

1. Introduction and description

In his Rembrandt monograph of 1986, Tümpel eliminated without commentary this painting from Rembrandt's oeuvre, labelling it as a workshop product.¹ As will become apparent in this entry, this painting cannot be so easily rejected; in fact, strong arguments can be introduced in favour of maintaining the traditional attribution to Rembrandt. Admittedly, at first sight it does not fit easily into Rembrandt's oeuvre, being unusual both in execution and composition. However, the latter point can be largely explained by the reconstruction put forward below of the panel's highly complex material history. As to the first point, the painting must be seen in the context of the remarkable diversity of the work produced by Rembrandt and his workshop in the 1640s.

The sitter looks at us almost frontally with his body turned three quarters to the right. The clothing and finery are unusually complex and difficult to identify, in part because of their sketchy execution. The red cloak covering most of the torso appears to be held closed by a hand concealed beneath the fabric. The nature of the garment covering the neck, chest and shoulder is unclear. A comparison with Pilate's costume in the 1636 second state of Rembrandt's *Ecce Homo* etching (B. 77) suggests that it might be a loose collar. The fabric gathered into pleats most resembles brown velvet. A chain is depicted at the top edge of this collar. It either rests loose or is attached to it. A little lower is a second chain which seems to weigh down the fabric of the collar. The light, frilled collar of a shirt is just visible beneath the brown garment at the neck. On his head Rembrandt wears a small brownish black cap trimmed with a headband decorated with a glistening material. From both ears hang transparent pendants on gold rings which, as appears from the lit ear, pierce the lobes. A curious feature of the outfit is a dark piece of cloth hanging down at the neck on the right which is probably attached to the back of the cap.

Working conditions

Examined on 11 June 1968 (J.B., S.H.L.) and on 15 March 1989 (E.v.d.W.): out of the frame, in good daylight, with the aid of four X-ray films covering almost the entire surface, a stereomicroscope, an ultraviolet lamp and an infrared photograph. The remains of the signature were studied with infrared reflectography. The yellowed varnish hardly impedes examination.

Support

Oak panel, grain vertical, 73.5 x 59.6 cm including the pieces, with mitre joinings, which were added to turn an oval panel measuring 68.5 x 56.5 cm into a rectangle. The oval consists of two parts, which from left to right are 4.5 and 52 cm wide; thickness about 6 mm. The oval panel is not bevelled on the reverse. The narrow, left-hand part of the oval panel is so evidently different in ground and paint from the main part that this small strip can only be a later addition (see *Radiography* and 2. *Comments*). On the right side of the oval panel, about 15.5 cm from the right edge,

there is a vertical crack running slightly at an angle. Joining up with this, and running in the same direction, cracking continues in the pieces added at the corners.

After being enlarged to a rectangle, the panel was attached to a panel of softwood, which was later largely planed off before being cradled. The softwood panel must have consisted of several parts because the grain runs in different directions in what remains of it. These cover parts of the edge of the oval. For an interpretation of the material history of the panel, see 2. *Comments*.

Ground

A light yellow ground shines through the transparent red paint of the cloak and at the right in the background.

Kühn believed he was analysing a single ground containing chalk, lead white and slight traces of ochre and glue as the medium.² Probably chalk-glue priming and 'primuersel' were analysed as a single layer (see Vol. I, pp. 18-19). The ground that shines through must be that of the portrait of a man underneath (see *Radiography* and 2. *Comments*).

Paint layer

Condition: Except for a few thin patches, for example in the hair, the paint on the original part of the panel is in excellent condition. The 4.5 cm wide strip added to the left of the panel (see *Support*) – which the infrared photograph suggests may have been partly overpainted – has severely darkened with age.

Craquelure: In the most thickly applied passages, especially on the ridge of the nose, hairline cracks are visible only with a magnifying glass.

Because of its execution, the painting gives the impression of being unfinished in places. This is particularly evident in the costume, which was done swiftly and with little attention to details (this also applies to the chains) or to the structure of the folds. This sketchiness is all the more striking because the head is so finely worked and has a clearer plastic autonomy than any other element in the painting. This is enhanced in the lit passages by the highly varied yet always careful execution which, employing small, generally flat brushstrokes, suggests delicate curves and hollows, especially at the eyes and mouth. The shadow effects, which imply a rather powerful side light, give rise to a subtle play of wrinkles and curves in the skin of the forehead. The nose casts a fairly marked and rather broad shadow, beside which light, half-shadow and reflected lights evoke a three-dimensionally differentiated image of the unlit half of the face. The contour, which like most contours in this painting is not entirely sharp, nonetheless adds to the clear structure of cheekbone and cheeks. The principal feature of the colour scheme is the contrast between the predominantly warm hues in the figure and the cool, dark grey background, which is slightly illuminated in places; especially the cloak in transparent red paint plays an important role.

A number of obvious pentimenti can be seen in the paint surface. It is apparent that the cloak hanging in loose folds around the body originally lay a little higher

Fig. 1. Panel 73.5 x 59.6 cm. For a colour reproduction of a detail (1:1) showing the face see Chapter III fig. 259



Fig. 2. X-Ray



over the shoulder on the left. It evidently extended as far as the lower chain, because up to that point in the loose collar a red paint layer is visible in places under the top brownish layer. A dark red showing through the dark background on the right next to the shoulder and arm also indicates a pentimento. Evidently the contour first ran further to the right (for other pentimenti, see *Radiography*). The unusual appearance of the painting is also due to an underlying painting shining through at several points, particularly in the background to the left of the collar and in the hair and face of the sitter (see *Radiography* and 2. *Comments*).

Radiography

The X-ray image shows that the *Self-portrait* was painted over another portrait. Almost exactly under the head in the *Self-portrait* is the head of a man wearing a ruff. The area occupied by each portrait in the X-ray image can be determined locally because the underlying head is executed more smoothly than the *Self-portrait* which is in a more coarsely textured paint. This difference in execution is especially noticeable when the two ears at the left are compared. Because of the coarseness of the paint, Rembrandt's ear lobe with its pendant shows up as a somewhat blotchy shape among the lit forms of the elaborately modelled ear, in even thick paint, and the equally smoothly executed cheekbone of the underlying figure. Rembrandt's left eye overlaps exactly the left eye of the discarded portrait. His right eye is slightly lower than that of the underlying portrait, which contributes to the mistaken impression that the first head has excessively large eyes. The ruff of the underlying figure shows relatively little radioabsorbency. There is no firm evidence that it was completed before the *Self-portrait* was painted over it. For example the finishing light accents normally applied to the edges of the pleats of such ruffs are missing. The series of points showing up light on the left below the head are due to the highlights in the chains of the *Self-portrait*. The significantly lighter appearance in the X-ray image of the appended strip of wood indicates that its ground differs from that of the original panel and that it is therefore a later addition.

Infrared photography: Because the cloak is done in red paint, the infrared rays easily penetrate the paint layer and are reflected by the light ground. As a result, a configuration of dark lines shows up very clearly. However, interpretation of the image is hindered because of the difficulty in distinguishing which of these lines belong to an underlying brush drawing and which were added at a later stage to indicate folds in the red cloak. The straight line running obliquely across the chest most likely belongs to an earlier version of the clothing and was intended to indicate where a coat or doublet was fastened. The clearly legible sleeve inset sketched in a few lines, must also be part of that garment. The lines running down from this inset before veering sharply to the right could be read as the contours of the sitter's right arm held in front of his body and covered by a sleeve. The thin vertical line would then mark the end of that sleeve. A line rising at an angle from the forearm to the right coincides with a fold in the

cloak and so must lie on the surface, as do the short strokes running straight across it. Because the different lines seem to intersect wet into wet, it thus appears that the process of laying in the original coat and its subsequent transformation into a cloak took place in one and the same session. A line showing up dark next to the right-hand contour of the body, which runs obliquely to the right and disappears into the dark background, was evidently an earlier contour.

The infrared photograph also shows that the sleeves of the jacket continue into the pieces added to the oval panel to make it a rectangle. This is only faintly visible in the surface.

For the dark appearance in the infrared photograph of the strip added, see *Paint layer Condition*.

Signature

On the lower right in the background and in part where the earlier body contour was painted over: <Rem>; the remnants of a *b* are intersected by the edge of the oval panel. This fragment of a signature is legible only with the aid of infrared reflectography.

2. Comments

In order to assess the stylistic characteristics of this *Self-portrait*, its material history must be interpreted. The alterations to the format of the panel alone significantly affected the composition. Until now it has always been assumed – for example by Lauts,³ and also by Tümpel (see note 1) – that the oval of the present central panel, without the additions which make it a rectangle, was the original format. However, this is improbable, if only because (as Pinder⁴ and Schwartz⁵ noted in connection with this painting) the oval portrait had gone out of fashion by the 1640s. Moreover the reverse of the central panel shows no trace of the kind of bevelling along the edge customary for ovals (cf. II A 59, A 60, A 62, A 72 and A 82). One then has to consider whether the panel might originally have been rectangular. The fact that the signature is cut off by the edge of the oval conclusively proves that the panel must have been cut down some time after the painting had been signed, regardless of the question of who signed it and when.

A curious feature is that the panel was later enlarged with a slat on the left side before its format was altered (see *Radiography*). It is probable that in this process the bevelled part of the panel on the left was removed to provide a sufficiently thick edge onto which the new strip could be glued. The enlargement may have been carried out to prevent too much of the sitter's body being cut off and to avoid having the edge of the painting too close to the head.

It cannot be established with certainty when the panel was cut down. Lauts (see note 3) pointed out that when it was in the estate of Hyacinthe Rigaud in 1703 it was not explicitly described as 'en ovale', as some other items were, and concluded from this that at that point it must have been rectangular. This led Lauts to assume that by then the, as he thought, originally oval panel had been

Fig. 3. Infrared photograph



Fig. 4. Detail (1:1.5)

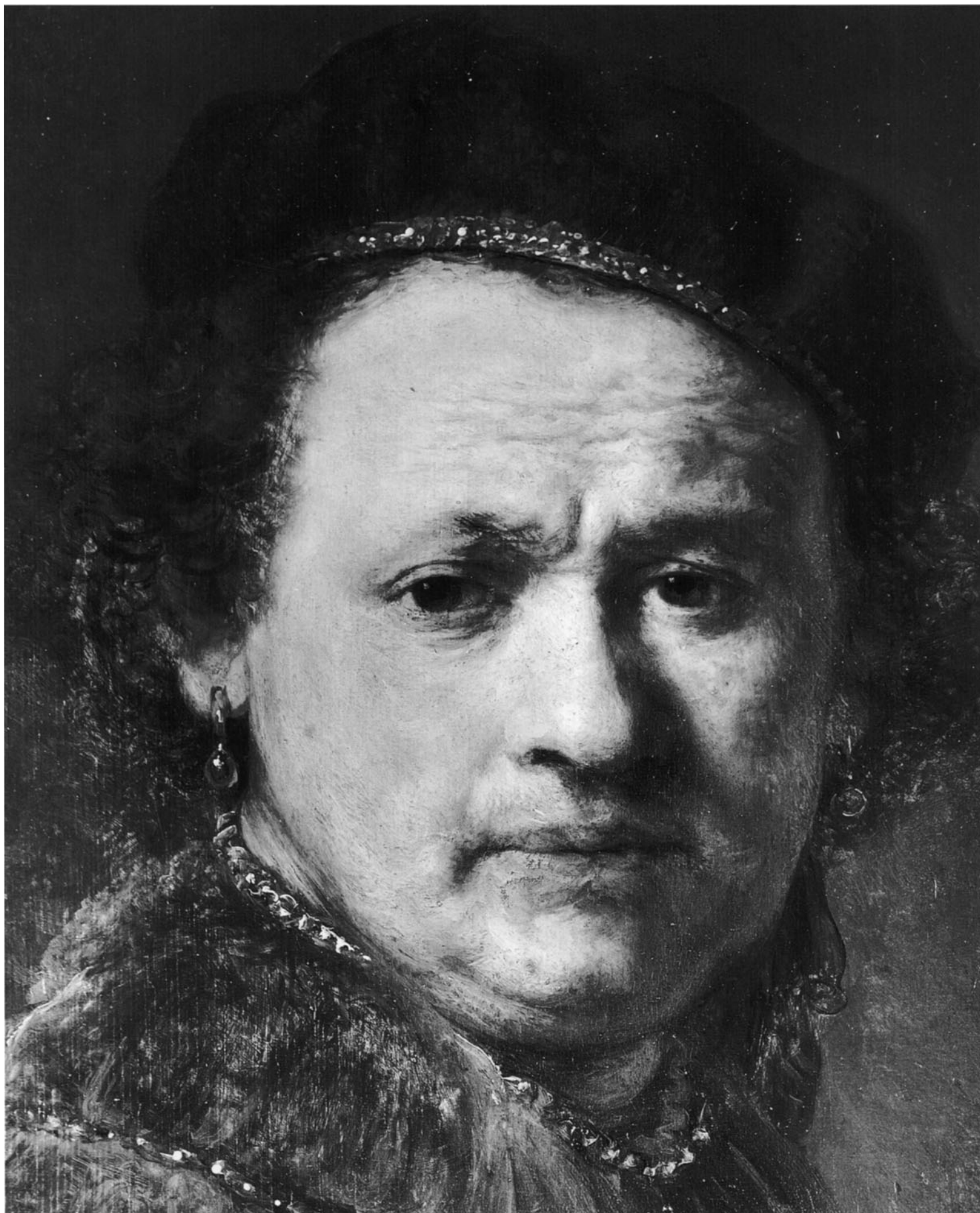


Fig. 5. X-Ray, detail



filled out to its present rectangular format. It is more likely, however, that at that stage the originally rectangular panel had not yet been cut down to an oval.

All in all, these complex alterations to the original panel resulted not only in a different format but also – and most importantly – in a change of the painting's composition. The figure was moved slightly to the right, so that the tilt of the head is brought in line with the vertical axis of the oval. This fixes, as it were, the frontal position of the head and thus the animated turn of the head in relation to the body is lost. A precondition for this suggestion of movement is that body and head must be placed asymmetrically in the picture plane, a customary device in 17th-century busts.

The present unusual composition may have been one of the features of the painting which led Tümpel to eliminate it from the artist's oeuvre (see note 1). The execution is also sufficiently unusual in various respects to give grounds for questioning the painting's authenticity. However, a partial explanation for this too can be found in the material history and above all in the genesis of the painting. Like several other self-portraits (authentic or otherwise), this work was painted on a previously used support (see Chapter III pp. 96-98). As can be seen in the X-ray image, the support of this painting originally bore the portrait of a man. His head is in virtually the same place and on the same scale as the head of Rembrandt painted over it. Judging by the X-ray image, this earlier portrait was done in a different, smoother style at variance with that of Rembrandt. This makes it extremely unlikely that the underlying head is by Rembrandt, as Gerson suggested.⁶ It is conceivable that the panel came from the inventory of the workshop of another artist. It is impossible to say how much earlier this old-fashioned-looking portrait should be dated. The evenly starched ruff that the X-ray image reveals provides no specific evidence of date. This type of ruff came into fashion at the beginning of the 17th century and continued to be worn well into the 1650s.

Through wearing of the paint, the ear of the underlying head has become visible in the hair to the left of Rembrandt's ear. In the face, too, the paint of the head underneath comes to the surface in places, such as by the cheek on the left and in the shadow under the nostril and the tip of the nose. The *Self-portrait* is evidently not painted on an intermediate ground layer. The appearance in the X-ray image of the ruff without the finishing touches in the underlying portrait supports the thesis that it was not entirely finished (see *Radiography*). The extent to which a light yellow ground shines through the translucent paint in large parts of the costume and background of Rembrandt's painting shows that the underlying head had not yet been given a background or the rest of the costume. Thus, apart from the area with the head and ruff, the panel appears to have been covered only by a light ground, which the painter of the *Self-portrait* was able to utilise.

As is most clearly evident from the infrared photograph, the *Self-portrait's* first lay out was executed in very free black strokes and lines. In those cases in which

neutron activation autoradiographs are available, sketchy strokes of this kind containing bone black, which are usually found beneath opaque paint layers, are often visible in costume passages (see II A 79, C 68 and C 69). It is safe to assume that this way of working was quite normal in Rembrandt's workshop and that such a sketch had the same function as a preparatory drawing. The fact that in places the initial design is so clearly visible to the naked eye is, however, one of the unusual features of this painting. As pointed out above, the painting was substantially altered in the initial stage; examination of the paint surface and infrared studies both reveal pentimenti, particularly in the costume (see *Paint layer* and *Radiography*). Grounds for justifying the way in which these pentimenti are barely concealed and the degree to which the painting appears to be unfinished can be found in 17th-century art theory, and the evidence we have as to Rembrandt's ideas about bringing works of art to completion.⁷ One is almost inclined to regard the painting as an early demonstration of Rembrandt's approach to finish as manifested primarily in his later oeuvre.

Assuming that the painting is autograph, dating it on the basis of stylistic and technical characteristics is somewhat difficult. The fine, yet always legible, brushwork in the face is most reminiscent of Rembrandt's self-portraits of the early 1630s (cf. the *Self-portrait* in Paris of 1633, II A 72, and that in Berlin of 1634, II A 96), though it is immediately apparent from the physiognomy that this would be a much too early date for the painting. The usual dating of the Karlsruhe *Self-portrait* to the 1640s rests above all on the physiognomy: compared with the London *Self-portrait* of 1640 (III A 139), the face has become fleshier and the cheeks flabbier. The sitter's frowning expression which Raupp⁸ interpreted as a conventional allusion to the view championed by artists since the 16th century that painting primarily required intellectual effort (see also IV 8 *Comments*) is not found to the same extent in earlier self-portraits. The complete absence of moustache and the usual tuft of hair under Rembrandt's lower lip, which has no parallel in any other self-portrait after 1632, does not help to solve the dating problem (though it contributes to the unusual nature of this work). The etched *Self-portrait drawing at a window* (B. 22), which is dated 1648 in the second state, could be regarded as a *terminus ante quem*. In this etching the sitter's features are heavier than in the Karlsruhe painting. This must be why Hofstede de Groot dated the Karlsruhe painting to 1643-45.⁹ Bauch preferred a date of around 1645 and pointed to a copy with the inscription *Rembrandt f. 1645*,¹⁰ though its position does not correspond to that of the incomplete signature on the Karlsruhe *Self-portrait* (see 5. *Copies*, 5; fig. 6). The stylistic differences from other work done at practically the same time, such as *A young girl leaning on a window-sill* at Dulwich (Br. 368) dated 1645, can be understood only if the premise is accepted that in this period almost every autograph work was an independent creation.

Supposing that the painting is a workshop product, a view that Tümpel was the first – and only – person to espouse (see note 1), the question then arises whether it is a portrait of Rembrandt by a member of the workshop or a

Fig. 6. Copy 5. Formerly Coll. Paul Ostra, Amsterdam 1941



more or less free copy after an existing self-portrait. The first possibility – that Rembrandt's portrait has been painted by someone else – is ruled out by the fact that the characteristic asymmetry in Rembrandt's face – the sagging fold of the eyelid on the right and the vertical furrow above the nose curving toward the left eye – is identical to what is seen in the self-portraits accepted as authentic (see Chapter III). Thus, the Karlsruhe work was painted in front of the mirror, or in some way based on an autograph self-portrait. The occurrence of a number of pentimenti and their nature (see *Paint layer* and *Radiography*) argue against the possibility that it is a copy. In fact, these alterations indicate a very free development of the conception, as is often found in works by Rembrandt; it is unlikely that a copyist would have made changes to such an extent and in this way.

The possibility that it is a free variant of the category discussed on pp. 117-132 should not be immediately excluded. However, as discussed in Chapter III, pp. 255-259 we are convinced that the painting's style and quality exclude that option.

3. Documents and Sources

None.

4. Graphic Reproductions

None.

5. Copies

Hofstede de Groot (see note 11) listed:

1. Coll. Count Keyserling, Mitau, exhibited there in 1894, no. 286.
 2. Rectangular, partial copy after the head, Gaunø Castle, Denmark; exhibited Copenhagen 1891, no. 173.
- Lauts (see note 3) adds three copies, one of which he believes may be identical to copy 1:
3. Canvas 57 x 46 cm, rectangular; sale Dr Raehlmann et al., Berlin (Lepke), 10 December 1907, no. 76.
 4. Canvas 66 x 56 cm, oval; 1951 with art dealer in Zurich.
 5. Canvas, rectangular, signed 'Rembrandt f. 1645' (fig. 6). The position of the signature in the background to the right of the shoulder does not correspond with that in the original. In 1941 in the collection of Paul Ostra, Amsterdam. The cloth hanging down at the neck on the right is not copied. This copy, which appears to be the work by a dilettante, was produced at the earliest in the 18th century.
 6. Canvas, rectangular; coll. Jeanne Goeders, Verviers (photograph in the RKD).
- None of these copies were seen by us.

6. Provenance

- Coll. Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659-1743); in the inventory Rigaud drew up himself on his marriage in 1703 two self-portraits of Rembrandt are described (one of which, the *Self-portrait* discussed here, recurs in the collection of the Comte de Vence): '...Le portrait en buste de Raimbran ... 500 liv.' and 'Un portrait du mesme ... 200 liv.'¹¹
- Coll. Comte de Vence. Described in: *Description du Cabinet de M. le Comte de Vence*, Paris n.d. [1759] (Lugt 1073), p. 21: 'Dans le second Cabinet... Dans les deux coins sont aussi deux Rambrandt; celui contre la fenêtre est son Portrait, & vient du Cabinet de M. Rigaud, Directeur de l'Académie: M. Drouais le fils doit la réputation qu'il s'est acquise aux soins qu'il a pris de copier tous ses Portraits.' Sale Paris, 9-17 February 1761 (Lugt 1135), no. 44: 'Rembrandt-Van-Rhein. Un autre Portrait très gracieux, vû de 3 quarts & coëffé d'un bonnet en forme de toque. Ce Tableau est peint sur bois, il est de même grandeur que le précédent [de 27 pouces de haut, sur 21 pouces & demi de large = 72.9 x 58 cm] & a beaucoup de mérite. Il vient du Cabinet de feu M. Rigauld, Peintre du Roi.' (400 livres to Eberts); bought here together with seven other paintings by the art lover and banker Jean-Henri Eberts for the collection of Karoline Luise von Baden-Durlach (1723-1783) of Karlsruhe.¹²

NOTES

1. Tümpel 1986, cat. no. A70.
2. Kühn, p. 193.
3. J. Lauts, *Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Katalog alte Meister bis 1800*, Karlsruhe 1966, no. 238.
4. W. Pinder, *Rembrandts Selbstbildnisse*, Königstein im Taunus n.d. [1950] (1943¹), p. 49.
5. Schwartz 1984, p. 409.
6. Gerson 262.
7. Van de Wetering 1997, p. 164.
8. H.J. Raupp, *Untersuchungen zu Künstlerbildnis und Künstlerdarstellung in den Niederlanden im 17. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim 1984, pp. 21-22.
9. HdG 547.
10. Bauch 1966, 320.
11. HdG *Urk.*, no. 387, pp. 444-445.
12. G.F. Kircher, *Karoline Luise von Baden als Kunstsammlerin*, Karlsruhe 1933.