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Portrait of Sultan Murad II (1404-1451)

Italy, 16th century

Oil on panel

64cm high, 48.5 cm wide (framed dimensions)

Stock no.: A5699

Provenance: From a European private collection where it was since at least the end of the nineteenth century.

This portrait of Sultan Murad II is a 16th-century copy of a portrait in the famous Giovio series of 'Illustrious Men'. Giovio's collection was made up of portraits by different artists copied from second-hand sources: existing portraits, death masks, medals.¹ Each painting was accompanied by a biography and modelled on Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* (*On Illustrious Men*). Amongst the 484 portraits of kings, generals, artists, and popes, were eleven portraits of Ottoman sultans.² Each portrait was given a number within the series. Murad II was number 23, which is also stamped on the back of the frame.³

Several sets of copies of the Giovio series were made in the 16th century. The most famous of these are the paintings by Cristofano dell'Altissimo commissioned by Cosimo I de' Medici in 1552. Between July 1552 and October 1556, Cristofano dell'Altissimo sent an average of 25 portraits per year to Florence, where they were hung in the Palazzo Vecchio in a room called the Guardaroba or Mappamondo, set up by the art historian Giorgio Vasari as a place to collect human knowledge.⁴

Other sets were made for Cardinal Federico Borromeo, now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan, and for Donna Ippolita Gonzaga by Bernardino Campi, now lost.⁵ A set of miniature copies was made for the Habsburg duke Ferdinand II between 1578 and 1599 to hang in the Schloss Ambras in Innsbruck.

(now housed in the Kunsthistorische Museum of Vienna).⁶ In the 17th century, the Uffizi copies were themselves copied for the Petite Galerie of the Louvre.⁷

At least two other versions of this portrait of Murad II are known. A version by Cristofano dell'Altissimo is in the Uffizi Gallery (no. [00290331](#)). Another version, which belongs to a series called the Newbattle Turks after the Scottish stately home where the collection was kept since the 17th century, is now in the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia.⁸ It is unknown, however, who commissioned this portrait. The depiction of Murad in the present portrait is strikingly similar to both the Uffizi and IAMM versions, distinguished only by the use of more vibrant colours. It is tempting to think that Cristofano himself painted all three versions. However, the difference in the Latin inscriptions – *Amurathes II* (Uffizi), *Amurates II Wernesii Acievictur* (IAMM), *Amurates II Acie Vict(o)r* (present portrait) – suggests a different hand for each.

[1] Lorne, Campbell. *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. p. 190.

[2] Le Thiec, Guy. 'L'entrée des Grands Turcs dans le Museo de Paolo Giovio', *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* (1992), pp. 781-830; p. 781.

[3] The numbers are recorded in Bruno Fasola's 'Per un nuovo catalogo della collezione gioviana', *Paolo Giovio, il Rinascimento e la Memoria*. Proceedings of the Raccolta Storica Conference 3-5 June 1983 17. Como: La Società a Villa Gallia, 1985. pp. 169-180.

[4] 'Ritratto di Murad II', *Le Gallerie degli Uffizi*, retrieved 07/10/2024 from <https://catalogo.uffizi.it/it/29/ricerca/detailiccd/1187779/>

[5] Sharples, Joseph. 'Cardinal Ippolito d'Este', *National Inventory of Continental European Paintings* (University of Glasgow), retrieved on 07/10/2024 via <https://www.vads.ac.uk/digital/collection/NIRP>

[6] See Kenner, F. 'Die Porträtsammlung des Erzherzogs Ferdinand von Tirol', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 14 (1893).

[7] Lalanne, L. 'Inventaire des tableaux et des autres curiosités qui se trouvaient au Louvre en 1603', *Archives de l'art français* 5 (1853-5), pp. 49-60.

[8] Published in de Guise, Lucien (ed.). *Orientalist Painting: Mirror or Mirage*. Kuala Lumpur: IAMM, 2022. p. 17.