

Of unknown men: Rembrandt or NOT?

A South African provenance story

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Abstract

Artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) is a highly regarded Master of the Dutch Golden Age, and consequently the subject of extensive international research. Museums worldwide give him pride of place in their collections. Given the artist's established prominence it is therefore shocking that in the last fifty years researchers have been able to successfully challenge the status of hundreds of artworks previously considered autograph. Added now to these challenges is a small unsigned portrait of an old bearded man in the University of Pretoria Museums. In 2016 this painting formed part of a pilot study investigating the provenance and authenticity of the JA van Tilburg Collection, donated to the University in 1980. Although international experts had attributed the portrait to Rembrandt since the 1890s, this paper presents contradictory research that raises significant issues on such authentication processes, as well as highlighting the current position of considered art experts in such processes. Exploring the provenance and using the conclusions drawn from technical analysis we show it is clear the painting in the University of Pretoria collection is not a Rembrandt.



[Figure 1] – “Portrait of an Old Man”, originally attributed to Rembrandt van Rijn from the University of Pretoria's JA van Tilburg Art Collection

Keywords

Rembrandt van Rijn, Dutch oil painting, University of Pretoria Museums, Van Tilburg Collection, provenance research, technical art analysis.

Introduction

In the last two years, the University of Pretoria has embarked on a large provenance study project reviewing the chain of ownership of all works of art in the institution's possession. The JA van Tilburg Art Collection is the first such collection to be investigated for provenance, as the collection's origin as possible war loot taken from holocaust victims has been raised on several occasions since 1976. The provenance research project attempts to bring some clarity and confirmation to both the origins of the collection and contested claims of legitimate ownership. The current research described in this

paper revolves around the most prestigious painting in the JA van Tilburg collection, namely a small portrait attributed to Rembrandt van Rijn. This painting was deemed to be the perfect point of departure as the artist is of such renown that much information is readily available on the man, his life and his oeuvre. In order to fulfil the aims of the study, two parallel streams of research were necessary, first the provenance and second the authentication of the painting through technical art analysis. Whilst the focus of this article is on the former, the research herein mentions results of the latter for the sake of clarity.

The artwork in question, henceforth referred to as 'the Pretoria painting', falls into the category of Rembrandt's *Tronies* (or 'face' in Dutch) and is a common genre of the 16th to 17th century. This cluster of artworks executed during the Dutch Golden Age usually depicts an exaggerated facial expression or character in costume. The painting under discussion is a portrait of an older man facing left, wearing a brown cloak and a black fur cap, set against a brown background.

The research began with a desktop study and a literature review of locally available books and journals about the artist and his works attempting to locate the specific painting. In several previously published sources there were mentions made to this or a similar work and in one source a bad quality photograph, but nothing conclusive was found (Hofstede de Groot 1916, 227). It led us to the conclusion that if the work was indeed by Rembrandt van Rijn, it is very much an unknown work by the Master.

Art historical research on international artworks is limited in South Africa due to the long distances between the Southern edge of the African Continent and Europe. In order to thoroughly investigate the provenance of the artwork, the research had to be carried out in The Netherlands where access to auction catalogues, books and periodicals is possible.

When provenance research started in earnest, a further eight copies of the work were uncovered bringing the total to nine. The Leiden Gallery, in their 2017 report (De Witt 2017), sites eleven artworks, however we believe that three of those mentioned refers to the same painting. The question remains, which one is original? Ernst Van de Wetering, a Dutch art historian and expert involved with the Rembrandt Research Project which has published the *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* in 6 volumes, proclaims the work in the Leiden Gallery in New York, as the original painting (van de Wetering 2014, 628). Although the authenticity of the University of Pretoria's portrait is the focus of this paper, nevertheless it is helpful to consider its relationship to the other extant versions of the composition.

The disputed ownership of the Pretoria painting prioritized research of its provenance, as concerns were raised in 1976 that it may have been taken from Holocaust victims during the Second World War (1939-1945). For this reason, after briefly reviewing the New York painting and the seven remaining ones for context, we will expand on the origins and authenticity of the Pretoria painting attributed to Rembrandt van Rijn to discover where it came from, if the attribution is correct, and if not, attempt to discover why it was created.

The New York painting presently in the Leiden Gallery

As provenance research on the Pretoria painting progressed it was discovered that several versions of the same portrait exist. Slight differences in style, medium, size and locality allowed for separation of the different paintings and their associated information. A total of nine paintings were distinguished including our own, the Pretoria painting. To make the narrative easier to understand the artworks will be named after their last known location.

When discussing several copies of the same painting it is probably the easiest to start with the one currently accepted to be the original. This would then, according to Van de Wetering, be the New York painting in the Leiden Gallery (van de Wetering 2014, 628). This painting is an oil on panel measuring 223mm x 186mm. The work belonged to the Warneck Collection in Paris from 1883 up until 1926

when it was sold (Galerie Georges Petit 1926, 70). The provenance of this work before the date of 1883 is unknown. According to an annotated catalogue in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History) in the 1926 sale it was sold to Blummereich for 200 000 Francs (Galerie Georges Petit 1926, 70). In 1928, according to the journal *Der Cicerone* the painting found its way to the collection of that Richard von Schnitzler in Köln (Cohen 1925, 60). Von Schnitzler owned the painting until at least 1958 when it was sold to a private collection in Baden-Württemberg (De Witt 2017). In 1962 it was in the collection of Piet Boer in Amsterdam; in 1979 at Kunsthandel D.A. Hoogendijk; in 1985 at Guttmann Galleries; in 2004 at Salmon Lilian, Old Masters Paintings; and lastly the Leiden Galleries purchased it in 2005 as a painting by Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678) (De Witt 2017).

The Leiden gallery describes the work as: “This expressively rendered half-length oil sketch of an elderly bearded man depicts the sitter in profile with slightly downcast eyes as he gazes toward the book he holds in his hands. His fur-lined cloak and fur hat are rendered in ochre and brownish tones, with only the shirt, beard and face standing out from their tonal surroundings. Although the man’s physiognomy has been articulated clearly, the body is so sketchily handled and thinly painted that the vertical grain of the panel is visible through the reddish-brown paint. His arms and hands are indicated with only a few rough strokes, giving the work an unfinished appearance (De Witt 2017).” In this description the Leiden Gallery themselves regards the painting as an unusual rendition for a work by Rembrandt.

Van de Wetering in his *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings VI*, proclaims the work as the original, however he fails to include any details of the physical study of the work (van de Wetering 2014, 628), a practise introduced by himself in the Rembrandt Research Project that spanned almost fifty years, from 1968 to 2015. In an article by Gary Schwartz the omission of at least 44 works in the Corpus VI are highlighted. In this same article Van de Wetering is quoted as saying: “In the art world judgments concerning paintings are considered opinions, as most of them indeed are. I however do not deal in opinions. My judgments are based on scientifically buttressed reasoning. There is no question that sooner or later people will realize that I am right. (“Mijn gelijk komt vanzelf.”) I’m not very worried about that” (Schwartz 2018). In the case of the Leiden Gallery work Van de Wetering contradicts his own standards as he delivers an opinion as opposed to a scientific analysis (van de Wetering 2014, 628). In the critique of Van de Wetering, keeping in mind that other scholars like Horst Gerson, head of the RKD in the 1960s, in 1969 re-attributed the work to Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (Bredius & Gerson 1969, 228), and Bruyn in 2004 attributed it to Samuel van Hoogstraten (Burgemeister 2004). The uncertainty as to the attribution of the Leiden Gallery painting to Rembrandt would be corrected by a thorough technical analysis beyond the x-radiography and infra-red photography available in the Rembrandt database.

The seven other copies



[Figure 2] – The New York painting and the seven copies

The next artwork, in the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, is a chalk on board work measuring 206mm x 157mm. The Haarlem work is therefore the only one that is a sketch similar in appearance, and has been attributed to Gerbrandt van der Eeckhout (1621-1674). However, Van de Wetering questions this attribution as “stylistically, there is no connection with Eeckhout’s signed drawings” (van de Wetering 2014, 628).

The third work is in the Louvre Museum collection in Paris, it measures 210mm x 180mm and is described as oil on panel. The Paris painting entered the Louvre Museum in 1922 from the collection of Baron Salomon Rothschild, as attributed to Rembrandt. Today the Louvre describes it as “an imitation painted on top of a reproduction of the Warneck Painting”, attributed to the school of Rembrandt, circle of Gerbrandt van der Eeckhout. To explain the painting better, the Louvre version is a print that was painted over with oil paints (Joconde n.d.).

The fourth work is in the Ranger House in Greenwich Park in London. The London painting is oil on panel, measuring 213mm x 177mm. The original owner of the collection, Sir Juluis Wernher (1850-1912), is said to have purchased the painting between 1890 and 1910 as a work from the school of Rembrandt (Van Tuinen 2010). There are some peculiarities to the early history of the painting, as it is described as a man facing right, instead of left, in two different exhibitions, in 1946 (Wildenstein 1946) and 1953 respectively (Luton Loo 1953). The London painting was not present in the Ranger House collection in 1954 (Hove Museum of Art 1954). As there are other small ‘tronies’ on record belonging to Wernher (Anonymous 1955, 11), which included a man facing right, there is a possibility

that the London painting only entered the collection at a later date, purchased by his son Sir Harold Augustus Wernher (1893-1973).

The location of the fifth work is unknown today. It will be called the Brussels painting as that was the last known location. The painting, an oil on panel, measures 170mm x 150mm and was owned by Michel van Gelder in 1915 (Dumont-Wilden 1915, 145). His son, William van Gelder, inherited the painting in 1938. On 14 May 1971 he sold the painting at a Christie's auction to a person only known as Francis and it is believed to be in Geneva, Switzerland (Christies 1971).

Of the sixth, seventh and eighth paintings very little is known. Number six was in the Mikhailov Collection in Paris in 1945 and in the Georges Renand Collection in 1988, from which it sold at the auction Hôtel Drouot (Anonymous 1988, 14). This painting was described as *Portrait of a Rabbi*, attributed to the circle of Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout, and is an oil on panel measuring 197mm x 157mm. The location of this painting is currently unknown (Van Tuinen 2010). Painting number seven was exhibited at the Schoneman Galleries Inc. in New York in 1954, advertised with the provenance of the New York Painting (i.e. being of the Warneck Collection), however the photograph is of a different version (Anonymous 1954, 94). Lastly, number eight was in the collection of Werner M Wolf in Küsnacht, Switzerland in 1984. Although the painting is represented with a photograph in the RKD, there is no associated information available (Van Tuinen 2010).

Description of the Pretoria painting

The Pretoria painting is a small oil on a rectangular portrait shaped oak panel with a thick varnish layer. The original painted panel measures 230mm x 180mm and the gilded frame itself measures 460mm x 420mm (The enlarged panel includes a small plain wooden frame and measures 246mm x 200mm; the painted panel as visible when in the gilt frame measures 224mm x 177mm and the visible panel before the inner gilt frame was removed measured 200mm x 165mm). The painting is referred to as a *Tronie* a Dutch Golden Age caricature. The painting depicts an older man, painted in profile and facing left, seated with his shoulders rounded and his hands clasped to his chest. His eyes are downcast, looking past his long curved nose and sporting a long grey beard, knotted towards its apex. The face and beard are painted in fine detail and controlled strokes, while the clasped hands are painted in a loose style, barely visible and appear to be holding something. He wears a large flat black fur cap which extends past his forehead. Over his clothes he wears a large mantel, painted in broad sweeping strokes of warm brown paint, with a large round medallion above the shoulder and a finely painted fur trim on the edges of the sleeve. The lack of detail in the medallion gives no further clues for interpretation.

Affixed to the back of the oak panel is a wooden cradle. The vertical slats are glued with their grain following that of the painted wooden panel, whilst the horizontal runners lie across the grain, sliding through slots in the vertical slats. This kind of cradle allows for some movement and free play within the panel. The panel on which the painting is applied has a thin wooden frame added to it to fit snugly into its golden frame. The frame is large and heavy, decorated with four medallions in the corners depicting flowers and leaves, these same medallions are affixed in the middle of each of the sides of the frame.

Provenance of the Pretoria painting

The earliest that the Pretoria painting could be positively identified is in the collection of Walter Childe Alers Hankey (1839-1921). The work came into his collection between 1885 and 1899, as it was not included during the exhibition of the Hankey collection at the Royal academy of Arts in 1885 (Anonymous 1885). On 4 March 1899, Martin H. Colnaghi, an art dealer and agent for Hankey, sold the Pretoria painting at a Christie, Manson and Wood auction in London as Lot 9 (Christie, Manson and Woods 1899). In the *Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie* (RKD) is an example of this

1899 catalogue inscribed by Cornelis Hofstede de Groot (Christie, Manson and Woods 1899), one of the most famous Rembrandt scholars of the time. In this example, he makes the following notes in Dutch "From the same time as the woman with the same folded hands in Utrecht. Surely Authentic. Invoice authentically Rembrandt's – The painting is very faint and the paint very thin. Suffered under a cleaner. Gold framed, panel enlarged and brown. Same one in Paris," (Own translation from Dutch). It should be remembered that at this time the New York painting was in the Warneck Collection in Paris.

At the 1899 auction, Sir John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) purchased the Pretoria painting for 265 Pounds as an original work by Rembrandt (Christie, Manson and Woods 1899). JC Robinson was a famous museum curator, but bought this painting for his private collection. After Robinson's death in 1913 his son, JH Robinson, sold at least a portion of his father's collection on auction at Christies on 16 June 1916. The Pretoria painting was one of these, sold as a work by the school of Rembrandt, Lot 128. Dowdeswell & Dowdeswell Galleries in London acted as Robinson's agent in the auction, and bought the work for their own stock (Christie, Manson and Woods 1916, 128). A year later, Dowdeswell & Dowdeswell sold the painting as an original Rembrandt at the Christies auction of 11 June 1917, Lot 58 (Christie, Manson and Woods 1917). E Markey, a London based restorer, purchased the painting from this auction (Christie, Manson and Woods 1917, 58). We presume that Markey restored the damage mentioned in the pencil inscription by Hofstede de Groot and most likely added the cradle that was not mentioned previously by Hofstede de Groot. The painting was then presumably sold to a private client. This sale has not been confirmed by documentation, but the short amount of time that elapsed between the purchase made by Markey and the next documented auction sale suggests a private sale as the most plausible action. The painting was sold on 5 December 1919 at Christies as Lot 80 (Christie, Manson and Woods 1919). A certain MH Fisher, who could not be identified further than the initials and surname, sold the work, and Walter Dowdeswell (1858-1929), the owner of Dowdeswell & Dowdeswell Galleries, purchased the painting for his private collection (Christie, Manson and Woods 1919, 80).

Between this purchase by Walter Dowdeswell in 1919 and the next sale of the work by WN Ferguson in 1927, no records were found. However as Dowdeswell had been an art dealer, it can be assumed that he sold it on to Ferguson, or a third party prior to Ferguson. By 1927, the Pretoria painting was sold by WN Ferguson at Christies on 9 May that year as Lot 58 (Christie, Manson and Woods 1927). Garrad Tyrwhitt-Drake (1881-1964), a businessman, purchased the painting from this auction (Christie, Manson and Woods 1927, 58). Drake consigned the work with WEA Reilly, an antique dealer in Ireland. Two years later, this same antique dealer sold the work at another Christie's auction on 1 February 1929, Lot 80 (Christie, Manson and Woods 1929). The Pretoria painting was purchased by Percy Moore Turner, a London Art Dealer, as a painting by the school of Rembrandt (Christie, Manson and Woods 1929, 80).

Turner in turn sold the painting, presumably to Elizabeth Hartogs-Hijman, the wife of Jacques Coenraad Hartogs (1879-1932), a rich textile and art merchant who traded extensively between Britain and The Netherlands. Hartogs-Hijman took over her husband's business when he passed away in May 1932. Although the specifics could not be confirmed it is presumed that Hartogs-Hijman purchased the painting from the 29 July 1932 auction at Christie's in London, lot 117, from the anonymous part of the auction (Christie, Manson and Woods 1932). Hartogs-Hijman purchased several other paintings by Rembrandt at auctions in London during 1932 and returned them to her home in Arnhem (Christie, Manson and Woods 1932). By 1941 the Pretoria painting was in the collection of Hartogs-Hijman (Van Marle & Bignell, 1941). Hartogs-Hijman sold two other paintings by Rembrandt Van Rijn (Lot 19 and 20), as well as the current painting, as a School of Rembrandt (Lot 22) on the Van Merle and Bignell Auction of 1 July 1941 (Van Marle & Bignell, 1941). Hofstede de Groot described the Pretoria painting, Lot 22, in his microfiche as a copy of a painting of Rembrandt in Berlin at the time (Hoofstede de

Grootfiches N.d.) At this stage the New York painting, presently in the Leiden Gallery, was in Berlin in the collection of Richard von Schnitzler (Cohen 1925, 60).

Rudolf Liffers bought the Pretoria painting from the auction of 1 July 1941. The Ministry of Justice in The Netherlands (Ministerie van Justisie 1947), as well as an annotated copy of the Van Marle and Bignell auction catalogue in the RKD confirm this purchase (Van Marle & Bignell, 1941). The catalogue records the purchase as attributed to phone bidder F55, which, according to the stock books, was Liffers (Van Marle & Bignell, 1940-1941). Liffers purchased this work for 135.000,00 Guilders on the advice of Dr Martin de Wild, a well-known forensic art scientist and restorer of the time (Ministerie van Justitie 1947). Liffers was a spy for the Abwehr or German Military in The Netherlands (Kluiters, 2006). In Kluiters's manuscript *De Abwehr in Nederland*, Kluiters confused the Pretoria painting owned by Liffers (Lot 22) with a painting bought by Tietje (Lot 20). Kluiters mistakenly wrote that Liffers and De Wild sold the Pretoria painting to A.C.P.J. Honigmann, This was however not the case, and it is in fact the Tietje painting, a portrait of a young man (Lot 20) that was first sold to Honigmann, then onto Miedl.

In 1944, Jacob Abraham van Tilburg paid a visit to Liffers in Arnhem to seek his assistance in resolving a charge of Jewish mediation that was made against him by the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst* or Security Service) of the German Nazi Party. Van Tilburg bribed Liffers in order to resolve the matter expediently (Van Beijma, 1945). The assumption is that Mr van Tilburg saw the Pretoria painting here for the first time, and Liffers told him that Dr De Wild had authenticated the painting. Somewhere in 1944 or 1945 Liffers sent some 100 of his paintings to De Wild's restoration studio for safekeeping According to the testimony of De Wild himself this included, the Pretoria painting. He claimed he was busy restoring the work at the time, hence the presence of a photograph of the Pretoria painting in De Wild's archive.

In 1947, the *Nederlandse Beheerinstituut* or Dutch Management Institute confiscated all the paintings belonging to Liffers from De Wild's studio, labelling them war profits (Ministerie van Justisie 1947). On 25 September 1947, the Dutch Management Institute sold the paintings, including the Pretoria painting, at the auction of the Nijstad Antiquaris in Laren. The Pretoria painting featured as Lot 22 in the catalogue and is described as a painting by the School of Rembrandt, "Studie van een oude man", with an image included (Huize Oolde te Laren, 1947). Van Tilburg is likely to have purchased the Pretoria painting at this auction. In 1957, when van Tilburg arrived in Cape Town, South Africa, the Pretoria painting appeared in his import catalogue as "Portrait of Old Man with Beard", case 156 (Commissioner of customs and excise 1959). In 1976, Van Tilburg donated the collection to the University of Pretoria and it became the property of the institution with his passing on 5 October 1980 (De Kamper 2018).

Examining the Pretoria painting

One of the driving factors of the provenance research into the Pretoria painting was the need to have it conserved, as it shows signs of an unstable condition with some mechanical and possibly insect damage. However, not a single art conservator in South Africa was willing to take on the project without a clear understanding of the painting's authorship. The painting was examined in-house in the University of Pretoria's conservation laboratory.

The surface of the artwork exhibits dirt, thick, yellowed and obscuring varnish; scratch and scrape marks, drying and alligator cracks, as well as evidence of past retouching and contamination (Markgraaf 2015). Also visible on the top margin of the painting is a large scrape, with paint and varnish removed exposing the underlying wood. This is consistent with AM de Wild's authentication process, where he sampled paintings with a small steel awl and mounted the sample on Canada balsam in order to examine it under magnification (De Wild 1928, 5).

As it seemed evident that further technical analysis would be required, one conservator consulted even arranged for preliminary dendrochronological tests to be carried out, in order to verify the date of the painting. Dendrochronology is the scientific method of dating the annual growth rings in hardwood trees. Since the characteristics of the growth ring curve are unique and specific to wood of differing geographical origins, it is possible to obtain a relatively precise dating of the Pretoria painting, as well as the provenance of the wood panel. The micro sampling required was carried out locally and sent to the University of Hamburg for testing. Dating studies usually result in an earliest possible creation date, and a tentative date for the actual arrival of a seasoned raw panel. In the case of the Pretoria painting's oak panel, the conclusion is for a possible creation date no earlier than 1646 (Klein 2005). This date coincides with Rembrandt already being an established artist in Amsterdam.

As the date obtained with the dendrochronology was consistent with claims by the previous owner of the authenticity of the Pretoria painting as a true Rembrandt, further investigation was initiated on both the painted panel and its accompanying frame. Examination under Ultra Violet illumination was performed on the painting, but the thick and evenly applied layer of varnish fluoresced and obscured the underlying layers, with only retouching above the varnish layer being clearly visible (Markgraaf 2015). Examination under raking light of the frame revealed a damaged or cancelled stamp containing the letters 'HVU'. The initials is significant as they could point to Hendrik van Uylenburg, with whom Rembrandt had a close relationship since as early as the 1630s (Michel 1894). Rembrandt worked in Van Uylenburg's studio.



[Figure 3] - Cancelled 'HVU' stamp on the back of the frame of the Pretoria Painting

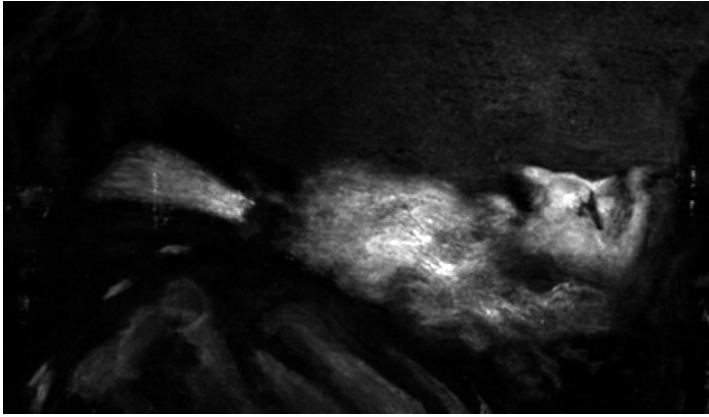
To gain a better understanding of the materials and construction of the painting x-radiography was carried out. X-ray is useful in understanding how a panel is assembled in its cradle, as well as to determine the artists' method, compositional changes and material use. The painting was taken to the University of Pretoria Radiology department. The X-ray revealed how the cradle and frame were

tacked in place, the x-ray however did not reveal any other information on the materials such as the paint used. The x-ray testing was inconclusive as the grain of the wood kept showing through more clearly than possible preparatory layers. The visibility of the wood was consistent with the examination of the artwork and its description in the Hankey auction catalogue previously mentioned, where it is described as thinly painted as if it had been over cleaned (Christie, Manson and Woods 1899).

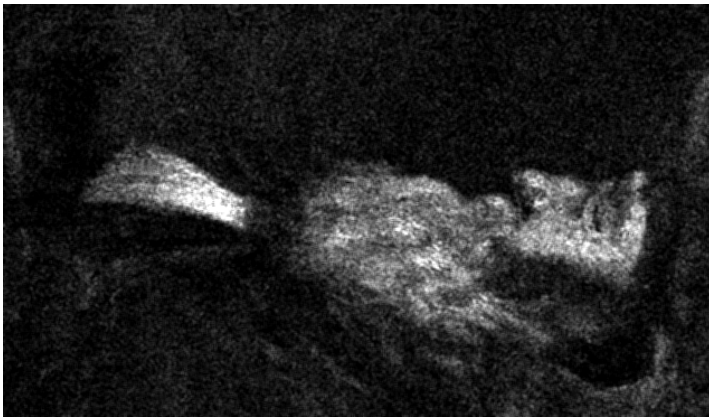
As the X-radiography was inconclusive, it was followed by x-ray fluorescence (XRF) testing, using both a handheld XRF spectrometer and micro XRF mapping. XRF testing allows for the elemental analysis of the mineral components in paint, allowing the differentiation in pigments used which in turn informs questions of creation date and origin. For example differentiating between vermilion and cadmium red, two reds of similar hue. Vermilion is a bright red pigment made from the mineral cinnabar which is composed primarily from mercury and sulphur and has been used since antiquity. Cadmium red is composed primarily from cadmium, sulphur and selenium and has been in use since 1892. This difference would therefore make a painting with cadmium red post 1892. For the handheld XRF analysis 26 target areas were selected for spot testing as a representative range of the colours observer. The handheld XRF analysis was conducted by Maggi Laubser, programme manager, senior lecturer Tangible Heritage Conservation and XRF specialist at the University of Pretoria. Although some of the pigments and elements analysed appears in Rembrandt's palette, there were also inconsistencies. Elements that should be visible are absent or only appears in trace quantities such as lead. Rembrandt is renowned for his use of lead white paint, the absence of high levels of lead suggests that Rembrandt's traditional recipes and methodology were not used (Gonzales, 2019).

To better understand the unusual results micro-mapping XRF was carried out at the University of Pretoria in a Bruker M4 Tornado XRF scanner. The analysis was done by Dr Roald Tagle, senior application scientist micro-XRF, Bruker Nano analytics. The Tornado combines XRF sampling with scanning technology in order to create a digital map of the elemental data. The XRF map clearly shows how pigments are arranged, and layers can be isolated or removed digitally for ease of examination and interpretation. The result of the XRF scanning was definitive in its analysis. The results indicated the absence of a lead based preparatory ground layer. Instead, the presence of large quantities of zinc was revealed, which was only available as a zinc white watercolour after 1834 and only mastered much later in oil paintings. Large quantities of barium sulphate were also discovered. Barium sulphate is a naturally occurring white pigment obtained from the mineral barite. Barium sulphate was developed as an artist pigment known as *blanc fixe*, a non-poisonous replacement for lead white and has been in use since the 1820s (Cameo 2020). However, mixed with zinc, barium sulphate formed Lithopone, which was first produced in 1874 and called Orr's white (Cameo 2019).

Therefore these results do not support a creation date before 1834. The XRF mapping results clearly indicate that a creation date in the 1650s is not possible and that the painting cannot be attributed to Rembrandt, his school or his circle; and the Pretoria painting was created in the second half of the 19th century. Even if the painting had sustained extensive restoration treatments over time, thus introducing more recent paint, there would still be sufficient original material remaining in order to guide that restoration and repainting. Having only trace elements of lead in the paint and ground is inconsistent with Rembrandt's body of work.



[Figure 4] - XRF mapping of the Zinc white



[Figure 5] - XRF mapping of the Barium Sulphate

Conclusion

Returning to the original question of attribution, although the provenance research as well as the dendrochronology results supports the initial attribution of the painting to Rembrandt; the XRF mapping results contradicts this position and suggests an artwork created between 1838 when the zinc oxide pigment became available, and 1899 when the painting first appears in documentary evidence. This conclusion then raises additional questions. How this painting came to be considered a Rembrandt, and more importantly, was this painting made to deliberately deceive. There are additional questions as who was the forger and how they introduced the painting into the market, albeit being good questions, as forgers are not known to document their deceptions, they will probably never be answered.

There are several elements that should be considered in answering this question. The first concerns the addition of the "HVU" stamp and its 'cancellation'. The addition of the stamp certainly suggests a direct connection between the painting and Rembrandt a point not missed in the initial research. The next point of interest is the presence of the 'invoice' signed by the master in 1899 (Christie, Manson and Woods 1899). A fact that could not be checked due to the invoice not accompanying the artwork anymore. However the addition of the invoice did move Hofstede de Groot in making the assumption that the work is indeed an original painting created by Rembrandt. The third point is the panel dated by dendrochronology to 1646. The panel used as substrate was likely scavenged from a piece of historical furniture, as tree ring growth patterns have been studied since the 18th century, and an

authentic panel would create the impression of age and appropriate material use for the time. These three elements combined present a painting with the look and feel of an authentic 17th century Dutch panel painted by Rembrandt. These three elements therefore also suggest a clever combination which was intended to deceive from its first creation and therefore a fake.

This declaration of the painting being fake raises the further question as to why this subject matter was chosen as to this we can only guess, as it may seem an odd choice for a forger and yet there are nine. The nine is therefore suggesting that on the contrary, a small intimate 'Tronie' had both popular appeal and was recognisable as a theme used by Rembrandt. It is also possible that the lack of literature at the time of creation as well as the relatively unknown subject made it the perfect choice, as the purchaser of the work would not have the ability to check the authenticity.

The other, probably more important, question is the role of 'experts' in creating the Pretoria painting's authenticity and putting validity to the claim that the work is indeed by the hand of Rembrandt van Rijn. The 'experts' include opinions by Hofstede de Groot in 1899 that claimed that the painting is "Zeker Echt" (surely real) in his notes (Christie, Manson and Woods 1899); Dowdeswell that sold it in 1917 as an original (Christie, Manson and Woods 1917), and had been selling works by the master for many years; and lastly the authentication by Martin de Wild, an expert in chemical analysis of the paint of old master paintings, who claimed to have tested it in 1940s (Ministerie van Justisie 1947). The question then remains whether an expert opinion as sole validation for authenticity on paintings still has merit. Through this research and our experiences during the research process, we suggest that the expert opinion become an additional weight on the balance for authentication in a similar fashion to that of the x-radiography, x-ray fluorescence and other technical analyses, rather than the only justification. This approach may draw into question at least the validity of the New York, Haarlem, London and Brussels paintings, none of which have been tested for authentication. Additionally, further research into the methodology of early chemical analyses is required, as well as possible re-authentication of those works tested using such methodologies, as these were not quantitative or definitive. As we discovered with the Pretoria painting, which had previously been chemically tested by AM de Wild, new techniques have now disproved the painting to be by Rembrandt van Rijn, his school or his circle. It is currently unknown by whom the painting was created, however it was almost certainly created with the intention to fool and has done so since at least 1899. A reunion of the nine paintings side-by-side might yield interesting comparisons and results, as would further provenance studies and technical art analysis on those remaining.

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