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Boy in a Cape and Turban (Portrait of Prince Rupert of the Palatinate)

Jan Lievens
(Leiden 1607 – 1674 Amsterdam)

ca. 1631
oil on panel
66.7 x 51.8 cm
JL-104

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In this beautiful and compelling image, Jan Lievens has depicted a smooth-faced boy exotically dressed in a golden cape attached with a chain clasp and a blue and gold turban festooned with the soaring plume of a bird of paradise.[1] Light falling from the left illuminates the brilliant, shimmering fabrics of his wardrobe, a symphony of yellows, golds, and blues that bespeaks wealth and privilege. As exquisitely as Lievens has rendered the fabrics, even more remarkable is the sensitivity with which he has characterized the sitter's expression. As the youth stands with one hand clasping his richly decorated cloth belt, he stares out to left with wide open eyes with a serious demeanor that conveys both dignity and inner resolve.[2]

The sitter looks like a Turkish or Persian character or a figure from a biblical story, but he is actually Prince Rupert of the Palatinate (1619–90), the youngest son of Frederick V (1596–1632), elector Palatinate, and Elizabeth Stuart (1596–1661). Lievens painted this portrait while Frederick, the nephew of Frederik Hendrik, stadholder of the United Provinces, and Elizabeth, daughter of James I, king of England, were living in exile in The Hague after losing their realm in 1619. Frederick had been named king of Bohemia in November 1619, but his Protestant forces were soon routed by those of Emperor Ferdinand II at the Battle of White Mountain, a key battle of the Thirty Years War. Since their reign only lasted one winter they were often referred to derisively as the Winter King and Winter Queen; nevertheless, they were warmly welcomed in The Hague and they maintained close relationships with Frederick Hendrick and his consort, Amalia van Solms.[3]

Lievens presumably received this commission through the recommendation of Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), secretary to Frederick Hendrick, the prince of Orange and a scholar and connoisseur passionately interested in science, art, and music. In the late 1620s and early 1630s Huygens was instrumental in helping Lievens and Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) become court painters, not only for Frederick Hendrick and Amalia van Solms but also for Frederick and Elizabeth.[4] Huygens was a great admirer of Lievens's portraits, about which he wrote: "In painting the human countenance, he [Lievens] wreaks miracles," and his artistic recommendations would have been eagerly followed by these courtly patrons.[5] Portrait commissions from the Bohemian court were also appealing for Lievens because of his aspirations to become a court painter for Elizabeth's brother, King Charles of England.

In the early 1630s Lievens and Rembrandt each painted portraits of the children of Frederick and Elizabeth. Rembrandt, with workshop participation, painted a *portrait historié* of Rupert and his tutor, possibly in the guise of the biblical figures Samuel and Eli **(fig 1)**. In that painting Rupert wears an Oriental costume similar to that in the Leiden Collection painting.[6] In 1631 Lievens painted a *portrait historié* of

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Rembrandt and studio, *Prince Rupert with His Tutor as Samuel and Eli*, ca. 1631, oil on canvas, 102.9 x 88.3 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 84.PA.570



Fig 2. Jan Lievens, *Man in Oriental Costume ("Sultan Soliman")*, 1629–30, oil on canvas, 135 x 100.5 cm, Neues Gallerie, Potsdam, GK 1, 884

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Rupert's older brother, Charles Louis (1617–80), also in Oriental costume, and his tutor (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles). Lievens's painting was presumably a pendant to Rembrandt's *portrait historié*.[7] Around 1631 Lievens also executed a formal portrait of Rupert.[8]

Meredith Hale proposed that the sitter of the Leiden Collection painting was Charles Louis, but because of the sitter's young age and his close resemblance to the figure in Rembrandt's *portrait historié,* a stronger argument can be made that he is Rupert.[9] Rupert, who was twelve years old in 1631, had a straighter nose and narrower face than did Charles Louis, who was his elder by two years. These slight differences in the appearances of the princes became more prominent over time if one judges by double portrait Anthony van Dyck (1599–1640) painted of the two young men in 1637 (Musée du Louvre, Paris).[10] There, the prominent jaw and sloping eyelids of the older but shorter Charles Louis have become quite distinctive features.

Rupert's Oriental dress was part of a vogue for such costume in the Netherlands and England at the time, and Elizabeth must have specified this attire when she commissioned the portrait. Perhaps her interest was provoked by the physical appearance and manners of the members of the Persian embassy, notably Musa Beg, who fascinated the Dutch when he visited The Hague in 1626 on behalf of Shah Abbas to secure a trade pact with the Dutch.[11] Lievens seems also to have been inspired by the figure of one of the Magi in a painting of the Adoration of the Magi by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), a composition that would have been known to him through an engraving, dated 1621, by Lucas Vorstermans (1595–1675). Lievens had also used Rubens's magus as the basis for *Man in Oriental Costume ("Sultan Soliman")*, 1629–30 **(fig 2)**. This imposing painting was in the collection of Frederik Hendrik and therefore probably known to Elizabeth, which may explain why Lievens's portrait of Rupert in Oriental costume follows very closely the pose and costume of the "sultan."

- Lloyd DeWitt, 2017

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Endnotes

1. In February 2019, the feather adorning the turban was correctly identified as that of a bird of paradise. It was originally published as an ostrich plume.
2. Rupert's averted glance is seen in many of Lievens's portraits, including his *Self-Portrait* of ca. 1631–32 (JL-105). Lievens, with few exceptions, tended to make his sitters and figures seem aloof, detached, or reflective, and in this portrait he used the sideways glance to give the prince an air of thoughtful authority. See Lloyd DeWitt, "Evolution and Ambition in the Career of Jan Lievens (1607–1674)" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2006), 76.
3. Marika Keblusek, "The Bohemian Court at The Hague," in *Princely Display: The Court of Frederik Hendrik of Orange and Amalia van Solms*, ed. Marika Keblusek and Jori Zijlmans (Exh cat. The Hague, Historical Museum) (Zwolle, 1997), 47–49.
4. See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Bringing New Light to an Old Master," *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2008), 9–10.
5. Constantijn Huygens wrote these words in his autobiography. This quotation is taken from *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2008), 287.
6. Christopher Brown identified the boy in the Rembrandt workshop portrait as Prince Rupert based on an eighteenth-century description and the provenance. Ernst van de Wetering in Bernhard Schnackenburg and Ernst van de Wetering, eds., *The Mystery of the Young Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. Kassel, Museum Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Wolfratshausen, 2001), 326–31.
7. Lloyd DeWitt, "Prince Charles Louis with His Tutor, as the Young Alexander Instructed by Aristotle," in *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2008), 138, no. 29.
8. Jan Lievens, *Portrait of Prince Rupert of the Palatinate,* ca. 1631, oil on canvas, 66. 2 x 51.6 cm, formerly Richard Green Ltd., London.
9. Meredith Hale, "Boy in a Cape and Turban," in *Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (New Haven, 2008), 141, no. 30.
10. Susan J. Barnes et al., *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (New Haven, 2004), 485–86, no. IV. 69.

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11. Hermann Goetz, “Persians and Persian Costumes in Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century,” *Art Bulletin* 20 (1938): 287.

Provenance

- Jules Porgès, Paris, by 1921 (sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 17 June 1924, no. 105, as by studio of Rembrandt [Galerie van Diemen, Berlin, 1925; to Guttman]).
- S. Guttman, Berlin and London; by descent to the Bett family (sale, Bonhams, London, 13 December 1990, no. 102 [£584,500 to Emmanuel Moatti, Paris; to a private collection, Brazil, around 1994]).
- Private collection, Brazil (sale, Christie’s, New York, 17 June 2004, no. 72 [to Johnny van Haeften, Ltd., London]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2004.

Exhibition History

- Berlin, Akademie der Künste, “Gemälde alter Meister aus Berliner Besitz,” July–August 1925, no. 218 [lent by Galerie van Diemen, Berlin].
- London, Matthiesen Gallery, “Rembrandt’s Influence in the Seventeenth Century,” 20 February–2 April 1953, no. 46 [lent by S. Guttman or his descendants].
- Paris, Grand Palais, “16e Biennale Internationale,” 18 September–4 October 1992 [displayed by Emanuel Moatti, Paris].
- Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, 24 August 2004–31 October 2005 [lent by the present owner].
- Washington, National Gallery of Art, “Jan Lievens: A Dutch Master Rediscovered,” 26 October 2008–11 January 2009; Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Museum, 7 February–26 April 2009; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis, 17 May–9 August 2009, no. 30 [lent by the present owner].
- Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, on loan with the permanent collection, January 2010–February 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Istanbul, Sakip Sabanci Museum, “Rembrandt and His Contemporaries: The Golden Age of Dutch Art,” 21 February–10 June 2012, no. 68 [lent by the present owner].
- New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, September 2012–September 2013 [lent by the present owner].
- Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, on loan with the permanent collection, April 2013–April 2016 [lent by

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the present owner].

- Paris, Museé du Louvre, “Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection: The Age of Rembrandt,” 22 February–22 May 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, “Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre,” 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H’ART Museum, “From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, “Art and Life in Rembrandt’s Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].

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Technical Summary

The support is a rectangular composite panel composed of two vertically grained Baltic oak planks of similar but not identical widths.[1] The panel join runs right of center. There are bevels along all four edges, and the panel is unthinned and uncradled. There are two paper labels, a black stencil, and two handwritten inscriptions, but no wax collection seals, import stamps, panel maker’s marks or machine toolmarks.

A light-colored ground is thinly and evenly applied followed by a light brown imprimatura.

The paint has been applied quickly with thin opaque scumbles, which allow the ground and imprimatura to show through in areas, and wet-into-wet where one stroke interrupts the other. The cloak appears to have been underpainted with a deep crimson, which gives a warmth to the shadowed folds. The turban decoration and the feather have been scratched into wet paint with the back of a brush.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

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Infrared images captured at 780–1700 nanometers reveal a dark brushy sketch below the paint surface used to establish the shadows along the figure's proper left shoulder and left side of the neck and face. There is no additional finer underdrawing.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2004 and remains in a good state of preservation.[2]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on Peter Klein's two dendrochronology reports. One states a dating could not be obtained; the other suggests an earliest fell date of 1617, a more plausible fell date of 1621…1623…1627 + x, and a plausible first use date from 1625 onward.
2. Entry based on a 2011 examination report by Kate Smith, Paintings Conservation Department, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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