

= A Polish Nobleman =

A Polish Nobleman is a 1637 painting by Rembrandt depicting a man in a costume of either Polish szlachta or boyar nobility . The identity of the subject of the painting is unclear , and has given rise to several different interpretations . The view that the figure 's dress is clearly Polish is not universally held and it may have been a self @-@ portrait .

The painting has changed owners several times , and its past owners have included Catherine II the Great and Andrew Mellon . It is currently located at the National Gallery of Art in Washington , D.C.

= = Description = =

The portrait represents a man , estimated by some to be 45 years of age , standing turned to the viewer 's right , looking at the viewer with a commanding expression . In his uplifted right hand he holds a baton with a golden cap . He has a thick moustache and wears a high fur cap on which there is a golden chain with precious stones and a coat of arms in the center . From his ear a large pear @-@ shaped pearl hangs from a golden pendant earring . He wears a reddish brown mantle with a broad fur collar and , over it , a heavy gold chain from which the order of three horse tails , set in rich pendants , hangs on his right shoulder . A full light from the left falls on the right side of his face . The background is brownish @-@ grey .

= = History and provenance = =

The painting was created by Rembrandt in 1637 . It was not given an official title . The current one is the most recent , widely accepted one . Prior and alternate names include Portrait of a Slav Prince , Portrait d 'un Turc , and Man in Russian Costume . Its authenticity was supported by an analysis of the panel 's wood , which showed that it was cut from a tree felled around 1635 that was also used in the painter 's River Landscape with Ruins ( 1650 ) . The painting underwent restoration in 1985 and has been X @-@ rayed .

The painting 's first owner or owners are not clear , but it might have been owned by a certain Harman van Swole . It was purchased in 1768 by Catherine II the Great and held in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg . It was purchased by Andrew Mellon in 1931 , and given by the Mellon Trust to the National Gallery of Art in Washington , D.C. in 1937 . The painting was one of a number of artworks that Mellon had purchased from the Hermitage during the 1930s . He denied having made these purchases for several years , since the US was in a major depression ? which would have made the acquisitions seem extravagant ? and at odds with the Soviet government . The works were kept for some time in a non @-@ public section of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington , D.C.

= = Analysis = =

This work was labeled by some art critics as a tronie , a painting with an exaggerated facial expression or a stock character in costume . For instance , Melissa Percival notes that in this particular painting the viewer may notice an extravagant fur cape , lopsided hat , tufted mustache , and similar paraphernalia , all giving " an impression that the painting should not be taken too seriously " .

Scholars have attempted for more than a century to understand who is portrayed in this painting . Earlier proposals that the subject was John III Sobieski ( who would have been eight years old in 1637 ) or Stephen Bathory ( who died in 1586 ) have been discredited . According to Otakar Odlo?ilík , while the man in the painting is clearly wearing Polish garb , it is neither certain who he is , nor whether he is a Pole . Odlo?ilík 's research on this issue suggested that the painting may be that of Andrzej Rej , a Polish noble and diplomat of that era who passed through Amsterdam , the Netherlands , where Rembrandt was working , at the time the painting was created . Nonetheless ,

without any documents from that era clearly acknowledging that fact , as Odlo?ilík noted , it may never be known for certain who the subject really is .

Odlo?ilík concluded ( writing in 1963 ) that most scholars are in consensus that Rembrandt portrayed a real Polish noble . He cited research by Kurt Bauch who has suggested that it may be Rembrandt 's brother Adriaen who modeled for him , but judged it as unlikely . Other views have emerged since the publication of his article . In 1979 the art historian Kenneth Clark opined that it was a self @-@ portrait , idealized and " got up in fancy dress . " Walter Liedtke of the Metropolitan Museum of Art writing in 2001 identifies the hat as Russian and Marieke de Winkel in 2006 asserted that " ... the man cannot be identified as a Pole but as a Muscovite boyar . " The National Gallery website states that it is " probably not a portrait of a specific individual " , but notes a strong resemblance to Rembrandt himself and suggests in turn that it may be a self @-@ portrait . One objection to its classification as a self @-@ portrait , that the subject 's jowls were too pronounced , was addressed by an X @-@ ray analysis showing that Rembrandt modified the painting during the course of its creation .