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By Jupiter! Duke's 'fake' Titian is the £44m real deal



• The painting at Apsley House that has been confirmed as a Titian, part of his Danaë series

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Descendants of the Duke of Wellington have had a windfall in the form of the discovery of a Titian painting at their home in Apsley House.

The painting, which belongs to Titian's *Danaë* series and which depicts a classical princess being showered with gold, was assumed to be a 19th-century copy of a Titian masterpiece, but research using X-rays and infra-red photography has revealed it to be an original painting by the master's own hand.

The research, carried out by the Prado National Museum in Madrid and funded by Iberdrola, the owners of Scottish Power, means that the value of the painting has risen from £800,000 to an estimated £44 million.

The assumption that it was a later copy arose because of the painting's poor condition. Titian's brushwork had been obscured by repeated restorations and the addition of layers of dark varnish. The canvas had also been shortened on each of its four sides, resulting in the loss of the god Jupiter's attributes of an eagle and lightning.

Conservators examined the drawings beneath the paint using X-ray and infra-red photography and found small alterations made by the artist, which helped to prove that he was not copying an existing work.

The painting is currently on display at the Prado, but is usually held in the private section of Apsley House inhabited by the Duke's heir Lord Douro rather than the part open to the public. It is unclear whether the painting will be put on public display when it returns to Britain in March.

The first Duke of Wellington received the painting as a gift from Ferdinand VII of Spain in the early 19th century after British forces helped to defeat Napoleon in the Peninsular War of 1807-14. The painting was one of a series of six commissioned from Titian by Philip II of Spain before he ascended to the throne.

The Prado declared that there was no doubt that the Wellington *Danaë* was "not only an original work, but that it was the first of the set of six" and that it was "one of the most important and most influential mythological cycles in the history of Western painting".

The painting shows the moment in Ancient Greek myth when a princess who has been locked away to prevent her from having children is fertilised by Zeus, the father of the gods. This confounded Danaë's father, Acrisius of Argos, who had imprisoned her in a bronze cage in an attempt to avert a prophecy that he would be killed by his grandson. Danaë duly gave birth to Perseus, who eventually fulfilled the prophecy by accidentally striking his grandfather with a javelin during an athletics competition.

The painting is being shown alongside *Venus and Adonis*, another Titian masterpiece that belongs to the Prado.