tintoretto as Draftsmen : Some Debatable Works from circa 1580–1600

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Today my topic is a “father and son” in a typical family workshop of artists in Renaissance Venice: the old genius and his faithful heir around the time of his succession to the family headship. In 1580, Jacopo Tintoretto (1518/19–94) was slightly more than sixty years old, and the son Domenico (1560–1635) was twenty. Around that time, Domenico began to make his presence felt in the vast production of the father's workshop. The personal characters of father and son seem to have been rather different. While the father was characterized by the biographer Giorgio Vasari as “resolute, extravagant, most terrible brain” etc.,¹ Domenico is described, by the biographer Carlo Ridolfi, as quite fond of literary study, and seems to have been rather an introvert by nature.²

Ridolfi knew Domenico personally. He wrote that Domenico was born to such a fine father and he could have aspired to great success by following his father's path. In fact, according to Ridolfi, “the works Domenico did in his youth gave everyone grounds for admiration”, but his evaluation of Domenico's later works was rather negative. “But disdainful to continue on the true path, he strayed from his father's manner”.³ In the end, for Ridolfi, Domenico was an unworthy heir to such a father. Indeed, the life of a son of a great father is not easy.

What were their artistic personalities, particularly as draftsmen? I am afraid this slide might appear as something like a bad joke (figs. 1, 2). Of course, I do not intend to speak of any “influence” between the two artists. The left image is one page from a printed pattern book published by the Japanese Edo period artist Katsushika Hokusai. I wanted to show you that Hokusai was a passionate draftsman who delighted in



fig. 1 After Katsushika Hokusai, *Archers*, page from *Hokusai Manga* (*Hokusai's Sketches*), woodcut, published 1814–78



fig. 2 Jacopo Tintoretto, *Archer*, early 1580s, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence (hereafter GDSU), 12968 F

observing and drawing the infinite variety of actions and movements of the human body. Certainly, the same was true with Jacopo Tintoretto. Unfortunately, this special talent was not inherited by the son Domenico, whose repertoire of human figures is much more limited than his father's. The difference is fundamental, especially when we compare their drawings of human figures.

As was suggested by Ridolfi, during Jacopo's lifetime, that is, until 1594, Domenico was a faithful assistant to his father. The amount of his contribution to various commissions undertaken by the father from around 1580 is truly impressive. In this respect, the important basis of our knowledge was provided by the catalogue compiled by Prof. Paola Rossi in her monograph of 1982, where she listed many of Domenico's early works which had often been regarded as Jacopo's late works.⁴ Today we are fairly accustomed to distinguishing the young son's style of execution from that of the father. In the case of this *Circumcision* in the ground floor room of the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice, we can note Domenico's relatively dull execution, compared with the father's inspired brush in other works of the same cycle.

But there are also works that are harder to judge. This is the *Finding of Moses* in the Metropolitan Museum (fig. 3), now exhibited in the Museum's gallery. It is generally accepted as Jacopo's work from around 1570, but some scholars, Rossi among others, have considered it as by Domenico.⁵ The brushstrokes are fluent and the sort of stiffness which characterizes the San Rocco *Circumcision*, seems absent here. However, I also am inclined to regard the Metropolitan *Moses* as by Domenico. The painting's style may be compared with that of the *Allegory of Fidelity* in the Harvard Art Museums,⁶ which is surely by Domenico. Further, the man sketched in the left background of the Metropolitan painting (fig. 4) curiously resembles the figure type that appears in Domenico's later oil drawings (fig. 5). Probably we should remember that the young Domenico could adjust himself to his father's different painting styles, either his earlier realistic style of the 1560s or later highly painterly style of the 1580s.

Now I would like to turn to the questions of drawings by Jacopo and Domenico during the last fifteen years of Jacopo's lifetime. Needless to say, to distinguish between the late works of Jacopo and the early works of Domenico is a fundamental and rather complicated problem in our study of their drawings. This well-known, highly original oil drawing in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples (fig. 6), is now exhibited in the Tintoretto exhibition in Venice.⁷ It is



fig. 3 Probably Domenico Tintoretto, *Finding of Moses*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



fig. 4 Detail of fig. 3



fig. 5 Domenico Tintoretto, *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*, 1597-1601, The British Museum, London, 1907, 0717.87

preparatory for the large canvas depicting the battle scene on the Taro River which the Duke of Mantua commissioned from Jacopo. It is widely acknowledged that Jacopo largely left the execution of the canvases of this cycle to studio assistants, especially his young son Domenico. For this reason the question of the author of the Naples sketch has long been disputed. To cite only important recent critics, Rossi regarded it as Domenico, while Roger Rearick firmly supported Jacopo's authorship.⁸

Many examples of Domenico's oil drawings are known, especially those in the album in the British Museum's Print Room.⁹ On the other hand, no other oil drawing securely attributable to Jacopo is known. Obviously, the question is a difficult one, but, in the catalogue of the Venice show, I myself favored the father's authorship.¹⁰ My reasons are: first, the composition of this battle scene is well-organized, and I seriously doubt that the young Domenico could invent it. Second, the style of the Naples sketch does not really resemble Domenico's known oil drawings; Third, a recently published X-radiograph of Jacopo's altarpiece in London, *St. George and the Dragon* (fig. 7), remarkably resembles the depiction of the figures in the Naples drawing.

The comparison with the same X-radiograph may also be valid with another oil sketch, now in Braunschweig, representing an episode of Pompeius (fig. 8).¹¹ This sketch has also often been assigned to Domenico, but the manner in which simple brush strokes were used to construct forms looks quite similar to the brushwork in the X-radiograph, so I think the attribution to Jacopo may be justifiable.

Let us compare the Naples sketch with a known example of an early oil sketch by Domenico. The right image is Domenico's compositional study in oil, now in Oxford's Christ Church Gallery, for the *Stoning of St. Stephen* in San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice (fig. 9).¹² The same materials were used, but the two sketches look fundamentally different in style. The author of the Naples drawing seems to focus his attention



fig. 6 Jacopo Tintoretto, *Battle on the Taro River*, 1578–79, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples, 1031



fig. 7 Jacopo Tintoretto, *St. George and the Dragon*, c. 1553, detail of X-radiograph, The National Gallery, London



fig. 8 Jacopo Tintoretto (?), *The Return of Pompeius*, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, ZL V 5360



fig. 9 Domenico Tintoretto, *The Stoning of St. Stephen*, c. 1594, Christ Church Picture Gallery, Oxford, JBS 778

on the overall chiaroscuro effect of the composition, treating the forms boldly in terms of large masses. On the other hand, the author of the Oxford drawing fails to create a dramatic contrast of light and dark in the entire composition, with his attention focused on the arrangement of each figure's position. It is rather difficult to consider that both of these sheets were drawn by one and the same artist.

When we consider the chronology of Domenico's oil drawings, the Christ Church sheet is very important since it can be dated more or less precisely. It was drawn around the year 1594, that is, the year of Jacopo's death. In fact, so far as I know, there seems to be no other securely datable oil drawing by Domenico prior to this sheet. It is possible that in the 1580s, he preferred to make compositional studies with pen and wash, as is the case with this drawing, a compositional study for *St. Jerome in Penitence*, in the Uffizi Gallery.¹³

Incidentally, the Christ Church sheet is useful in determining approximate dates of some other early oil sketches by Domenico. For example, the enigmatic composition, possibly the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, in the British Museum (fig. 10)¹⁴ may reasonably be dated to around the same date, that is, mid-1590s, as the two drawings share the same characteristics: simple monochrome in black, white and ochre, and the brushwork's somewhat forced vehemence. I believe this sheet is the earliest among the oil drawings in the London album. On the other hand, the last one seems to be this *St. John the Baptist* (fig. 11)¹⁵, a fragment of the originally larger sheet depicting the Baptism of Christ. Its drawing style is very close to the Princeton University sketch, compositional study for *Venice Supplicating the Virgin for the Cessation of the Plague*,¹⁶ which can be dated precisely to 1630–1631. The two drawings should be more or less contemporary. Consequently, the chronological range of the British Museum album covers at least about thirty-five years.

Domenico's oil drawings survive in good number, while the Naples sketch (and perhaps also the Braunschweig sketch) is an almost unique example by Jacopo. But I believe the Naples sheet is eloquent testimony that the origin of Domenico's later practice was this kind of sketch on paper by Jacopo around 1580, the time of the son's coming-of-age.

The next question I would like to touch on today regards figure drawings by the old Jacopo and the young Domenico. During the preparation of the catalogue for the Venice and Washington exhibition, I discussed several related issues with Bob Echols and Frederick Ilchman via email. Among others, one fundamental question was: which is the chronologically last example among Jacopo's known drawings. In Paola Rossi's standard catalogue of Jacopo drawings published in 1975, the last item among the authentic works is the drawing in Rotterdam (fig. 12), preparatory for the figure of Judas in the famous *Last Supper* in the Church of San Giorgio Maggiore.¹⁷ The painting is justly famous as one of Jacopo's last masterpieces, with its highly original composition and the mystic atmosphere evoked by bold light effects. So, I had been convinced that, albeit Domenico's extensive participation in execution, the design of the composition was done by



fig. 10 Domenico Tintoretto, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (?), mid-1590s, The British Museum, London, 1907,0717.13



fig. 11 Domenico Tintoretto, *St. John the Baptist*, c. 1630, The British Museum, London, 1907,0717.01

Jacopo himself, and consequently, I had not doubted the authenticity of the Rotterdam drawing of Judas. However, somewhat urged by the discussion with Echols and Ilchman, I reconsidered the question, and soon I found that the Rotterdam drawing's style did not seem to fit in the reasonable sequence of Jacopo's late drawings.

Conversely, this drawing's style turned out to be extremely similar to a drawing of a standing nude in the Uffizi, undoubtedly by Domenico's hand (fig. 13).¹⁸ Looking at them side by side, it is hard to deny that the two studies were drawn by the same artist. Contour lines, forms of legs, abbreviated way of depicting hands, etc., every element shows the same idiosyncrasy. So, even the dates of execution must be quite close. The drawing of this standing man is a preparatory study for Domenico's extant painting, the *Triumph of David*,¹⁹ and another sheet in the Uffizi can be connected with the same painting.²⁰

If the Rotterdam *Judas* is to be excluded from Jacopo's works, how did Jacopo's last drawings look? We know several good authentic examples from the early 1580s, like the studies for the *Baptism of Christ* in San Silvestro, or for the *Votive Painting of Doge Alvise Mocenigo* in the Palazzo Ducale.²¹ However, we have almost no examples securely datable to the last decade of Jacopo's life, that is, after the mid-1580s. Apart from the Rotterdam *Judas*, the group of drawings located at the end of Rossi's catalogue have a distinct character. This study for the *Flagellation of Christ* (fig. 14)²² is a good example: it looks rather awkward, with discontinuous outlines and rugged modelling. It would be reasonable to consider that this change of style reflected Jacopo's advanced age, either a sort of nonchalance or technical downfall.



fig. 12 Domenico Tintoretto, *Seated Man*, 1592–94, Boijmans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, 175 recto

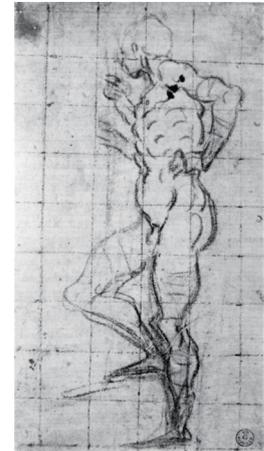


fig. 13 Domenico Tintoretto, *Standing Male Nude*, mid-1590s, GDSU, 12971 F



fig. 14 Jacopo Tintoretto, *Standing Male Nude*, late 1580s, GDSU, 12952 F recto

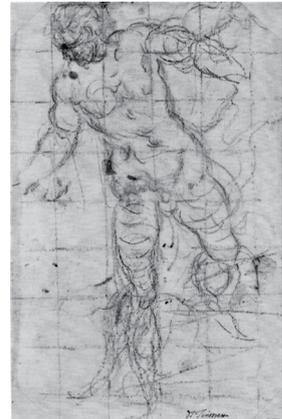


fig. 15 Domenico Tintoretto, *Standing Male Nude*, c. 1590, GDSU, 12952 F verso



fig. 16 Domenico Tintoretto, *Two Nude Figures*, early 1590s, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 2252

Interestingly, another figure is drawn on the verso of this sheet (fig. 15). Partially tracing the image on the recto, the draftsman creates another pose, changing the positions of arms and legs. Stylistically, it is obvious that the figures on the recto and the verso are not by the same artist, and I believe the verso image was by Domenico.²³ The verso drawing seems to attest that in this sheet Domenico did not imitate the “rugged” style of Jacopo’s last years. Rather, it shows nervously waving, repetitive contour lines and a certain indecisiveness of leg positions. The same characteristics can be observed in a study of two figures (perhaps Samson and Delila) in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (fig. 16).²⁴

Jacopo’s last style may be observed also in the well-known study in the Uffizi (fig. 17),²⁵ often connected to the figure of St. Christopher in the *Paradise* composition. The upper body of the drawn figure corresponds well with St. Christopher in the beautiful modello in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (fig. 18). The drawing style is not dissimilar with other studies from c. 1582, but looks less refined, and probably the sheet may be from a somewhat later date.²⁶ On the other hand, Domenico’s similar figure (fig. 15) is closer to the same saint in the final canvas in the Palazzo Ducale (fig. 19).

Another example: this sheet in the Uffizi (fig. 20)²⁷ shows again the typically “rugged” style of Jacopo’s last years. Although the form does not correspond exactly, it is tempting to connect it with the ceiling canvas in the Sala del Senato in the Palazzo Ducale, *The Triumph of Venice* (fig. 21). The painting was executed after 1587 by Jacopo’s workshop, mainly by Domenico, but the drawing may possibly represent Jacopo’s style in the late 1580s. Another drawing, now in Naples, depicting a man from behind (fig. 22),²⁸ can certainly be connected to the same painting (fig. 23). It has been generally attributed to Domenico,²⁹ but, I believe, the judgement is not an easy one. Juxtaposing these two images (figs. 20 and 22), we may well have the impression that the author would be one and the same, that is, the old Jacopo.

In the stylistic change of Jacopo’s drawings from the mid-1570s to the late 1580s, the contour lines become gradually harsh and stiff, but generally, the sound understanding of bodily structure and the convincing suggestion of three-dimensional movement are conserved.

Needless to say, it is not an easy task to distinguish the son’s hand from that of the father’s, especially during the period when they were in close collaboration. After the father’s



fig. 17 Jacopo Tintoretto, *Standing Male Nude Holding a Lyre*, c. 1587–88, GDSU, 12972 F



fig. 18 Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Paradise* (modello), detail, c. 1588, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid



fig. 19 Domenico Tintoretto and workshop (execution), *The Paradise*, detail, 1588–92, Sala del Maggior Consiglio, Palazzo Ducale, Venice



fig. 20 Jacopo Tintoretto, *Standing Male Nude*, c. 1587–88, GDSU, 12946 F



fig. 21 Domenico Tintoretto and workshop (execution), *The Triumph of Venice*, detail, 1587–88, Sala del Senato, Palazzo Ducale, Venice

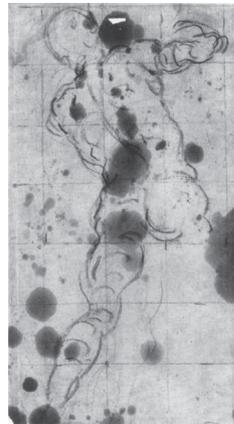


fig. 22 Jacopo or Domenico Tintoretto, *Standing Male Nude Seen from Behind*, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples, 0193



fig. 23 Domenico Tintoretto and workshop (execution), *The Triumph of Venice*, detail, 1587–88, Sala del Senato, Palazzo Ducale, Venice

death in 1594, Domenico's personal characteristics as draftsman became more visible. This study for the figure of Christ, now in the Harvard Art Museums (fig. 24),³⁰ was done by Domenico several years after Jacopo's death for an altarpiece now in the Galleria Estense in Modena, datable to 1597–1601. Traditionally, Domenico's figure drawings have often been described as "realistic" in contrast to Jacopo's "abstract" style.³¹ But in this case, this characterization does not seem to be very useful. The technical type was inherited from Jacopo's examples, but Domenico's individual characteristics are revealed in the weakness of the body's three-dimensional structure and the curious indecisiveness of the leg positions. With the figures 15, 12, 13 and 24 we have traced the stylistic changes of the draftsman Domenico from the late 1580s up to around 1600. In any case, the young Domenico's drawing style still needs to be better clarified and defined.

The late Prof. Roger Rearick, such a great expert of Venetian drawing, considered this Rotterdam drawing (fig. 12) as Domenico's work, while he regarded this Uffizi drawing (fig. 13) as by Jacopo,³² although the two sheets share the same style. Perhaps the inconsistency of his attributions, I believe, simply shows the unstable state of our knowledge of the graphic production of the father and the son from this period of hectic collaboration. But our understanding of the young Domenico as draftsman will inevitably affect our understanding of the old Jacopo's last activities, and so, further clarification is required.



fig. 24 Domenico Tintoretto, *Standing Male Nude*, 1597–1601, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (MA), 1997.206

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Notes

- 1 G. Vasari, *Le vite*, ed. G. Milanesi, Florence, 1906, vol. 6, p. 587.
- 2 C. Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte*, ed. D. von Hadeln, Berlin, 1914–24, vol. 2, p. 262.
- 3 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 257.
- 4 P. Rossi, “Opere di incerta o erronea attribuzione”, in R. Pallucchini and P. Rossi, *Tintoretto. Le opera sacre e profane*, Milan, 1982, vol. 1, pp. 239–257.
- 5 Rossi, in Pallucchini and Rossi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 249, cat. no. A74.
- 6 Rossi, in Pallucchini and Rossi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 241–242, cat. no. A18.
- 7 Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, inv. no. 1031. See R. Echols and F. Ilchman (eds.), *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, exh. cat., Palazzo Ducale, Venice/ National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2018–19, p. 178, fig. 156.
- 8 P. Rossi, *I disegni di Jacopo Tintoretto*, Florence, 1975, p. 7, note 18; W. R. Rearick, in M. Laclotte, et al., *Le siècle de Titien. L'âge d'or de la peinture à Venise*, exh. cat., Grand Palais, Paris, 1993, pp. 587–588, no. 240.
- 9 H. Tietze and E. Tietze-Conrat, *The Drawings of the Venetian Painters in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, New York, 1944, pp. 263–266, no. 1526, 1–90.
- 10 M. Koshikawa, “Draftsman”, in Echols and Ilchman, *op. cit.*, pp. 177–178.
- 11 C. von Heusinger, “Die Ölskizze auf Papier mit der Darstellung der Rückkehr des Pompeius von Tintoretto in Braunschweig”, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ölskizze vom 16. Bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, 1984, pp. 35–44.
- 12 Inv. no. JBS 778.
- 13 Uffizi, inv. no. 12928 F. See P. Rossi, “Disegni della bottega di Jacopo Tintoretto”, *Arte Veneta*, vol. 68, 2011, p. 84, fig. 54.
- 14 British Museum, inv. no. 1907,0717.13.
- 15 British Museum, inv. no. 1907,0717.01.
- 16 Princeton University Art Museum, inv. no. Gibbons 686. See M. Koshikawa, “I disegni di Domenico Tintoretto: un contributo”, *Arte Veneta*, vol. 48, 1996, p. 66, fig. 22.
- 17 Inv. no. I 75. See Rossi, *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 53.
- 18 Inv. no. 12971 F.
- 19 See P. Rossi, “Per il catalogo tintoretiano”, in P. Rossi and L. Puppi (eds.), *Jacopo Tintoretto nel quarto Centenario della morte. Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi*, Padua, 1996, pp. 119–120; M. Koshikawa, “Drawings by Domenico Tintoretto in the Uffizi: Notes for a Catalogue Update”, *Aspects of Problems in Western Art History*, vol. 11, 2013, pp. 32–33.
- 20 Inv. no. 12979 F.
- 21 Uffizi, inv. nos. 7476 S, 12943 F, 12961 F.
- 22 Uffizi, inv. no. 12952 F. See Rossi, *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 26.
- 23 Rossi is of the same opinion. See the reference in the previous note.
- 24 Inv. no. 2252. See D. Scrase, *Italian Drawings at The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 640–641, no. 685 (as by Jacopo); M. Koshikawa, *op. cit.*, 1996, p. 61 (as by Domenico).
- 25 Inv. no. 12972 F. See Rossi, *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 30.
- 26 Rearick thought that the sheet was originally intended as a preparatory study for the figure of Apollo in *The Triumph of Venice* in the Sala del Senato in Palazzo Ducale, as the figure holds a lyre. See W. R. Rearick, *Il disegno veneziano del Cinquecento*, Milan, 2001, p. 228, note 252; J. Marciari, *Drawings in Tintoretto's Venice*, exh. cat., The Morgan Library & Museum/ The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2018, pp. 133–134. If this is the case, the drawing should be dated to c. 1587–88.
- 27 Inv. no. 12946 F. See Rossi, *op. cit.*, 1975, pp. 24–25.
- 28 Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, inv. no. 0193.
- 29 Tietze and Tietze-Conrat, *op. cit.*, p. 266, no. 1533 (as by Domenico); Rearick, *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 228, note 252 (as by Domenico).
- 30 Inv. no. 1997.206.
- 31 Tietze and Tietze-Conrat, *op. cit.*, pp. 257, 269.
- 32 Rearick, *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 204; p. 229, note 252.

Illustration sources

Rossi 1975 (figs. 2, 12, 14, 17, 20); The Metropolitan Museum of Art (figs. 3, 4); The British Museum (figs. 5, 10, 11); Echols and Ilchman 2018 (figs. 6, 7, 18); Christ Church Picture Gallery (fig. 9); Fitzwilliam Museum (fig. 16); Pallucchini and Rossi 1982 (figs. 19, 21, 23); Museo di Capodimonte (fig. 22); Marciari 2018 (fig. 24).