THE EMPRESS ISABELLA, TITIAN AND GUILLIM SCROTS  
(Notes on the Flemish portrait of Isabella in Poznán)  
by Jan Bialostocki

Some years ago Wilhelm Suida published a portrait of the Empress Isabella of Portugal (Fig. 1)\(^1\), which is almost identical, as far as the general composition and the pose of the sitter is concerned, with the portrait of the same person in the National Museum in Poznán (Fig. 2 formerly in the Czartoryski Collection in Goluchów)\(^2\). Dr. Suida maintains that the very picture he publishes (which was formerly in the Gavet collection) was sent to Titian as a model for his portrait of the Empress, painted about five years after her premature death. The author says that in his (and Dr. W. R. Valentiner's) opinion the Gavet picture was painted by the little-known Flemish painter William Scrots (court painter to Mary of Hungary, Regent of the Netherlands). As the picture in Poznán is very similar to the presumed prototype of Titian, we might ask why the Gavet portrait (if one of both) and not the Poznán version should be regarded as having been sent to Titian.

The discussion of this question is therefore justified against the background of Isabella of Portugal's iconography in general. And, last but not least, one would like to know if Scrots\(^3\) actually is to be considered as the painter of the Gavet (and Poznán) portraits.

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According to the studies of Roblot-Delondre\(^4\), Georg Gronau\(^5\), Gustav Glück\(^6\), Hans Tietze\(^7\), Alfred Scharf\(^8\) and Theodor Hetzer\(^9\) it is possible to sum up the general discussion in the following terms:

Titian painted at least three portraits of Isabella, namely:
1. the well-known Prado portrait (Fig. 3);  
2. the lost portrait, known from the following sources:  
a. the replica, formerly in the collection of Mme Roblot-Delondre in Paris\(^10\);  
b. another replica, formerly in a private collection in Florence\(^11\) (Fig. 4);  
c. the engraving by P. de Jode (Fig. 5)\(^12\);  
3. the “double portrait”, showing the Empress Isabella and Charles V, known by the Rubens copy (detail Fig. 6; before the war in the F. Sabin coll. London)\(^13\).

With regard to the prototype sent by Charles V to Titian\(^14\) in June 1543, if we are to look for it among the existing, known pictures, two painters only could claim to be the authors of the model picture made after the living Empress: Jan Vermeyen and Jacob Seisengger. It cannot be proved that Scrots has ever been in Spain. All we know about him in connection with the Isabella portraits is that two effigies of the Empress by his hand were in the palace of Charles V in Brussels\(^15\) and in the collection of Mary of Hungary\(^16\). From this fact Glück drew the hardly convincing conclusion that one might believe in Scrots' Spanish journey\(^17\). But in an age when court portraits were in great vogue, is it really necessary to believe in a long journey of a painter because of his having painted two portraits of the sovereign residing in Madrid? I think this hypothesis is unproved, and still more uncertain is Suida’s assertion that Scrots “positively has been in Spain”.

Only two painters whose pictures are known to us were in Spain and painted the Empress from life. But Vermeyen’s fine and subtle portrait\(^18\) cannot be connected with the above-mentioned works of Titian. On the other hand, the pictures connected with
Seisenegger 19) have many points of contact with the portraits of the Venetian master. As far as the double portrait (formerly Sabin coll. London) is concerned, it has already been said, that Seisenegger’s picture served as a model for the figure of Isabella 20). In my opinion it is very likely that the picture painted by Seisenegger after the drawing taken from life, served as a model for all the portraits Titian ever made of the Empress Isabella 21). Seisenegger was twice in Spain and is said to have executed several portraits of the Empress 22). The replica in the “Münzsammlung” of the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum compared with the Prado picture shows many similarities in the general composition, costume, attitude and expression. It seems to me that this supposition becomes still more likely as it was precisely Seisenegger’s portrait that formerly served Titian as a model for his portrait of Charles V in the Prado 23). The prototype Titian used was altered by him in several ways. In the first version he gave it a rich and representative character (an effigy of the “living and ruling” Empress), in the second a more intimate, austere and contemplative, (an effigy of the “late Empress”, a “souvenir picture”). The second version of Titian’s portrait, known to us from replicas only, was more popular in the XVIth century as more appealing to the taste of mannerism and counter-reformation 24).

It is obvious that the Gavet picture, as well as the Poznán portrait depend on this second type of Isabella’s effigy, created by Titian — far from being its source. This is evident, if one compares these pictures with the authentic (or probably authentic) portraits of Isabella, those by Vermeyen, Seisenegger, and the sculpture by Jean Mone in the Gaasbeek Castle near Brussels 25). The Poznán portrait is distinctly the portrait of the dead Empress. Her mask-like, immobile face, treated with mannerist coldness, the sharp features contrasting with the pale, subtle modelling of the cheeks, the unseeing immobile staring eyes, the cold beauty of the head, all attests that we have before us a “picture-monument”; this is further accentuated by the high, stony parapet, which makes the model appear far removed and separated from the world.

The Gavet picture, very similar in attitude, is different in expression — more serene, with a delicate smile. Some details in the costume (“capigliara”) connecting the two pictures in a group slightly different from the others allow us to believe in the existence of still another version of Titian’s portrait, or an interpretation of it, different in details from those discussed above. This becomes still more plausible as an analogous portrait of Isabella, with the same attitude and exactly the same costume elements (“capigliara”), is found in the Recueil d’Arras, reproducing different portrait prototypes especially famous in the XVIth century 26).

It must be said that there is more resemblance between the Gavet portrait and the Arras drawing than between the latter and the Poznán picture: the alllongation of the face in Poznán is unmatched in any of Isabella’s portraits known to me (the Leoni