



FIG. 1. *The Molo, Venice, Looking West*, Luca Carlevaris, 1709, oil on canvas, $19\frac{7}{8} \times 47\frac{1}{8}$ in. (50.5 × 119.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.



FIG. 2. *View of the Molo*, Canaletto, ca. 1725, oil on canvas, $26\frac{1}{2} \times 32\frac{3}{4}$ in. (67.3 × 83.2 cm). Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, SC. After treatment (see also fig. 2, p. 188).

Canaletto Paints the Molo from the Ponte della Paglia

Katharine Baetjer

VIEW PAINTING FLOURISHED in eighteenth-century Venice. The period may be said to have begun in 1703 with the publication of Luca Carlevaris's compendium of engravings, *Le Fabriche, e Vedute di Venetia*, and to have ended in 1797 with the fall of the Venetian Republic.¹ The principal view painters belonged to three succeeding generations: the Udinese Carlevaris (1663–1730) was the eldest, while his principal successors and competitors were the Venetians Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal, 1697–1768), Canaletto's nephew Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780), and Francesco Guardi (1712–1793). All painted topographical and festival scenes and *capricci*—real and imaginary buildings and ruins, unrealistically combined. As Venice's own citizens had limited interest in paintings of their native city, success in this genre depended upon the patronage of Italians living outside the Venetian Republic and of visitors from north of the Alps, notably ambassadors to the Serenissima and also English gentlemen who completed their education with travel on the European continent, on the so-called Grand Tour.

Foreign patrons preferred easily recognizable subjects: the church and piazza of San Marco; the quays and harbor basin and the island church of San Giorgio Maggiore; the Grand Canal from the Dogana da Mar, or customs house, to San Simeone Piccolo (opposite the modern train station). Such views were painted as independent single canvases, pairs, groups of four, and larger sets. A popular motif was a bird's-eye view of the quay, or Molo, to the west with the arcaded pink-and-white patterned façade of the Palazzo Ducale, the seat of Venetian government, in steep perspective to the right. The subject was a favorite with both Carlevaris (fig. 1) and Canaletto (fig. 2). In both canvases the

Fonteghetto della Farina stands at the end of the Molo with, in succession, the Granai, or Public Granaries; the Zecca, or Mint; the Biblioteca Marciana, Sansovino's famous library; and the columns of Saints Theodore and Mark. On the other side of the opening of the Grand Canal is the Dogana, crowned by a statue of Fortune standing on a golden globe supported by Atlases. To the left lies the Giudecca Canal with the island of the Giudecca and Palladio's church of the Redentore, while to the right is Longhena's Santa Maria della Salute on the Grand Canal. In readiness for the doge, a galley with a striped awning is anchored at the Molo.

Canaletto, born in the parish of San Leo, came to public notice in the early 1720s when he was in his mid-twenties. The son of a theatrical scene painter, he had worked with his father in Rome before renouncing the theater to return to Venice, where he was registered in the local painters' guild in 1720.² His reputation was established by 1723, when the Giovanelli brothers commissioned from him two enormous *capricci* to decorate their villa at Noventa Padovana, on the Brenta Canal near Padua.³ Thereafter he was recommended—in preference to Carlevaris—to the Lucchese textile merchant Stefano Conti, for whom between August 1725 and June 1726 he painted four canvases representing the Rialto Bridge, the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, and the Grand Canal seen from the Rialto Bridge and from Santa Maria della Carità.⁴ Reporting what he described as a generally held opinion, Conti's agent in Venice, Alessandro Marchesini, famously remarked that the difference between the two artists lay in the fact that in Canaletto's works "*si vede lucer entro il sole*": this remark, variously translated, seems to suggest that Carlevaris's paintings present a more uniform sunlight, while Canaletto was better able to suggest the transitory nature of light effects. The 1720s—which encompassed Canaletto's maturation and his development of an early style characterized by vigorous handling and acute sensitivity to light and atmosphere—concern us here. Modern scholarship holds that by 1730 at the latest, his work had become brighter, tighter, and in general more in accord with visitors' perceptions of the city (fig. 3).



FIG. 3. *View of the Molo*, Canaletto, ca. 1730–35, oil on canvas, 44 1/2 × 63 1/4 in. (113 × 160.6 cm). El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, TX.

In 1933, Samuel H. Kress bought a painting by Canaletto representing *View of the Molo* (figs. 2, 5, and 6) from Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, the Florentine count who was his principal dealer.⁵ Mr. Kress lent the painting to the National Gallery of Art, Washington from 1941 until 1952, and in 1954 the Kress Foundation presented it to the Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina. The Columbia view of the Molo is probably to be identified with a picture consigned anonymously by the London firm Gurr Johns to Christie's, where it was sold as the property of a gentleman on June 12, 1931, as lot 59, "The Doge's Palace, Venice," measuring 26 × 32 1/4 in., for £ 483 to "Holland."⁶ Contini-Bonacossi often used an agent to buy Italian works on the London art market before World War II, and although the sale catalogue description is inadequate for purposes of identification, the correspondence in size (the Kress canvas measures 26 1/2 × 32 3/4 in.) is close and the proximate dates of the transactions are suggestive.

Roberto Longhi's opinion, inscribed on the reverse of a photograph of the picture in the Kress Archives, is dated "Roma 1933" and identifies "*questa magnifica veduta*" as a work of Canaletto's best (i.e. his early) period.⁷ The Kress Foundation then followed standard practice in soliciting additional written endorsements from William

Suida, in 1935, as well as from Giuseppe Fiocco, Raimond van Marle, and Adolfo Venturi.⁸ The picture was first published in the National Gallery of Art's 1941 *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture*, which included both gifts and loans to the Museum. The brief comment reflected the opinion of Canaletto expert and Boston Museum curator W.G. Constable: "Painted c. 1730. May be related in style to [the Conti pictures] . . . A version is in the Gallery of Turin."⁹

In a letter of March 17, 1954, responding to a request for further information from Suida, who by then was Kress Foundation curator of research, Constable reversed his earlier opinion:

This of all the Kress pictures is the one with which I am most familiar. After careful study and much hesitation, I've reluctantly come to the view that it is not by Canaletto and is probably a work of the earlier nineteenth century. This view is based mainly on the character of the brush work and the drawing . . . I have not been able to clear up one or two obscurities in the history. The picture is said to have come from Sir Francis Swan [typescript corrected in ink to read Ewan], London, but so far I have not managed to find anything about this collection. Moreover, there was a picture (which I have only seen in the photograph) sold in the Ashurst sale, Christie's, June 12, 1931, No. 59, which is apparently identical with the Kress picture. I'd be most grateful



FIG. 4. *View of the Molo*, after Canaletto, oil on canvas, 26 × 33 7/8 in. (66 × 86 cm). Galleria Sabauda, Turin, 1871.

for any information that could either make certain that the two paintings are the same or settle that they are in fact different.¹⁰

The various editions of the Canaletto oeuvre catalogue were prepared using annotated photographs and notes, information from which has been kindly supplied by Charles Beddington. What are apparently Constable's earliest comments on the Kress picture, made from a Witt Library photo mount on Courtauld Institute of Art stationery, indicate that at first he accepted the attribution in full. He also recorded the Ex (collection) as that of Sir Francis Ewan, London. Later, studying an image of the painting belonging to the Photo Library of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, he again concluded that it was an autograph early work. In January 1953, however, when he examined it with John Walker of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, he found both the architecture ("scratchy and thin") and the figures ("impressionist and sketchy") wanting. Walker agreed. Meanwhile, Constable seems always to have accepted the attribution to Canaletto of the Galleria Sabauda picture on the basis of the Anderson photograph, simply adding, without comment, the number 86 of the catalogue raisonné on the reverse.

Suida published a catalogue of the Kress Collection at Columbia, South Carolina in 1954, but Constable's letter of March 17 evidently came too late for inclusion.¹¹ However when, in 1962, Suida's successor Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi (the dealer's nephew) published an expanded volume, he had to take into account Constable's 1962 monograph. This he did in a note: "W. G. Constable in his recent book rejects the attribution to Canaletto and considers this painting 'perhaps by an early nineteenth-century imitator.' (!)"¹² He did not mention that it was listed as a variant of the painting in Turin. There the matter rested until 1973, when Fern Rusk Shapley, writing also for the Kress Foundation, opted for "Attributed to Canaletto."¹³ Shapley emphasized the connection with the version at the Galleria Sabauda (figs. 4, 7, and 8):



FIG. 5. *View of the Molo* (fig. 2), detail.



FIG. 6. *View of the Molo* (fig. 2), detail.



FIG. 7. *View of the Molo* (fig. 4), detail.



FIG. 8. *View of the Molo* (fig. 4), detail.

[In the Turin picture] the viewpoint, from the Ponte della Paglia, at the extreme right, is the same as in [the Columbia picture], and figures, boats, and even size of canvas correspond very closely. It would seem that one of the two paintings is a copy of the other, or that both are copies of a third, now lost. The unusual appearance of [the Columbia picture] under X-ray tends to support the opinion that this painting may be by a follower rather than by Canaletto himself.

Mario Modestini points out that Shapley was under some pressure from the Foundation not to follow Constable.¹⁴ She chose not to offer a definitive opinion as to the relative merits of the two canvases. It is curious, however, that she should have cited the evidence of the X-radiograph (see fig. 5, p. 191) of the Columbia picture as negative: what this shows is a major pentiment in the lower right, including a catenary curve which could be read as the edge of a partially lowered sail. The pentiment, together with the extension of the composition at the right edge, seems to me to support its primacy over that at the Galleria Sabauda. The Turin painting was bought in 1871 through Baron Sallier de la Tour, having belonged previously to a lawyer of the Martelli family of that city.¹⁵ It also lacks an early history, while neither the Turin nor the Kress picture has ever been included in a major exhibition.¹⁶

The Columbia view of the Molo is in a good state, as Elise Effmann explains in her paper (in this volume, pp. 189–95) but by 1997 the varnish had yellowed and the retouches discolored. Treatment at the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts afforded an opportunity to re-evaluate the picture in the light of Constable's long-standing opinion. But the "character of the brush work and the drawing" did not suggest inauthenticity. On the contrary, the handling and techniques seemed typical of Canaletto's practice in the second half of the 1720s. What then was the relationship to the Galleria Sabauda picture?¹⁷ And were there any topographical or other anomalies in either canvas or in both?

While Canaletto made numerous versions of his most popular compositions, he generally did not paint exact replicas. He showed the buildings of Venice more or less as he saw them, recording changes in and repairs to various structures as these occurred.¹⁸ Nearly 250 years later the city is largely the same, and Canaletto's audience still assumes that his topography is accurate, while the most persistent among us go out and have a look from time to time, to be sure of the details and to check for discrepancies. By contrast to the buildings, the boats and the people—individuals involved in the business of daily life, washing, building, pushing, posing—quite naturally differ from one variant of a cityscape to another. Canaletto's figures are distinctively dressed in accordance with their place of birth and their role in society; the nearer they are, the more highly they are individualized.

There is one noticeable topographical error in the Columbia painting: the subsidiary dome of Santa Maria della Salute is flanked by the two slender towers, whereas from Canaletto's chosen point of view, as indeed from the Grand Canal, one of the towers should be on the near side and the other should be largely hidden.¹⁹ At the Palazzo Ducale, additionally, there are twenty-one Gothic arches where there should be seventeen, at ground level, and thirty-eight where there should be thirty-four, on the balcony. (When seen straight on, the arcades of the building are symmetrical, with two arches above corresponding to one below. However for Canaletto, the number of arches depicted seems to have depended to some extent on the scale of the picture as well as on the degree to which he wished to emphasize the effect of recession. He did not bother to count and neither did we until recently.) In this painting the asymmetry is in fact invisible because the angle is so steep. The Columbia picture shows the entire façade of the Palazzo Ducale including the half quatrefoil at the end of the balcony, omitting only the sculpture marking the near corner of the building. The columns at ground level are partially whitewashed, apparently as a surface on which to inscribe notices intended for

the public. The last five arches, behind the Ponte della Paglia, are boarded up. The last three arches of the balcony above are partitioned off; one pane of one of the three windows is open. In the eighteenth century there were fruit and vegetable stands at the ends of the bridge. To the left of the vendor's hut shown here is a knife grinder's stall, while to the right and below, set into the masonry of the bridge, is a niche containing the tabernacle of the gondoliers' guild.

The towers of Santa Maria della Salute and the various details described above are all the same in the Sabauda picture, but there are some additional inaccuracies and uncharacteristic omissions. Of the six windows on the façade of the Palazzo Ducale, the two at each end of the Sabauda picture are aligned while the middle two, flanking the balcony, appear to be higher. In fact, as in the Columbia painting and most other Canalettos of this subject, only the two original Gothic windows at the extreme right are lower.²⁰ In the Turin painting, the statue of Justice at the summit of the façade of the Palazzo Ducale is missing, as are all the sculptures on the volutes at the Salute, and Fortune upon her golden ball has disappeared from the customs house. There were two or three principal points of arrival for visitors reaching Venice by water, one of which was the customs house. Ships of substantial size, and thus most foreign vessels, could anchor only in the basin or in the Giudecca Canal. Their merchandise passed through the customs house. The elegant building with the statue of Fortune would therefore have been the first thing many people saw upon disembarking. Canaletto rejoiced in the sharp irregular contours created by the fretwork of statuary against the sky and would not have omitted such a quantity of important architectural sculpture. It is difficult to imagine any Venetian view painter having done so. But what is most disconcerting is that all of the figures of any size in the Columbia and Sabauda pictures match, not only in their number, scale, and disposition, but also in the colors of all of their garments. There are the same officials, in red or blue, or in black robes with full-bottom wigs; the same oriental, seen from behind,

in blue trousers, a gray vest, white shirt, and red turban; the same knife grinder talking to a woman with an impatient child. These identical details, or in the case of the sculpture its absence, seem to me to support the view that the Columbia picture is the autograph version of this subject.

In the 1720s Canaletto made various sketches as well as other paintings of the Molo looking from east to west. While none can be dated with any degree of certainty, there is one festival picture with which the Columbia canvas can be usefully compared: among the young painter's most important early commissions, it represents the *Reception of the French Ambassador at the Doge's Palace*.²¹ Louis xv's ambassador, the Comte de Gery, had been in Venice since December 1723, but he did not present his credentials to the doge until November 5, 1726. He was recalled in October 1731. Canaletto's canvas must date earlier in these years rather than later, and shows him to have been greatly influenced by Carlevaris, who had already won acclaim as the inventor of this sub-genre, painting the receptions of the Abate de Pomponne in 1706, of the Duke of Manchester in 1707, and of the Conte di Colloredo in 1726. Canaletto would have advanced his career when, displacing Carlevaris, he secured Gery's important order, as had been the case with Conti's commission. In style Canaletto's figures are unusually similar to those of Carlevaris. Canaletto's *Reception of the French Ambassador* suggests that he understood the appeal to foreigners of his rival's style. To accommodate himself to their taste, he apparently introduced a blonder palette and smoother finish earlier than had once been thought.

When arriving for his official reception by the doge, a foreign ambassador disembarked from his boat at the corner of the Molo. Carlevaris and Canaletto both adopted a low viewpoint for reception pictures on account of the primacy of the ceremony playing out in the foreground, but otherwise Canaletto preferred a higher and necessarily imaginary bird's-eye view. The original impetus for the disposition of the subject absent the ceremonial aspect may have come from Carlevaris. While Canaletto's *Reception of the French*

Ambassador must date from 1726–27, there is no reason why the first of his bird’s-eye views of the Molo could not be earlier. A painting similar in subject and style to that in Columbia appeared with its pendant on the London art market in summer 2002 (fig. 9).²² Topographically, it differs in that the corner of Palazzo Ducale and more of the span of the bridge are visible at the right. Santa Maria della Salute is inaccurate in some details: the subsidiary dome is smaller than in fact, the towers are inconsistent in size, and both are too tall. The handling seems to be much the same, with proportionately less detail than in the Columbia picture on account of the smaller size of the canvas. This new view of the Molo with its pendant, showing Piazza San Marco, is believed to have been owned by Edward Southwell (1705–1755), who visited Venice in 1726.

According to the late J.G. Links, Constable devoted no less than forty years to the preparation of the first edition of his Canaletto catalogue raisonné and identified primary versions of roughly 500 compositions, with secondary versions numbering as many as twenty in some cases.²³ For the most part, Canaletto’s patrons were not Italian and until recently there were few paintings by Canaletto in public or private collections in Italy. Constable knew the Kress work but it seems improbable that he ever saw the canvas in the Galleria Sabauda, which should be identified as a somewhat damaged early copy. Links, who



FIG. 9. *View of the Molo*, Canaletto, ca. 1726, oil on canvas, 18 1/4 × 29 1/4 in. (46.4 × 74.3 cm). Private collection.

offered no additional commentary, apparently never saw either. The Kress *View of the Molo* appears to be entirely autograph and a date for it of about 1725 is supported by comparison with the Conti views of 1725–26, and with the painting that was probably commissioned or bought by Edward Southwell in the latter year.

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NOTES

1. The first Carlevaris exhibition in America was held at the Timken Museum of Art, San Diego, April 27–August 31, 2001. Charles Beddington in *Luca Carlevaris: Views of Venice* (exhib. cat., San Diego, 2001) provides an overview of the artist’s career.
2. The standard catalogue is W.G. Constable, *Canaletto: Giovanni Antonio Canal, 1697–1768*, 2 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon, 1962); a second edition was revised by J.G. Links, 2 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon, 1976), and reissued with a supplement and additional plates, 2 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989). This was followed by J.G. Links, *A Supplement to W.G. Constable’s Canaletto: Giovanni Antonio Canal: 1697–1768* (London, Pallas Athene Arts, 1998), a posthumous publication with amendments and additions by Links and Charles Beddington. The artist’s early work has been the subject of much valuable recent research, for which see especially the catalogue of the exhibition shown March 18–June 10, 2001 at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice: A. Bettagno and B.A. Kowalczyk (eds.), *Canaletto: Prima Maniera* (exhib. cat., Milan, 2001).
3. See Constable 1962 and Links 1989 (both cited in note 2), Vol. 1, figs. 479^{**} and 479^{***} and Vol. 2, p. 449, nos. 479^{**} and 479^{***}; see also Charles Beddington in Bettagno and Kowalczyk 2001 (cited in note 2), pp. 58–61, no. 30, ill. (color), and pp. 68–9, no. 34, ill. (color).
4. Most recently Kowalczyk in Bettagno and Kowalczyk 2001 (cited in note 2), pp. 144–53, nos. 62–5, ill. (color). For a complete transcription of the Conti documents see Marina Magrini, “Canaletto e dintori: i primi anni di Canaletto attraverso le lettere dei contemporanei” in Bettagno and Kowalczyk 2001, pp. 191–5 and 197–208, documents 1–24 and 26–33.
5. Constable 1962 (cited in note 2), Vol. 2, p. 218, no. 86(a). Later editions do not differ, nor is there an illustration. See also Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, Vol. 3: Italian Schools, XVI–XVIII Century* (London, Phaidon, 1973), pp. 163–4, no. K-252, fig. 315.

6. The name of the consignor has been supplied by Christie's through the good offices of Francis Russell and Jane Vernon, whose help I gratefully acknowledge. The catalogue description is generic; the size is 26 × 32 1/4 in. The modern firm of Gurr Johns holds no files dating to 1931 that could be checked.
7. The photograph bearing Longhi's expertise must have been solicited by Count Contini-Bonacossi. Unlike the other opinions in the Kress Foundation Archives, it is not stamped with the name of New York photographer Murray R. Keyes.
8. Only the opinion of Suida is dated.
9. *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture*, National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C., 1941), pp. 31–2, no. 234, and *Book of Illustrations*, National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C., 1941), p. 77, no. 234. The date of acquisition is given in error as 1939, while Sir Francis Ewan is identified as the former owner. One other Kress painting bought from Contini-Bonacossi is said to have belonged to Sir Francis Ewan, Fungai's *Martyrdom of Saint Lucy*, for which see Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, Vol. 2: Italian Schools, XV–XVI Century* (London, Phaidon, 1968), p. 109, no. K-248, fig. 271.
10. The letter, the balance of which contains supporting information about the Conti pictures, is among Kress Foundation archival materials.
11. William E. Suida, *Art of the Italian Renaissance from the Samuel H. Kress Collection*, The Columbia Museum of Art (Columbia, SC, 1954), p. 59, no. 25, ill. p. 58, cites the additional opinion of F. Mason Perkins.
12. Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, *Art of the Renaissance from the Samuel H. Kress Collection*. Columbia, SC: The Columbia Museum of Art, 1962, pp. 101–2, no. 35, fig. 35.
13. Shapley 1973 (cited in note 5), pp. 163–4. The opinion of the Tietzes has not been preserved in manuscript.
14. Conversation with Mario Modestini, September 2001.
15. Constable 1962 (cited in note 2), Vol. 2, p. 218, no. 86, noted an exhibition, *Venezia*, at the Petit Palais, Paris, in 1919. The painting was shown at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence in 1922: U. Ojetti, L. Dami, and N. Tarchiani, *La Pittura Italiana del Seicento e del Settecento alla mostra di Palazzo Pitti* (exhib. cat., Milan and Rome, 1922), pl. 43. See also Noemi Gabrielli, *Galleria Sabauda: Maestri Italiani* (Turin(?), Ilte, 1971), p. 91, pl. 162, fig. 435.
16. The exhibition history of the Kress picture: Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA, *Canaletto and Bellotto*, August 2–31, 1960, No. 14; Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA, *The Circle of Canaletto*, February 21–March 21, 1971, No. 8.
17. For the transparency of the Sabauda picture we thank the Director of the Museum, Dr. Michaela Di Macho. It is evident that there is significant wear and damage, notably along the bottom edge and at the lower left corner.
18. On this subject see André Corboz, *Canaletto: Una Venezia Immaginarica* (Milan, Alfieri Electa, 1985), 2 vols.
19. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 52 and figs. 30–35. Figure 35 is evidently taken from a photograph of the Columbia picture and not that in Turin.
20. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 46–7 and fig. 18, for changes Canaletto made when painting the *bacino* façade of the Palazzo Ducale.
21. For this painting belonging to the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, see A. Bettagno and B.A. Kowalczyk (eds.), *Venezia da Stato a Mito* (exhib. cat., Venice, 1997), pp. 357–9, no. 39, and pp. 218–19, color plates.
22. The pair was offered by Sotheby's, London, on July 10, 2002, as no. 79, described and illustrated in the catalogue, pp. 218–23, and sold privately.
23. Constable 1962 and Links 1989 (both cited in note 2), Vol. 1, p. xiii.

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

- Fig. 1, p. 196. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.90). Photograph © 2000 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Figs. 2, 5, and 6, pp. 196 and 200. Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, SC, Samuel H. Kress Collection (CMA 1954.44).
- Fig. 3, p. 198. El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, TX, Samuel H. Kress Collection (1961-6/41).
- Figs. 4, 7, and 8, pp. 199 and 201. Galleria Sabauda, Turin, 1871.
- Fig. 9, p. 204. Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's, New York, NY.

