

655. The RRP has, unconvincingly to my mind, proposed that the painting was executed by Carel Fabritius (c. 1622–1654) rather than Rembrandt himself. See *Corpus* 1982–, 3: 617–624, C97. The RRP rejects the authenticity of the signature and date, which read “Rembrandt f/ 163[8],” and dates the painting about 1641, the year of Fabritius’ arrival in Rembrandt’s workshop.

11. B. 1797, 20.

12. HdG 1907–1927, 6: 297, no. 615, includes in his provenance for this painting three sales that refer to a lost painting, Smith 1829–1842, 7: no. 502. The sales are: De Gaignat, Paris, 1768; De Calonne, Paris, 1788; De Choiseul-Praslin, Paris, 1793.

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1940.1.13 (499)

Rembrandt van Rijn and Workshop (probably Govaert Flinck)

Man in Oriental Costume

c. 1635

Oil on canvas, 98.5 x 74.5 (38³/₁₆ x 29⁵/₁₆)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

Center left: [R]embrandt ft

Technical Notes: The original support is a fine-weight, tightly and plain-woven linen fabric that has been lined to two fabrics at separate intervals. The original tacking margins have been trimmed, and 1 cm of the original support and design layers has been turned over the stretcher edges. Cusping is absent along the right and bottom edges and slightly visible on the top and left edge, indicating that the painting’s dimensions have been reduced more extensively at the top and bottom than along the sides. In any event, the *R* from the signature has been cropped along the left edge. The x-radiograph shows a long horizontal tear in the background in the upper right.

The double ground is oil-bound with a thin, red-earth lower layer and a thicker, light gray upper layer composed largely of lead white. The x-radiograph indicates that the gray layer was smoothed with a broad sharp-edged tool in diagonal strokes. The thin, sketchy underpainting, applied with a wide brush in short strokes, is visible in the unfinished lower third of the painting and between the wide brushstrokes of the finished area.

Paint was applied wet into wet in layers of moderate thickness with impasto in the turban. The medium has been identified as oil and the pigment mixtures are complex.¹ Paint in the turban was intentionally scraped away in areas to expose the gray ground before design details were added, and lines in the feather were incised with the butt end of a brush. The hands are painted with a thin, semi-transparent layer over the gray ground, and, like the lower half of the costume, are unfinished. Long, thin, broken lines of losses occur on either side of the head, in the background and turban, and below the proper left hand. Numerous small areas of abrasion are scattered overall.

The painting was cleaned in 1987, at which time disfiguring overpaint was removed. Remnants of an aged discolored oil coating remain on the light background, and sections of the upper paint layer of the drapery have blanched.

Provenance: Johan Ernst Gotskowsky, Berlin, before 1756;² acquired 1764 by Catherine II, empress of Russia [1729–1796];³ Imperial Hermitage Gallery, Saint Petersburg; sold through (Matthiesen Gallery, Berlin; P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London; and M. Knoedler & Co., New York) to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 8 March 1938 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: *Rembrandt Tentoonstelling*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. 1932, no. 5. *Art Treasures*, Christie’s, London, 1932, no.

1367. *Loan Exhibition of Paintings by Rembrandt*, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 1933, no. 3. *A Collection of Old Masters*, Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts, Delaware, 1935, no. 9. Washington 1969, no. 1. *A Question of Rembrandt*, Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, 1988, no cat.

IN THIS imposing half-length portrait a bearded man wearing an elaborate, bejeweled turban stares out at the viewer, his features strongly modeled by light streaming in from the left. A fur-lined cape, loosely clasped at the neck with a gold chain, covers his shoulders. His right hand grasps the sash that wraps around his waist, while his other hand rests upon a wooden staff.

During the 1630s Rembrandt depicted numerous figures in his paintings, drawings, and etchings who wear middle-eastern attire. While the commercial enterprises of the Dutch republic had reached the Middle East by the early seventeenth century and Levantines were to be seen in the streets and marketplaces of Amsterdam, Rembrandt's images are not portraits of these people.⁴ Rather they are imaginative evocations of a distant culture that have as their basis Dutch models, including Rembrandt himself, dressed in exotic costumes.

The reasons for this fascination with the Middle East are many. There existed a great interest in exotica in the Netherlands during this period, which was also manifested in the collecting patterns of wealthy patricians. Objects from all parts of the world, including shells, swords, musical instruments, and costumes were avidly sought by collec-

tors. Rembrandt's own collection was a *kunstkamer* of this type. Scheller has demonstrated that Rembrandt's motivation for his encyclopedic collection of art and artifacts was that he wanted to be recognized as a member of this class of gentlemen-virtuosi.⁵

Rembrandt's interest in the East, however, had deeper significance than mere exoticism. His aspiration as an artist was to be a history painter—a painter of biblical and mythological subjects who would not only portray the stories that comprised his cultural heritage but would also evoke the essential character of those whose lives and actions had had such an impact upon mankind.⁶ The appeal of the Middle East to Rembrandt was largely that the stories of the Bible had taken place in that distant region. The images of Levantine patriarchs that appear in his paintings, etchings, and drawings of the early 1630s evoke the character of those people, their inner strength, and dignity.

The sitter in this painting has no attributes to indicate that he represents a specific person. It is not even possible to determine whether Rembrandt considered this mode of dress to be that of a contemporary or of a biblical figure. Given the presence of similarly dressed figures in his biblical scenes from the early to mid-1630s, the latter seems more probable. Particularly close to *Man in Oriental Costume* is the frontally posed oriental figure on horseback in *The Raising of the Cross*, 1632 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich), which Rembrandt painted as one of a series of the Passion scenes for Prince Frederik Hendrik. The



Fig. 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Belsazzar's Feast*, c. 1635, oil on canvas, The National Gallery, London



Rembrandt van Rijn and Workshop (probably Govaert Flinck), *Man in Oriental Costume*, 1940.1.13



Fig. 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Man in Oriental Costume*, 1632, oil on canvas, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William K. Vanderbilt, 1920

model for *Man in Oriental Costume*, dressed in a similar although more elaborate costume, is also seen as the main protagonist in Rembrandt's dramatic *Belshazzar's Feast*, c. 1635 (fig. 1).⁷ Comparisons with this latter work, and with a number of etchings of similar oriental figures dated 1635,⁸ suggest an approximate date of 1635 for this painting.

As seen today, *Man in Oriental Costume* is not what Rembrandt originally intended: x-radiographs reveal that the canvas has been cut on all four sides. No evidence of thread distortions appears at either the right or bottom, and only traces of them appear along the left side and top. One may speculate that the original dimensions approached those of a comparable painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the three-quarter-length portrait of a *Man in Oriental Costume*, 1632 (fig. 2). Just when the Gallery's painting was cut down is unknown, although it occurred after the signature was applied, for the *R* of Rembrandt has been cut off, and before G. F. Schmidt's etching of the painting (in reverse) in 1756 (fig. 3).⁹

The image seems never to have been completed. The lower half of the body has been blocked in, in thinly applied paints, gray for the cloak, maroon for

the undergarment, and ochers for the hands. Only the chain attaching the cloak has some impasto. None of the final modeling tones, which would have given this portion of the torso volume and density, have been applied. The head, in contrast, is fully defined with densely applied paints that carefully delineate the features, the wrinkles around the eyes, the beard, and the turban. The contrast between the treatment of the head and turban and the lower torso is unique among Rembrandt's paintings. Because it serves no logical stylistic or iconographic purpose, one can only conclude that the painting has been left in an unfinished state, and that the paint on the lower torso represents the underpainting, or, as it was known in the seventeenth century, dead-coloring, that was intended to serve as a basis for the final modeling of the form.¹⁰ Since the painting appears to be unfinished, it seems curious that it is signed. The signature may have been added somewhat later. The straight stem on the *b*, unusual for the early to mid-1630s, is similar to that on etchings later in the decade.¹¹

The extent to which the treatment of the torso and head differ has long been obscured by layers of

Fig. 3. G[eorg] F[riedrich] Schmidt, etching in reverse of 1940.1.13, 1756, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



discolored varnish. With the recent restoration, this remarkable phenomenon, which can now be studied more precisely than was previously possible, provides much information about Rembrandt's working procedure. The ground layer upon which he worked was light gray and seems to have been uniform across the whole surface.¹² He then added a deeper gray color for the background, modeling it slightly to indicate the play of light against the backdrop. The area in which he intended to place the figure was left in reserve, although he extended the background color slightly beyond the proposed contour of the figure's form.¹³ The extent of this layer, as it defined the general parameters of the figure, can be seen in the x-radiograph of the head (fig. 4).

After completing this process, Rembrandt blocked in the form in muted colors that related to his eventual color scheme. He modeled the right hand more completely than the left because it was illuminated by light and the other was not. He depicted the chain with a few rapid strokes of lead-tin yellow, but only sketchily indicated its form.

In its surety and similarity to other, more completed images by Rembrandt, this underpainted layer is totally convincing as being the work of the master. The right hand of *Man in Oriental Costume*, for example, is remarkably similar in structure to that of *A Polish Nobleman*, 1637 (1937.1.78). The relatively finished execution of the face and turban, however, is problematic.¹⁴ While bold strokes around the eyes suggest the wrinkles and folds of the skin, the eyes lack that sense of life so characteristic of Rembrandt's images. An excellent comparison is the painting of *A Man in Oriental Costume*, 1633 (fig. 5), where Rembrandt's characterization of the face through the eyes is unmistakable. The treatment of the beards in these two paintings is also different: while the curls of the hair of *Man in Oriental Costume* have a quite regular rhythm, a variety of waves animate the beard of the oriental figure in Munich. Finally, the yellow highlights in the colorful turban in the Gallery's picture sit on the surface of the cloth and do not become part of its structure as they do in the Munich painting.

A similar comparison can be made with the head of Belshazzar in Rembrandt's large-scale painting of about 1635, *Belshazzar's Feast* (fig. 1). In this instance the similarities in the brushwork on the face, particularly in the modeling around the left eye, are extremely close, so much so that it would seem to confirm an attribution to Rembrandt. Nevertheless, the comparison also points out the relative lack of vitality in the man's face. The technique used to paint Belshazzar's turban and crown, moreover, is



Fig. 4. X-radiograph of head in 1940.1.13

much freer. Whereas dense paint seems to have been applied with broad and rapid strokes of the brush in *Belshazzar's Feast*, in *Man in Oriental Costume* the paint is more carefully applied to distinguish the various colors and patterns of the turban.

The range of techniques Rembrandt used to execute his works during the mid-1630s is extremely broad. Since nothing is known about the circumstances of this painting, whether it was a commissioned piece, or why it was left unfinished, one must be cautious in discussing attribution issues. Nevertheless, this work appears to be an instance where Rembrandt blocked in a composition to provide a foundation for a particularly talented assistant, one who had mastered the techniques Rembrandt had devised for painting such fanciful portraits. In this instance that assistant worked up the turban, head, and shoulders before the final execution was for some reason or other abandoned. It may well be that at a final stage Rembrandt would have returned to the painting to add accents that would enliven the



Fig. 5. Rembrandt van Rijn, *A Man in Oriental Costume*, 1633, oil on panel, Munich, Alte Pinakothek

image. Such a process, which admittedly is not documented by contemporary sources, would help explain why it is so difficult to distinguish the hands of such talented assistants as Govaert Flinck (1615–1660) and Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680) while they were active in Rembrandt's workshop. Once they had left the workshop and begun to provide their own compositional foundations the individualities of their style become quite obvious.

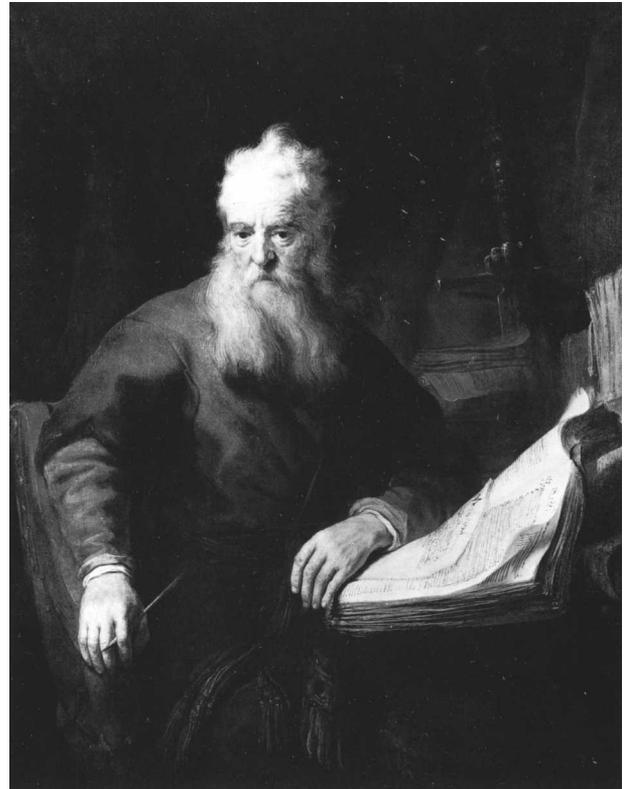
While the identity of the assistant who worked on *Man in Oriental Costume* is not known, it may well be the same artist who executed *The Apostle Paul* in Vienna (fig. 6). This painting, which must date to about 1634, is executed with much the same bold modeling in the face, and the gentle flow of the rhythms of Paul's beard and hair are comparable. Also similar in the two paintings are the simplified contour of the shoulders and the broad zigzag pattern of folds in the robe of the oriental figure and on Paul's right arm. The Vienna painting has been con-

vincingly attributed to Govaert Flinck; thus it may be hypothesized that he was also responsible for the finished portions of *Man in Oriental Costume*.¹⁵

Flinck, who came to Rembrandt in 1633 after having studied with Lambert Jacobsz. (c. 1598–1636) in Leeuwarden, must have been particularly suited for working as an assistant on such historicizing paintings, for he would have been trained in such works by his teacher. Indeed, Lambert Jacobsz. painted a large image of *Saint Paul in Prison* in 1629 (Frisian Museum, Leeuwarden, inv. no. 2463) that is quite close in concept to the Vienna painting.

Whether or not the assistant of the National Gallery's painting was Flinck, the involved interworking of Rembrandt and an assistant, which seems to be demonstrated in this piece, serves as a reminder to those who would try to separate too narrowly Rembrandt's work from paintings produced in the studio. The fundamental question that needs to be asked is whether Rembrandt perceived collaborative paintings, such as *Man in Oriental Costume*, which were executed in the workshop, as fundamentally different from those executed totally by his own hand. Thus far there is no indication to that effect.

Fig. 6. Govaert Flinck, *The Apostle Paul*, c. 1634, oil on canvas, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



Indeed, given the fact that the imagination had priority over execution in contemporary art theory it seems virtually certain that he would have understood such works as forming an integral part of his artistic production.

Notes

1. Reports are available in the Scientific Research department on media analysis (21 August 1987) and pigment analysis (1 April 1987).

2. Gotskowsky originally bought the picture on behalf of Frederick the Great, king of Prussia (1712–1783). Due to the financial straits of Prussia during the Seven Years' War (1756–1762), the painting remained in Gotskowsky's hands until he sold it to Catherine II of Russia in 1764. The inscription on a reproductive etching of the painting (in reverse) by Georg Friedrich Schmidt notes that it was in Gotskowsky's collection in 1756.

3. Acquired by the empress with over two hundred other paintings from Gotskowsky's collection.

4. Such oriental figures are seen in street and market scenes by, for example, Gerrit Berckheyde, in addition to many by Rembrandt. See also Slatkes 1983.

5. Scheller 1969, 81–147.

6. See Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., "Rembrandt and the Rembrandt School," in Washington 1980, 137–141.

7. This recurrence of the model was pointed out to me by Gregory Rubinstein.

8. Illustrated in Münz 1952, 2: 58–61.

9. The painting may also have been reduced in stages. One can imagine that it could have been changed initially from a three-quarter-length to a bust-length portrait that included the signature. The signature could have been cropped when the support weakened and the canvas needed to be restretched.

10. See Van de Wetering 1986, 23–29, for further discussion of Rembrandt's use of dead-coloring in his early work.

11. See, for example, *Rembrandt Leaning on a Stone Sill*, 1639 (B. 21).

12. Van de Wetering 1986, 42, notes that grounds on Rembrandt's canvas paintings are generally gray during the early phase of his career, whereas he used an ocher-colored ground when he painted on wood. The ground on canvas paintings generally consists of two layers, an under layer comprised of red ocher and an upper layer consisting of a mixture of white lead and a black pigment.

13. The process is characteristic of Rembrandt's work in his early period. See Van de Wetering 1986, 25–31.

14. *Corpus* 1982–, 2: B8, 581–588, the attribution to Rembrandt is considered uncertain. They date the painting about 1633.

15. Moltke 1965, 18–19, no. 71; Sumowski 1983, 2: no. 643. The attribution to Flinck, however, was rejected by the RRP (*Corpus* 1982–, 3: 28), which compared this work to the admittedly tame execution of Flinck's earliest dated paintings, his *Rembrandt as Shepherd* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. A3451) and *Saskia as Shepherdess*, 1636 (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, inv. no. 252). These paintings, however, were executed after Flinck had left Rembrandt's workshop and were neither built on a foundation provided by Rembrandt nor executed in a manner intended to pass as his style.

References

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