Velázquez's *Philip IV* in the Metropolitan Museum

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In the fall of 2009, following the successful cleaning and restoration of two Velázquez paintings, *King Philip IV of Spain* from the Frick Collection and The Metropolitan Museum of Art's own *Portrait of a Man,* Keith Christiansen, John Pope-Hennessy Chairman of the Department of European Paintings, suggested that the Metropolitan's early full-length portrait of Philip IV (Figure 1) should be examined as a potential candidate for conservation.[1] In certain ways this painting seemed a strange hybrid of the two portraits previously treated. As in the case of the Frick picture, the circumstances of its commission are well known, even including a dated receipt for payment signed by Velázquez, but nonetheless, like the Museum's *Portrait of a Man,* it had slipped inexorably toward workshop status.[2] The key question was just how much the condition of the picture, which was known to be compromised, together with its existing restoration, contributed to its sometimes less than favorable critical reception and its undeniably underwhelming appearance (Figure 2).[3]

Part of the Benjamin Altman Bequest, the painting entered the Museum's collection in 1914 as an autograph work by Velázquez, confidence buoyed no doubt by the publication in 1906 of a signed receipt for payment which provided a firm completion date and strong evidence of the artist's direct involvement.[4] Velázquez had been appointed court painter to Philip IV on October 6, 1623, and the Metropolitan's portrait of the king was evidently commissioned shortly thereafter, along with a portrait of the king's favorite, the Count-Duke of Olivares (Museu de Arte de São Paulo), and a lost portrait of Don García Pérez de Araciel y Rada, a knight of the Order of Santiago, professor of law at the University of Salamanca, and attorney general of the Council of Castile. The latter died on September 28, 1624, and the receipt for a payment of 800 reales from his widow, Doña Antonia de Ipeñarrieta, was signed by the artist on December 4, 1624, suggesting that she may have ordered all three canvases.[5]

The close association of the Metropolitan's picture with the more striking and fluidly painted full-length portrait of the young Philip in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (Figure 3), had been noted by several early scholars, since pentimenti that corresponded with the Altman picture—in particular the contours of the legs and cloak—had started to show through that work's uppermost paint layer. The full extent of the relationship was only fully understood once X-radiography performed on the Prado painting revealed that beneath it lies a fully worked version of the Metropolitan's composition (see Figure 8). López-Rey accepted this underlying version as the supposedly lost portrait that, according to Pacheco, Velázquez painted or completed on August 30, 1623, the work that effectively gained him his position as court painter.[6] However, another theory would have it that that elusive picture was only bust length and should be identified with the portrait that is now in the Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University, Dallas (Figure 4).[7] Such uncertainty raised important questions about the Altman picture. Was it an autograph replica of the Prado's repainted portrait or a faithful workshop copy? And how did it relate to the remarkably similar Meadows bust? To add a final layer of complexity, a portrait identical to the Metropolitan's had been acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1904 (Figure 5), and though that picture has generally been accepted as a workshop copy, its existence certainly clouded our understanding of the chronology, authorship, and purpose of these various images of the king. Frustratingly, the condition and appearance of the Altman picture were such that no easy explanations were possible.

Metropolitan Museum records indicate that the painting did not undergo a full treatment after it arrived as part of the Altman Bequest in 1914. Its surface grime was removed and it was consolidated somewhat and varnished in 1926. Further minor cosmetic corrections were made in 1927 and

Metropolitan Museum Journal 45

1. Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (Spanish, 1599–1660). *Philip IV (1605–1665), King of Spain*, probably 1624. Oil on canvas, 78¾ x 40½ in. (200 x 102.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.639). This photograph shows the painting after treatment in 2010.

2. Figure 1 (MMA), before treatment

3. Velázquez. *Portrait of Philip IV as a Young Man*, ca. 1628. Oil on canvas, 79⅛ x 40⅛ in. (201 x 102 cm). Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (PO1182)

1931. In 1953 another surface cleaning was undertaken and two coats of synthetic varnish were applied.[8] In his 1963 catalogue raisonné López-Rey states that the painting underwent a cleaning sometime around 1911, when it was still in Duveen's possession and just prior to its acquisition by Altman.[9] It seems highly likely that in preparation for sale the present glue paste lining was added during that treatment. By 2009 the combination of liberal overpainting from the 1911 restoration and the unfortunate sandwich of four discolored varnish layers, the oldest of which had been applied almost one hundred years before, had totally swamped the portrait, making it virtually impossible to distinguish intact areas of original work from crude repainting and effectively undermining any chance of making a reasonably informed assessment of quality.

Cleaning a great, well-preserved painting is frankly a joy. The removal of old varnish and unnecessary or poorly executed repairs can appear like alchemy to the onlooker, but to the practitioner it feels like an act of exhilarating liberation. The same cannot be said about the treatment of badly damaged works of art, especially if the true condition of the object in question has not been sufficiently understood or documented and has moreover been broadly disguised by previous restoration. A strange and ultimately illogical sense of culpability seems to be inescapable, since removing a previous restoration campaign to reveal serious damage in

4. Velázquez. *Philip IV*. Oil on canvas. Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Algur H. Meadows Collection (MM. 67.23). Photograph: Michael Bodycomb

5. Workshop of Velázquez. *Philip IV*. Oil on canvas, 82⅛ x 43⅜ in. (208.6 x 110.2 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Sarah Wyman Whitman Fund, 1904 (04.1606)

preparation for a new intervention exposes one to a personal challenge to achieve something better.

The first cleaning test on the portrait was somewhat alarming. X-radiography had indicated that the painting had numerous small flake losses, particularly in the upper part of the composition. One of the larger of these sadly included a substantial area of the right eye. It was also assumed that the black drapery would be thin and possibly slightly abraded. However, the cleaning test, executed on the right side of the composition in an area comprising the table, hat, and hand, revealed that portions of the black had literally been scrubbed down to the ground in a previous cleaning. One immediately had to question whether the portrait was in a sense a fiction, a wreck that had been totally repainted. In order to answer this accurately rather than simply withdraw in haste, it was necessary to expand the original cleaning test and undertake new ones in other areas of the picture. A number of things became evident: the severe abrasion to the blacks was fortunately localized around areas of flake loss, while adjacent areas of the drapery remained relatively intact; the better-preserved areas, for example the hands, exhibited undeniable quality; and it was abundantly clear that previous restoration had involved broad, wholesale repainting of many areas. Taking these observations on balance, it was decided to proceed with the cleaning.

Cleaning essentially involved the removal of the varnishes and overpainting applied during the previous hundred

6. Figure 1 (MMA), after cleaning

years. What could not be safely removed were the relatively substantial remains of a campaign of broad repainting that had taken place at a much earlier date, possibly in the eighteenth century, at which time the whole of the background and large portions of the drapery and floor were broadly repainted or toned.[10] At a later date the picture had been cleaned, and in the process areas of the repainting were partially removed. It appears that something extremely caustic was employed at that time, since it was this crude campaign that caused such severe damage to parts of the drapery. Free of its heavy overcoat of repainting and oxidized varnish layers, the painting made a mixed impression, since its condition was both compromised and complicated (Figure 6).

The impact of the early repainting and its subsequent partial removal cannot be overstated. In the background it undermines the interplay between the figure and the surrounding space. It can be identified in the post-cleaning photograph as a more opaque purplish gray that spreads up and around the figure of the king. The original background color has a lighter but warmer tone and a more subtle modulation, creating a sense of air and volume around the figure. Where the repainting remains on areas of the drapery it clogs the surface, blocking the optical role of the red ground and creating a muddy, undifferentiated appearance. In particular in the breeches, broad bands of gray repainting had been brushed diagonally across the form, illogically suggesting that the cloak is gathered up across the body at the waist.

When assessing issues of quality and authorship, a thorough understanding of the complex condition of the painting is critical, since key signifiers of Velázquez's characteristic technique have been hidden or distorted. For example, in most areas the repainting around the figure slightly overlaps the black drapery, covering the crucial juncture of the contour where the artist typically leaves a thin line of the ground color visible. Similarly, the softly fused shadows have been toned, creating a heavier and harder effect than was intended and confusing the forms of the table legs. In attempts to apportion potential authorship to the various areas of the painting, the drapery falls into a sort of limbo. Intact areas reveal a logic of conception and an easy confidence of execution that speak of Velázquez's hand, but there are sadly far too many significant portions drastically affected by severe abrasion and remaining early repainting to permit certainty one way or another.

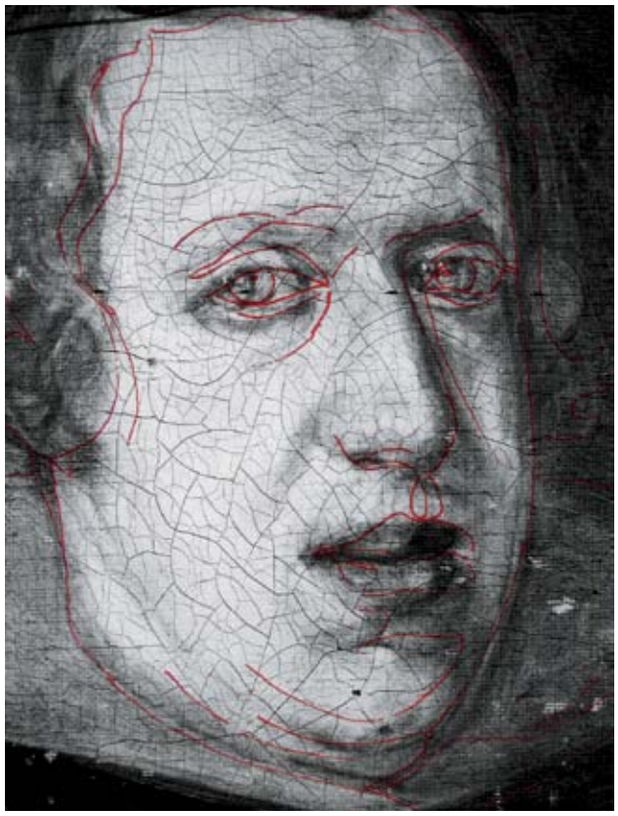
Thankfully other important areas—especially in the flesh tones but also in areas of the drapery—have remained relatively intact, and the extremely high quality of these portions of the painting is undeniable. Originally, the fluidly painted blacks and dark silvery grays of the silk costume clearly played off against the slightly warmer tone and more softly modeled forms of the woolen cloak. The background and floor shift the palette spectrum to tawny hues that further enhanced the elegant austerity of Philip's costume. The modeling of the head and hands is especially fine (see Figures 10, 13, 17). Using carefully blended rose and ivory hues and thin translucent shadows, the artist imparted an almost luminous polish to the young king's skin tones. The gold chain, worn bandolier-like across the chest, is executed using assured, thick dabs of impasto to describe the highlights and suggest the form. The play of light along the edges of the collar is modulated and subtle. There is confidence in the brushwork and an easy command of the structure of the collar itself. The hem emerges, disappears, and reemerges at the juncture with the neck; the linen seems to sag under

7. Figure 1 (MMA), during retouching

8. X-ray of Figure 3 (Prado)

its own weight as it passes behind the head, drooping back and catching the light. There is also a wonderful interplay between the cast shadow of the head on the right side and the translucency of the lace fabric in the light revealing a suggestion of the raised black collar of the doublet below.

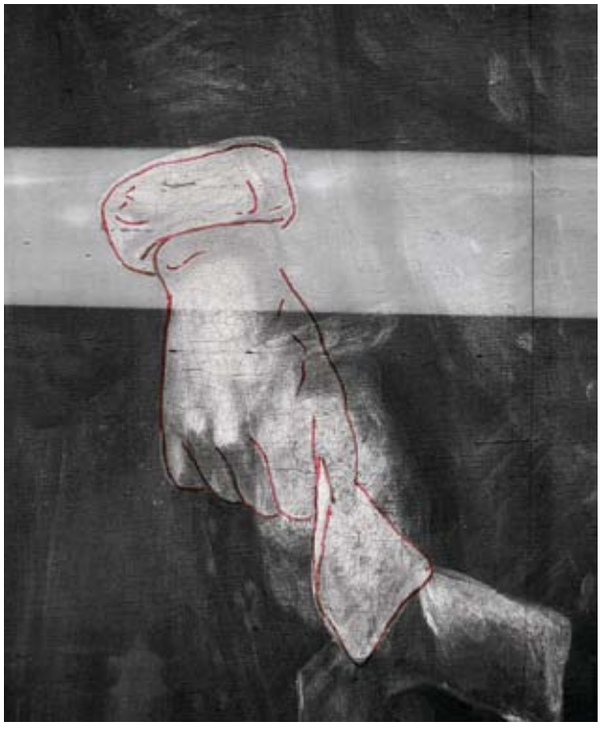
Once cleaning was completed, the next stage was the actual restoration, which involved careful retouching of losses and abrasion and the amelioration of some of the more jarring effects of the remaining repainting (Figure 7, and see Figure 1).[11] It was necessary to broker a satisfactory compromise between areas that are intact and display real quality and other areas that are substantially damaged or distorted by remaining repainting. Necessarily, the restoration of a painting is frequently a compromise, the principle aim being to permit the intact original to have maximum impact while appropriately reducing unwanted distractions or misleading effects of damage or excessive wear. There is no question that judicious, localized retouching can have a dramatically positive effect on the legibility of an image. Yet particularly in a painting with condition issues as complicated as those of the Altman portrait, it is vital to emphasize that the qualities revealed are inherent and not the result of artificial enhancement of the whole through repainting.



9. Tracing of a detail of the head in Figure 1 (MMA) over an X-ray of the head in Figure 3 (Prado)

In order to assist in the reconstruction of the damaged right eye, a high-definition image of the Meadows Museum's bust-length portrait was obtained along with a tracing of the head.[12] Both of these proved invaluable in the correct positioning of the missing portions of the Altman portrait. However, the tracing proved to be something altogether more interesting, since the match to the head, with the exception of the position of the collar, was almost exact. The relationship between these pictures proved far more than incidental, and emphasized the need to investigate further the correspondence between the Metropolitan's painting and the portrait visible in the X-ray of the Prado's *Philip IV* (Figure 8). In January 2009, a trip to the Prado and a careful examination of the X-ray with a tracing of the Metropolitan's painting confirmed the growing suspicion that the Altman picture was derived from a precise tracing or cartoon of this obscured first rendition of the king.[13] Placing the full tracing of the Metropolitan portrait over the X-ray made it clear that the original tracing or cartoon had been constructed from several sheets, producing inevitable slight shifts in the overall outline during the transfer process. The almost perfect match of individual parts (see Figures 9–11), however, left no doubt that the Altman portrait was a replica in a much more literal sense than had previously been thought.

10. Detail of the subject's right hand in Figure 1 (MMA)



11. Tracing of a detail of the hand in Figure 10 (MMA) over an X-ray of a detail of the hand in Figure 3 (Prado)

12. X-ray of Figure 1 (MMA)

Deciphering the complex overlapping of the two images of Philip seen in the Prado's X-ray is not easy and is evidently open to misinterpretation.[14] The paint application of the later portrait predominates and obscures a clear reading of the underlying image, but it is probably fair to say that in general the black costume in the first portrait seems to have been handled in a rather more painterly way than in the Metropolitan's replica. This type of handling becomes much more in evidence in the revision of about 1628, which employs short jabbing and abbreviated strokes to describe the elaborate velvet and silk decoration of the doublet. Interestingly, the X-ray reveals no major alterations in the first rendition, and the pronounced characteristic reworking of the contours is also nowhere visible.[15]

It seems curious that Velázquez should have created a more up-to-date portrait of the king by overpainting an earlier one. Surely there was no intention of obliterating a portrait the king was unhappy with, for we know it was replicated. Thus, the reworking of this fully finished portrait raises a number of interesting questions, especially given the apparent absence of pentimenti. Perhaps, as Jonathan Brown suggests, the initial version did not sufficiently represent Philip's true physiognomy,[16] though this seems slightly at odds with Pacheco's account that the artist's very first attempt of August 1623 captured his likeness as never before. So could the painting we now see only in X-ray also be a replica, possibly retained for the studio, of a definitive version that was lost in the fire in the Alcázar in 1734? In other words, in painting the portrait of about 1628, might Velázquez have employed the replica of the official portrait that he had retained in the studio for the inevitable repetitions that would be requested by court officials? Whatever the case, prime version or replica, it is hard not to be impressed by the sheer pragmatism of the intervention: an out-of-date image of the king was simply and expediently updated, just as one might revise a stale press release.

The clarity and detail of the forms revealed in the X-ray of the Metropolitan's portrait (Figure 12) are initially surprising, given the poor condition of portions of the painting. This is due to the relatively small additions of lead white used to create the gray tones, registering disproportionately in comparison to the earth tones and blacks, which, though they actually predominate, are far more transparent in X-ray. The drapery has a slightly graphic quality in its simplicity and a certain softness in handling. Not surprisingly, given that the work is a replica, there are no major pentimenti, but clear adjustments are visible around the collar, and a strong characteristic reinforcement of the contour can be seen along the right side of the cloak.

Naturally, the tracing of the Meadows bust-length portrait also matches the Prado's X-ray image, again the only exception being the shape of the collar. As already noted, it has been proposed that the Meadows picture is the first painting of Philip executed by Velázquez—the career-changing portrait of August 1623.[17] It is also a much compromised work, with extensive paint losses around the edges and in the upper part of the composition, including a large portion of the hair, with a correspondingly significant amount of restoration. The X-ray reveals cusping on all four sides, indicating that it has not been cropped, and apparent slight revisions to the shape of the collar and reinforcement to the contour of the right side of the head and shoulder.[18] Yet the picture lacks energy, and it is frankly hard to believe that this could be the image that caused such a stir at court. It seems much more likely that it is a replica of the head and shoulders of either the first version of the Prado portrait or another one now lost to us.

13. Detail of the head in Figure 1 (MMA)

14. Detail of the head in Figure 5 (Boston)

So what about the full-length version in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston? Most frequently, that painting has been accepted as a workshop product. Its appearance and legibility are somewhat compromised by a cloudy, oxidized varnish, and there is no question that the black drapery and portions of the background are thin and abraded. Yet, there can also be no doubt that the picture is in better condition than the Altman portrait. In June 2010 the painting was brought to the conservation studio at the Metropolitan. It was thought that its presence might assist with the restoration and would also provide an opportunity to study the issues relating to the process of repetition more closely. Seeing the two eerily similar paintings side by side was revelatory. Their correspondence in terms of content and structure appears to be exact,[19] but in terms of quality they are worlds apart. By this simple juxtaposition the gulf between autograph replica and workshop copy was clearly articulated. Most telling is the comparison of the heads. In the Altman *Philip* (Figure 13) the depiction of light through the subtle and fluid handling of paint creates a noble portrait of an unmistakably young monarch. By contrast, the pasty application and labored forms of the Boston version (Figure 14) seem to age the sitter, while the heavy-lidded eyes introduce an unpleasantly supercilious expression. In the X-ray (Figure 15) this effect is even more apparent, as the

15. X-ray of a detail of the head in Figure 5 (Boston)

16. Tracing of a detail of the head in Figure 1 (MMA) over an X-ray of a detail of the head in Figure 5 (Boston)

features become harder and exaggerated, the artist having heavy-handedly imitated the shapes and transitions in the face but with far less visual intelligence. The drapery is executed with some flair, as if the assistant was more confident in areas that permitted a less rigorous degree of observation.

At first glance, the Boston Philip looks somewhat smaller in stature, but this is a trick of perception caused by the larger overall dimensions of the whole, since the tracing from the Metropolitan's portrait provided an even more startling match than with the Prado's X-ray (see Figures 16–18).[20] In fact, despite the weaknesses of the Boston version, its faithfulness to the Altman portrait cannot be overemphasized, as individual passages of brushwork are carefully mimicked, for example the series of highlights along the edge of the folded document in the king's right hand. Today, in an age of effortless reproduction, we can easily overlook what this implies: the Boston painting is a copy not of the first version of the Prado's portrait of Philip IV but rather of the Altman portrait, and must have been created while the latter was still in the studio and available for close inspection. One glaringly obvious fact that points to the intimate relationship of the Metropolitan and Boston paintings is the inclusion of the gold chain, a striking feature absent in the Prado and Meadows portraits.

The concept of replication is nothing new, and has been discussed in the context of the work of other major artists as well as Velázquez.[21] Yet the clear use of tracing or cartoons in the artist's practice does seem to merit more attention.

17. Detail of the subject's left hand in Figure 1 (MMA)

18. Tracing of a detail of the hand in Figure 17 (MMA) over an X-ray of a detail of the hand in Figure 5 (Boston)

The tendency to fall back on a workshop "default" when faced with multiple versions possibly underestimates the practicalities of Velázquez's role and his attitude to the requirements of court portraiture—especially at this early stage of his work at court—and assumes a single autograph version followed by workshop copies and/or variants. Depending on the patron, Velázquez is likely to have varied his participation in the production of these official portraits. And it is worth recalling that in Seville he had already become adept at replicating certain compositions, the most pertinent example being his two versions of *Mother Jerónima de la Fuente*.[22]

It is to be hoped that the recent conservation treatment of *Philip IV* has rehabilitated an important portrait that has suffered much indignity. Although it was stoutly defended by López-Rey, its compromised state nevertheless inevitably raised doubts in the minds of other experts, and doubtless the fact that it is a replica will continue to do so. However, it is now possible to appreciate its strengths, and it is a pleasure to record here Jonathan Brown's confirmation that the picture is an autograph replica. The view held by many scholars that the painting perhaps lacks the spark of a truly original work but nonetheless possesses the undeniable quality we expect from the hand of Velázquez seems vindicated. Equally important, the picture becomes a key document in the early development of the court artist and raises crucial questions about the function, status, and practicalities of replication in his oeuvre and the composition of his workshop in his first years in Madrid.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful first and foremost to my curatorial and conservation colleagues at the Metropolitan Museum for their encouragement, support, and advice, in particular Keith Christiansen, Charlotte Hale, Dorothy Mahon, and Walter Liedtke. Silvia Centeno and Mark Wypyski in the Department of Scientific Research undertook analysis of paint samples, and Shawn Digney-Peer in the Department of Paintings Conservation carried out new X-radiography on the Altman and Boston portraits. Thanks are also due to numerous colleagues elsewhere: Gabriele Finaldi, Carmen Garrido, Javier Portús, and Enrique Quintana at the Museo Nacional del Prado; Ronni Baer and Rhona Macbeth at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Claire Barry at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth. I particularly wish to warmly acknowledge Jonathan Brown, Carroll and Milton Petrie Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, for his insight, perspective, and open mind.

NOTES

1. See Gallagher 2009, pp. 16–22, and Pérez d'Ors and Gallagher 2010, pp. 652–59.
2. The painting was downgraded by the Metropolitan Museum to workshop status in 1973, a decision that was featured in a *New York Times* article by Carter B. Horsley on January 19 of the same year.
3. It should be noted that the painting has had numerous defenders, in particular López-Rey. See López-Rey 1963, pp. 38–40, 207–8; López-Rey 1973, pp. 50–52; López-Rey 1979, pp. 31–32, 34–36, 159n65, 244–47; and López-Rey 1996, vol. 1, pp. 53–54, 56; vol. 2, pp. 30, 66–70. For a full list of references and related opinions, please consult the Department of European Paintings collection database on the Museum's website: www.metmuseum.org.
4. Mélida 1906, pp. 173, 175–85, 190–98.
5. Gállego 1989, pp. 88–95, 99–100, 124, 129.
6. López-Rey 1963, p. 206; López-Rey 1973, p. 52; Pacheco 2001, pp. 202–5. For a concise account of Velázquez's appointment as court artist, see Brown 1986, p. 45.
7. Brown 1986, p. 45; Carr et al. 2006, p. 30.
8. At some point in its early history the painting was evidently cut on all four sides. The reason for this intervention is not clear, but the support was later extended to its present dimensions (79⅛ x 40½ in., or 201 x 103 cm) using strips salvaged from old paintings. These additions returned the cropped composition to dimensions more closely resembling those of intact full-length portraits by Velázquez, in particular the key image of Philip IV in the Prado, which measures 79⅛ x 40⅛ in. (201 x 102 cm). The additions appear to be in place in an early illustration: Mélida 1905, pp. 96–97, pl. 10.
9. López-Rey 1963, p. 207.
10. It would appear that very early in its life the portrait had suffered from widespread pinpoint flaking, particularly in the upper part of the composition. Damp conditions may have encouraged this, especially given the presence of a first, chalk-based ground layer. It was these losses that probably precipitated the radical campaign of repainting.
11. The painting was given a first brush coat of varnish to commence the gradual process of saturating the paint surface and to provide an isolating layer between the original and the retouching. Actual losses were filled with a toned filler that mimicked the color of the ground. The first phase of the retouching involved underpainting of these losses. In the background and flesh tones a cooler and lighter color was generally used, whereas in the drapery the reddish ground color was matched in order to exploit its essential optical role in these areas at the final phase of the retouching. The painting was then given a further application of varnish to increase saturation. The intermediary photograph taken at this point is an important document for understanding the true nature of the painting's condition and the philosophy of approach taken in the restoration. It is possible to see not only the impact of the remaining areas of the early campaign of repainting in the background, floor, and drapery, but also how localized the damage is. The final phase of the retouching attempted to reintegrate the damaged areas without resorting to excessive reconstruction of the abraded areas.
12. I am particularly indebted to the Meadows Museum and to Claire Barry, chief conservator, Kimbell Art Museum, for making this tracing.
13. This trip was undertaken with Keith Christiansen and Walter Liedtke, curator of European paintings, who provided invaluable insight and debate.

14. López-Rey (1963, p. 210) misinterpreted the superimposition of the two heads in the X-ray as a single, flabbier one. This oversight is discussed in Brown 1986, p. 287n28.
15. Garrido Pérez 1992, pp. 122–23.
16. Brown 1986, p. 47; Brown and Garrido 1998, pp. 27–30.
17. See note 7 above.
18. The X-ray was provided by Rhona Macbeth, head of paintings conservation, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
19. The ground in both paintings is constructed of two layers, a first calcite-based one containing small amounts of an iron earth and carbon black, followed by a second layer composed principally of red earth. This construction is typical of the artist's preparation at this time. See Garrido Pérez 1992, pp. 15–19 and 123–25. Only one cross section was taken from the Boston *Philip* for analysis. However, examination under high magnification suggests that the materials are almost identical. Dr. C. Richard Jonson Jr. of Cornell University is currently examining the two paintings' X-rays as part of an ongoing weave counting and mapping project. It is hoped that these results can be compared to similar data obtained from the support of the Prado's portrait of Philip.

    All pigment analysis and cross-section investigation was undertaken by Metropolitan Museum research scientists Silvia Centeno and Mark Wypyski. Samples mounted as cross sections were examined by polarized light microscopy and analyzed with Raman spectroscopy and scanning electron microscopy-energy dispersive X-ray spectrometry (SEM-EDS).
20. Boston's relatively modern stretcher measures 82½ x 43½ in. (209.5 x 110.5 cm), but it would appear that the original cusped tacking edges have been preserved and incorporated. The absence of a distinct line of cracking or loss corresponding to a turnover edge suggests that the canvas was actually stretched flush with the front side of its strainer. Slightly raised marks a few centimeters in from each side were probably caused by the relatively narrow members used to construct the strainer or by an early framing element. It is noteworthy that the dimensions of these marks correspond almost exactly with the dimensions of the Prado portrait and therefore the likely original dimensions of the Altman picture.
21. Bauer 1986, pp. 355–57; Christiansen 1990, pp. 25–26; Bauer and Colton 2000, pp. 434–36; Falomir 2003, pp. 60–68; Bauer 2007, pp. 99–101. The exhibition "Der späte Tizian" (The Late Titian) at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, brilliantly explored this theme. See Wald 2007, pp. 123–31, 133–40. On Velázquez, see Garrido 2004, pp. 4–24.
22. Carr et al. 2006, p. 142; Garrido 2004, pp. 4–6.

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