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Twelve Caesars' Representations from Titian to the End of 17th Century: Military Triumph Images of the Spanish Monarchy

Titian's Twelve Caesars, in the 16th century, in the Ducal Palace of Mantua

In 1536 Federico Gonzaga commissioned Titian to paint the series of *Eleven Caesars* for the *Gabinetto dei Cesari*, part of a suite of rooms in the Ducal Palace in Mantua that he intended should be decorated with themes from ancient history¹. The series consisted of eleven three-quarter-length portraits: representations of Julius Caesar and the first ten Roman emperors. The twelfth Caesar, Domitian, was added in 1562 by Bernardino Campi [20, pp. 43–47, 235–240].

In addition to these paintings of *Eleven Caesars* by Titian, which are now lost but that we know from the series of engravings by Aegidius Sadeler (Ill. 110), and from Ippolito Andreasi's drawings, the decoration in the *Gabinetto* included stucco work on the lower part of its walls, in addition to frescoes by Giulio Romano, also known from Andreasi's drawings. This had a decorative function, of course, but it also provided a good complementary framework to the classical image of the *Twelve Caesars* [4, pp. 131–135].

Titian's Caesars represents a new twist to the reinterpretation of the subjects of classical antiquity [4, pp.127–128]. Firstly, this was a new archaeological and heroic interpretation of Roman Antiquity, based on ancient medals and busts [5, p. 187]. Secondly, inspiration was not now drawn from a poetic text — as was usual in Renaissance paintings of classical themes — but from one of the most important sources of Roman History: Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. In this literary work, which was widely published and enjoyed considerable popularity during the Renaissance period, the author presents the characters in a realistic framework, often not exempt from roughness, instead of idealizing them.

These paintings also reveal the change in the contemporary approach to the representation of the image of power, a change that Titian revealed in his portraits. During these years, the artist carried out his first portrait of Charles V² and that of Francesco II della Rovere, among others. Both paintings show the characters portrayed in full armour and in a three-quarter-length format. As a result, we have an image that depicts the modern ruler in a more classical, powerful, heroic and triumphant way. These portraits represent the first codification of the

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² The portrait of *Charles V with Drawn Sword* is known through Rubens' copy and two prints, one by Pieter de Jode and the other one by Lucas Vosterman.

image of the modern warrior in Titian's career; his *Twelve Caesars* series would follow this model, and the influence of this model would still be felt during the 17th century.

The new location of Titian's *Twelve Caesars*, in the 17th century, in the Royal Palace in Madrid and the new interpretation of the work, in its new context

From Mantua Titian's *Twelve Caesars* series was bought by Charles I of England, and after his death, during the Commonwealth Sale (1649–1652) it was purchased by the Spanish Ambassador, Alonso de Cardenas, for Don Luis de Haro, Marquis of Carpio and Chief Minister of Philip IV. Don Luis gave Titian's paintings to the Spanish monarch and so, finally, the series became part of the Spanish Royal collection, until they were destroyed by fire in 1734 [2, p. 98]. Thus, the second aspect to be analyzed is how to interpret the *Twelve Caesars* paintings in the space that they came to occupy at the old Alcázar in Madrid — the Spanish Royal Palace — from the time of their arrival from England, until their destruction.

After the arrival of Titian's *Twelve Caesars* in Spain, the paintings were hung in the old Alcázar of Madrid, specifically in the so-called *Galería del Mediodía* (South Gallery) because of its orientation. An analysis of the several inventories of the Alcázar, made during the 17th century — in 1636, 1666, 1686 and 1701–1703 — can provide us with valuable information about the new context in which these canvases were hung, and also enable us to read the images of the *Twelve Caesars* in conjunction with the other works of art that decorated the gallery, providing a new framework and interpretation which substantially differs from the original meaning of the Roman emperors images when they hung in the Ducal Palace in Mantua.

Thanks to the inventory of 1636, we know that the arrangement of the *Galería de Mediodía* before the arrival of Titian's series of paintings was very different from that presented after incorporating the series of the *Twelve Caesars*. In 1636, the gallery presented a decoration that was very far from reflecting the most innovative tastes of the moment: numerous portraits of the Spanish Royal family, twelve small paintings of the twelve months of the year, four paintings of the four elements and the four seasons, views of the Spanish Royal houses, scenes of war and hunting painted by artists of the Flemish School, some landscapes, and two paintings by Hieronymous Bosch [11, pp. 87–89]. This set of paintings, reflected in the 1636 inventory, highlights the fact that the *Galería de Mediodía*, an important element of the Royal apartments, had been poorly renovated, both in terms of theme and style.

However, the inventory of 1666 — the first extant documentary source that we have, after the arrival of the *Twelve Caesars* — reveals how the decorative programme of the *Galería de Mediodía* was completely renewed between 1636 and 1666, exactly coinciding with the arrival of Titian's paintings. In 1666, the 16th century Venetian school of painting and the portraiture genre dominated this gallery [15, pp. 41–44]. In fact, the *Galería de Mediodía* was also known at the time as *la Galería de Retratos* (the Portrait Gallery) [6, p. 134].

The twelve portraits of Roman emperors were hung in the upper part of the room, between the windows on the second level, on the north and south walls [1, pp. 149–150]. Besides the *Twelve Caesars*, other important paintings by Titian were exhibited: the portrait of Federico II Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua; Philip II in armour, Charles V, with a dog, beside his wife, the Empress Elisabeth; the Duchess of Alba; the portrait of Guidobaldo II della Rovere; a self-portrait

by Titian; and also some portraits by Tintoretto, among other works. Other paintings, principally portraits, completed the ensemble³.

Thus, the reinterpretation of the classic theme of Suetonius carried out by Titian in Mantua should be read, firstly, in its new location in the Alcázar of Madrid; and secondly, we should examine the relationship with contemporary artistic and political theory, that was germinating in the Hispanic context during the 17th century.

First of all, it is interesting to note how a relationship between the *Twelve Caesars* and the portraits of the Habsburg dynasty is established in the *Galería de Mediodía*. In fact, the reference to the Roman emperors became a constant in literary sources and figurative programmes commissioned by the Spanish Monarchy. Furthermore, this *paragone* was quite frequently imbued with a triumphalist and victorious message. In this regard, it has to be pointed out that, in the *Galería de Mediodía*, apart from the paintings mentioned above, there were also some ornaments, mainly sculptures and bas

relief medals, which reinforced the classical reference to Roman History in this gallery, and projected a clear triumphal note. Among other objects, two bas reliefs should be mentioned, that represented triumphs of Roman Emperors. These were placed under two porphyry heads, next to four white-marble medals [15, p. 44; 1, p. 159; 6, pp. 134–135].

The presence of marble medals brings us back, on the one hand, to the original idea that inspired Titian's particular conception of the *Twelve Caesars* canvases that he painted for Federico Gonzaga. On the other hand, the presence of several Roman Triumphs must be interpreted as an allusion to military victories, highly relevant not only to the Roman Emperors, but also to the Spanish monarchs represented in the same gallery.

This recovery and reinterpretation of the representation of the *Twelve Caesars* as an instrument for legitimating the Classical provenance of the Habsburg Dynasty is reinforced by the decorative programme displayed in the *Jardín de los Emperadores* (Garden of the Emperors) in the old Alcázar in Madrid, which was precisely located near the *Galería de Mediodía*. González-Dávila, in his literary depiction of the Alcázar, tells us that, next to a “beautiful gallery” (*Galería del Mediodía*) a garden was laid out, adorned with fountains and sculptures of Roman Emperors and a sculpture of Charles V [8, f. 310]. Once again, we are led to see the parallelism established between the images of the Classical rulers and the Habsburg monarchs.

The decoration of the *Galería de Mediodía*, in addition to the images of the *Twelve Caesars*, mainly consisted of portraits: outstanding men, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, portraits of artists, portraits of powerful rulers, and images of the Kings of the Habsburg Dynasty, such as



Fig. 1. Pedro Perret. Infante Don Carlos de Austria observes with devotion the image of Charles V. 1622. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

³ The account of paintings listed on the inventory of the *Galería de Mediodía* is basically the same in 1666, 1686 and 1701.

Charles V and Philip II, that should also be read in connection with the political ideas concerning the education of a Prince.

In 1640, Diego Saavedra Fajardo, a Spanish political theorist, published the emblem book entitled *Political Maxims. The Idea of a Christian Political Prince*, which is an essay about the education of a Prince. In the second political maxim, the author argues about the importance of the images displayed at the Palace for the education of a young Prince. To achieve these aims, Saavedra writes: “*At the Palace not only its living forms should be reformed, but also the “dead” ones, such as statues and paintings; though the chisel and the brush seem mute tongues, they persuade as much as the most fruitful ones*”⁴ [14, f. 12 r].

In the case of Saavedra’s second political maxim, this persuasive connotation is extended to the purely pedagogical value of the images in the education of the rulers, which is clearly stated by the theorist: “*In the palaces there must be no statue or painting that does not breed glorious emulation in the chest of the Prince. The brush writes on the canvas, the chisel on bronze and marble, the heroic deeds of his ancestors. The Prince must read them all the time, because such statues and paintings are fragments of history always present in the eye*” [14, f. 12 r].

In this way, Saavedra conceives the Prince, the most important user of the palace, as the main recipient and beholder of the images that decorate its walls, gardens, etc. Thereby, the important role played by images in encouraging emulation in young Princes became a commonplace in the political theory of the Spanish Modern Age.

Concerning the specific presence of images representing Roman Emperors in the Palace, and the imitation that they should inspire, one must also refer to the manuscript entitled *Treatise on the ancient sculptures* drawn up by Diego de Villalta [18]. In his prologue, Villalta points out that one of the most important legacies of the ancient Kings and Princes was the construction and ornamentation of magnificent buildings, partly in order to perpetuate their own memory and fame, and also to serve as models of excellence, so that their portraits and statues are also worth emulating [18, ff. 6 v.–10 r]. In addition, the clear parallel drawn between the Emperors and rulers of the Classical antiquity, and the monarchs of the Habsburg dynasty, becomes a constant [18, f. 14v., ff. 22r.–23v].

In summary, this view and interpretation relate exactly to the uses and functions of the images of the twelve Roman Emperors and the portraits hanging on the walls of the *Galería de Mediodía*. The best example to illustrate the acceptance of this idea is the engraving inserted in the book of Juan Antonio de Vera Zúñiga, entitled *Epitome of the life and deeds of the Emperor Charles V* (1622) [17]. In this engraving the Infante Don Carlos de Austria, the brother of King Philip IV, observes with devotion the image of Charles V, who is represented following exactly the model of the above-mentioned portrait of Charles V by Titian — and, by extension, of course, that of the *Twelve Caesars* — and where we read the moral inscription “*Virtute ex me*” (Fig. 1).

Representations of the *Twelve Caesars* as images of the military triumph of the Spanish Monarchy: the triumphal entries

Triumphal entries during the Modern Age have much to do with the appropriation of this classical commemorative tradition. Specifically with regard to the Spanish Monarchy, an ad-

⁴ Saavedra’s original text in Spanish has been translated into English for better understanding by the readers.

ditional appropriation of the ancient Roman tradition, through the reference to the images of the Twelve Caesars, would also become an image projection, during Royal triumphal entries, into the image of the Habsburg dynasty.

The *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi* (1625) displays the best example of this appropriation of the image of the *Twelve Caesars* in the context of triumphal entries. For this event, Rubens and his circle of collaborators deployed a monumental decorative appliance on the streets of the city of Antwerp.

The complete iconographic programme has been widely studied [10], so we will focus on the transformation of the image of the Twelve Caesars that came about in this re-enactment of triumphal entry, which resulted in the most spectacular decoration designed by Rubens: the Austrian Imperial Gate (*Porticus Caesareo-Austriaca*) (Ill. 109).

The gate was a hybrid structure, which involved an astonishing combination of a gallery of sculpture with a triumphal arch, the whole scenery crowned by an obelisk and twisted columns. Rubens laid out his gallery along a U-shaped plan and within the arches of the curved wings, which swept forward on either side; twelve gilt statues of Habsburg emperors were placed, over life-size, and carved in stone⁵.

This complex iconographic programme was designed by Rubens and originally devised by Jan Gaspar Gevartius, who was also responsible for drafting and describing the whole ceremony. His lengthy description of the work begins with the citation of a passage from Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, which he used as evidence to prove that such porticoes with statues existed in ancient Rome [7, p. 43]. Moreover, as P. Gorissen has shown, Gevartius had for some years been writing his own *Twelve Caesars*. This work was a glorification of the Habsburg Emperors from Rudolph I to Ferdinand II (precisely the sequence celebrated in the Portico of the Emperors). Thus, when Gevartius was commissioned by the City of Antwerp in May 1635 to prepare a volume commemorating the *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*, he took the opportunity to insert the twelve emperors in the text of his work [10, p. 107].

Representations of the *Twelve Caesars* in the collections of the Spanish nobility and the courtier class from the late 16th century to the end of 17th century

As Wethey has shown, paintings and sculptured busts of Roman Emperors enjoyed great popularity during the Modern Age [20, p. 43]. In fact, it is known that long before Titian's series came to Spain from England, Philip II, in the latter part of his reign, owned copies of the artist's *Twelve Caesars* at Mantua; further, the Spanish Monarchy's sculpture collection precisely began when five series of busts of the Roman Emperors arrived from Italy during the same period [16]. We will show below how the collecting practices and the taste of the Spanish monarchs for the representations of the *Twelve Caesars* was emulated by the Spanish nobility and also by the so-called "courtier class" of the time.

We should remember that the 17th century in Spain was, above all, an era that witnessed a fashion for collecting paintings, which eventually affected a wide range of Spaniards, from

⁵ As J. R. Martin has shown, for each of the emperors' statues Rubens prepared an oil sketch in grisaille to serve as a guide to the sculptor. Six of a set of twelve sketches are still extant: one in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford (the only sketch to preserve its original appearance) and five panels in the Hermitage, whose composition was altered by the addition of a painted niche and a pedestal with the emperor's name beneath.

the King, his nobles, and his ministers, down to relatively humble subjects. In this context, the tastes of the Spanish monarch and the paintings displayed in the Royal palaces would obviously and directly influence the tastes and collecting practices of the nobility.

With respect to the images of the *Twelve Caesars*, it is very likely that in the spread and general acceptance of this taste for representing the Twelve Roman Emperors, the engravings made by Aegidius Sadeler, after Titian's portraits of the *Twelve Caesars*, played a major role⁶ (Ill. 110).

Having consulted many inventories of contemporary art collections of the Spanish nobility, it is clearly an empirical fact that series representing the *Twelve Caesars* were very commonly included in collections of paintings throughout the 17th century. Unfortunately, as in the case of Titian's canvases, they have either not been preserved, or they are lost. It is important for us, however, that the surviving documentary evidence demonstrates that these series were remarkably popular and widespread.

As contemporary inventories confirm, *Twelve Caesars* paintings can be found in many remarkable collections of Spanish noblemen of the 17th century. Some of those members of the nobility, most of them military men who collected *Twelve Caesars* paintings in their collections, will be detailed here, in chronological order.

The case of Íñigo López de Mendoza, Duke of Infantado, should be mentioned first. In his inventory, drawn up in 1601, two large canvases portraying Emperors are itemized. Accompanying these paintings of Emperors, in the following entries of the inventory, we find two paintings depicting Roman triumphs [3, pp. 199–202]. Taking into account that this inventory recorded only the pictures sent from Rome to Guadalajara, by Cardinal Mendoza and the Duke of Feria, and some Italian pictures bought in Madrid, it seems quite plausible that the origin of both the Roman Emperors and the triumph canvases was Italy, and most probably Rome.

In addition to these two canvases portraying Emperors, a document dated in 1580 bears witness to the purchase, by Bartolomé Hernández, accountant of the Duke of Infantado, at an auction held at Guadalajara, of a set of Twelve Emperors paintings. These paintings had previously belonged to Pedro Osorio⁷. It appears quite probable that these canvases can be identified in the inventory of paintings made in Guadalajara at a later date, on November 19, 1624, with a first entry that records *Twelve Emperors*, and specifies that they belonged to *Don Yñigo* [3, p. 255].

The case of Don Rodrigo de Herrera, illegitimate son of the 1st Marquis of Auñón, is especially interesting because his post mortem inventory reveals an unusually high percentage of secular works, most of them representing classical subjects. The bulk of Herrera's picture collection was sold off at a public auction that began on December 6, 1641, and the set of 12 equestrian portraits of Emperors was bought by a distinguished Italian purchaser from Modena, Camilo Guidi, the Ambassador [3, pp. 361–362].

Don Diego Mexía Felípez de Guzmán, Marquis of Leganés, also possessed a set of Twelve Roman Emperors, in his vast collection of paintings [9, p. 303]. As listed in the inventory they were three-quarter-length portraits, so it seems reasonable to think that their compo-

⁶ This series consists of a dedication to Ferdinand II and twenty-four half-length portraits, printed two by two, man and wife on the same sheet or son and mother in the case of Otho and Albia Terentia.

⁷ Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Nobleza, Osuna, C. 1886, D. 11.

sition could have been inspired by Sadeler's engravings. The case of the Marquis of Leganés is particularly interesting, because the Marquis himself was portrayed by Rubens following the scheme of a Commander, which derives directly from Titian's *Francesco II della Rovere* and also had much to do, in terms of pictorial composition, with Titian's *Twelve Caesars* [19, p. 126].

As previously stated, the fashion for collecting series of paintings depicting the Twelve Caesars did not only affect the nobility but also affected the non-aristocratic and more modest collectors. The great success that these images of Twelve Caesars had among the relatively humble collectors is evident in the commissions for paintings on this theme to the Sevillian workshop of Francisco de Zurbarán. It is known, however, that the canvases belonging to this series that have been preserved were not inspired by Sadeler's engravings but by the Roman equestrian portraits of Stradanus and Tempesta [13, pp. 284–286].

Similar considerations apply to the sculptures of the Twelve Caesars collected by the nobility and the courtier class during the 17th century. Contemporary documents suggest that the majority of the sets of busts of the Twelve Emperors assembled in Spanish collections during the 17th century came from Italian sculpture workshops [12, pp. 147–148]. However, it must be pointed out here that it was generally the fate of these sculptured series in the Spanish collections, in contrast to the paintings which embellished the palatial walls, to be used as ornamentation for gardens⁸.

A good illustration of these Spanish sculpture-collecting practices is the letter that the Duke of Paganica sent from Rome, on June 26, 1689, to the Duke of Gandía, informing him that he had already met the sculptor Jerónimo Carmañoli, who was commissioned to carry out some marble heads representing ancient emperors⁹. Later the same year, in the last letter that refers to this commission, written on November 13, Juan Martínez comments that the artist is doing fine work on his sculptures of the *Twelve Caesars* and asks the Duke of Gandía for some money, to prepare the boxes for sending the works to Spain to decorate the Duke's garden¹⁰. Again, the Italian workshops were the origin of sculptures of Roman Emperors.

In conclusion, towards the end of the 16th century, the Spanish court begins to recover these images of the *Twelve Caesars* in order to illustrate the "heroic ideal". It has been demonstrated, that representations of Twelve Roman Emperors in the Spanish Royal collections were remarkably widespread. However, the original significance of Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* had by this time been reinterpreted: the Habsburgs transformed the representations of the *Twelve Caesars* into an instrument that would serve to legitimize the Classical provenance of the dynasty, as well as to project a great and noble image of its military triumphs.

Furthermore, we have seen the widespread popularity of these images of Classical Emperors, which became transformed, in more general terms, during the Spanish Golden Age, into the representation of the modern and triumphal warrior.

⁸ The fashion for collecting classical sculptures, and more specifically, busts of Roman Emperors to embellish gardens, was frequent not only in the Court of Madrid, but also in Seville, where distinguished noblemen such as the Duke of Alcalá displayed that kind of marbles in the gardens of their palaces.

⁹ AHN, Nobleza, Osuna, CT. 393, D. 9.

¹⁰ AHN, Nobleza, Osuna, CT. 113, D. 10.

Title. Twelve Caesars' Representations from Titian to the End of 17th Century: Military Triumph Images of the Spanish Monarchy.

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Abstract. This paper analyses the modern reinterpretation and the dissemination mechanisms of Titian's series of Twelve Caesars', from their arrival at the old Alcázar of Madrid to the end of 17th century. Firstly, those Twelve Caesars' representations that decorated palaces of the Spanish Monarchy, as well as the use of this iconography as a means of glorification of the Habsburg Emperors' triumphal entries are analyzed.

Then, this collecting practices and the taste of the Spanish monarchs for the representations of Twelve Caesars' would be emulated by the Spanish nobility of the time. The paper identifies representations of the Twelve Caesars in the inventories of contemporary art collections of the Spanish nobility and provides new documentary evidences relating to commissions of such series, as proofs of the remarkable diffusion reached by this classical Emperor's images, which were transformed during the Spanish Golden Age into representation of the modern warrior.

Keywords: the Twelve Caesars; Titian; Suetonius; military triumphs; Spanish Monarchy; art collecting.

Название статьи. Изображения «Двенадцати цезарей» от Тициана до конца XVII века: образы военного триумфа испанской монархии.

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Аннотация. В статье анализируется современная интерпретация серии картин «Двенадцать цезарей» кисти Тициана, история ее бытования и тиражирования после доставки в старый дворец Алькасар в Мадриде и до конца XVII в. В первую очередь автор уделяет внимание тем произведениям серии, которые украшали дворцы испанских монархов, а также — использованию иконографии цезарей для прославления династии Габсбургов, в том числе в оформлении триумфальных шествий.

В это время по примеру монархов, следуя их тяготению к изображениям «Двенадцати цезарей», подобную коллекционную деятельность стала практиковать и испанская аристократия. В статье публикуются выявленные автором в инвентарях художественных собраний, принадлежавших знатным лицам, сведения о произведениях, созданных на основе этой тициановской серии, и приводятся новые документальные свидетельства о заказах подобного рода, что объясняет необычайную распространенность классицизирующих изображений императоров, способствовавших постепенному сложению в течение Золотого века Испании изобразительного типа современного воина.

Ключевые слова: «Двенадцать цезарей»; Тициан; Светоний; военные триумфы; испанская монархия; коллекционирование произведений искусства.

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