

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM
FINE ARTS

FRENCH SCHOOL

PAGE IN PROFILE, WEARING A TURBAN

Oil on canvas
H. 0,65 m; W. 0,54 m

DATE: 1730-1750

PROVENANCE:

According to tradition, given by Frederik VII (1808-1863), King of Denmark to Jacob Kornerup (1825-1913), attributed to Karl van Mander III (1609-1670)
Private collection, Denmark
Rasmussen sale, 18-22 November 1988, n° 326; "Peintre anonyme, Nubien au turban"
Private collection

RELATED WORKS:

Several copies are known:

- 1) Drawing: *Head of a Man Wearing a Turban*, attributed to Géricault, trois crayons and red pastel highlights on paper, H. 505 mm; L. 395 mm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon, inv. no.1987-45-D.¹
- 2) Painting: Agnelli collection,² Christie's Sale New York, 10 January 1990, n° 230 A: "Circle of Claude Vignon (1593-1670)",³ oil on canvas, H. 0,648 m; W. 0,534 m; then Christie's sale London 19 April 1996, n° 177: "Follower of Aert de Gelder", oil on canvas, H. 0,65 m; W. 0,53 m.
- 3) Million & Associés sale, Paris 14 December 2007, n° 13: "Attribué à Matthäus Loder (active in Germany from 1759 to 1790)", oil on canvas, H. 0,655 m; W. 0,54 m.
- 4) A variant: Sotheby's 11 December 2003 then Sotheby's London sale, 8 July 2004, n° 334: "French School, 18th Century", oil on canvas, H. 0,646 m; W. 0,52 m (with elements from version 2's provenance); then Sotheby's sale London, 25 April 2006, n° 423: "French School c. 1800", oil on canvas, H. 0,648 m; L. 0,522 m.
- 5) A variant: Sotheby's New York, 11 June 2020, n° 42: "French School, c. 1700", oil on canvas, H. 0,97 m; W. 0,89 m.
- 6) to 8) three paintings mentioned by Pierre Rosenberg:
Bourges, Darmancier-Clair sale, 15 February 2014; Sotheby's New York, 30 January 2020; private collection, painting inscribed "Peyre 71".

¹ *Le Grand Tour. Voyage(s) d'artistes en Orient. Les collections orientalistes du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon*, exh. cat. Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 22 November 2019 - 9 March 2020, p. 38 (ill.).

² We are grateful to Pierre Rosenberg for providing this information.

³ This painting was rejected by Paola Pacht Bassani, *Claude Vignon 1593-1670*, Paris, 1993, p. 510, R21, *Tête de roi mage*, oil on canvas, H. 0,648 m; W. 0,534 m.

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The depiction of black pages during the 17th and 18th centuries, with their slave collars and pearls in their ears, lies somewhere between a mark of prestige and a colonial reality.

Although our painting's author remains anonymous, its high quality of execution indicates that it is the work of an important artist.

Apart from specific subjects, such as the *Adoration of the Magi* or the *Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch*, in 16th to 18th century European painting a black man was generally depicted as a submissive servant, accompanying his mistress or master in a portrait. From the mid-18th century onwards, this representation was gradually replaced by that of the black person in his own right.

These depictions had appeared as early as the 16th century, in Titian's *Portrait of Laura Dianti*,⁴ painted around 1523, for example, in which Alfonso d'Este's future wife places her hand on the shoulder of an African boy wearing a multi-coloured jacket.

Portraits of people accompanied by a black page subsequently appeared in England and the Netherlands, both of which were colonial powers. This formula's popularity can be explained by the direct influence of Antoon van Dyck (1599-1641) in England. Elena Grimaldi,⁵ whom he painted in Genoa, and Henriette de Lorraine⁶ in Brussels, are both accompanied by a black page. In the Netherlands, this theme became common from the 1660s onwards, as Adriaen Hanneman (1603-1671) and Caspar Netscher (1639-1684) show.⁷ This fashion spread throughout Europe in the late 17th and first third of the 18th centuries.⁸ In a second phase, the presence of black pages, used as stooges or fantasy images, diminished to be replaced by individual representations of black people.

Black pages in painting

Usually depicted as a child or young boy - and therefore small in stature - black servants raise an admiring eyebrow towards the main sitter. Richly dressed, from the first half of the 17th century they sometimes wore a silver slave collar.⁹ How can we interpret this undeniable allusion to his condition as a slave? Very often, the presence of a page is intended to assert a privileged social status, without the patron necessarily being the employer of a black person. They could also serve to emphasize, by contrast, the whiteness of the sitter's skin. There are many examples of this fashion from the second half of the 17th and early 18th centuries. The

⁴ Jean Michel Massing, *The Image of the Black in Western Art, From the 'Age of Discovery' to the Age of Abolition*, London, 2011, vol. III, part 2, p. 222. The author cites the rather early example of the Portrait by Laura Dianti by Titian (c. 1523, oil on canvas, H. 1,19 m; W. 0,93 m, Collection H. Kisters, Kreuzlingen, Switzerland.)

⁵ Antoon Van Dyck, *Elena Grimaldi Cattaneo with a Black Page*, 1623, oil on canvas, H. 2,46 m; W. 1,72 m, Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art.

⁶ Antoon Van Dyck, *Princesse Henriette of Lorraine*, 1634, oil on canvas, H. 2,13 m; W. 1,27 m, London, English Heritage, The Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood (inv. 88028826).

⁷ Jean Michel Massing, *op. cit.*, p. 225-226.

⁸ Jean Michel Massing, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁹ Jean Michel Massing, *op. cit.*, p. 228 and note 55. According to Massing, these slave collars did really exist, however, he thinks that depictions of them should nevertheless be seen as a symbol, signifying a servant's devotion rather than a literal image of a society reality.

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addition of a black servant was advocated in art literature, as in Samuel van Hoogstraten's *Introduction to the Academy of Painting*, first published in 1678.¹⁰

While not all black people living in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries were slaves, the presence of these young pages in European painting nonetheless reflected the sad reality of “triangular” trade and the slave trade in England, the Netherlands, and France.¹¹

In France

In French painting, the rare depictions of black pages in the mid-17th century did not yet correspond to the English or Nordic portrait tradition: a young Moor wearing a slave collar holds the sheet music in *The Lute Player* (1638) by Jean Daret (1614-1668),¹² and a handsome young black man appears in the Le Nain brothers' *La Tabagie* of 1643.¹³ Later, in 1682, Antoine Coypel portrayed Louis XIV's turbaned trumpeter with a girl, in a small picturesque painting.¹⁴ The first example of a prestige portrait with a black page seems to date from the same year: the *Portrait of Louise Renée de Kérouaille*,¹⁵ mistress of the English king Charles II, painted by Pierre Mignard (1612-1695) during her sojourn in France. A young Moor is shown alongside the Prince de Conti (1697),¹⁶ and another serves August III of Poland (1715) (Fig. 1)¹⁷ in paintings by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659-1743), whose posthumous inventory includes two portraits of young Moors; one of which corresponds to a painting in the Dunkirk museum (Fig. 2).¹⁸ In 1729, Nicolas de Largillière portrayed Madame de Souscarrière with her page.¹⁹

¹⁰ Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst*, Rotterdam, 1678, p. 141.

¹¹ Anne Lafont, “De Balthazar à Auguste. Figures et personnalités noires dans l’art à l’époque de la traite atlantique”, exh. cat. *Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse*, Paris, musée d’Orsay, 2019, p. 32-46, p. 43

¹² Jean Daret, *Lute Player*, 1638, oil on canvas, H. 1,26 m; W. 0,96 m, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery

¹³ Frères Le Nain, *La Tabagie*, 1643, oil on canvas, H. 1,17 m; W. 1,37 m, Paris, musée du Louvre (RF 1969 24).

¹⁴ Antoine Coypel, *Young Black Man holding a basket of fruit and a Girl Stroking a Dog*, 1682, oil on panel, H. 0,28 m; W. 0,22 m, Paris, musée du Louvre (INV 3518).

¹⁵ Pierre Mignard, *Louise Renée de Penencouet de Kérouaille*, 1682, oil on canvas, H. 1,21 m; W. 0,95 m, London, National Portrait Gallery (NPG 497).

¹⁶ Hyacinthe Rigaud, *François Louis de Bourbon Conti*, 1697, oil on canvas, current location unknown, engraved by Pierre Drevet in 1700.

¹⁷ Hyacinthe Rigaud, *August III of Poland*, 1715, oil on canvas, H. 2,50 m; W. 1,73 m, Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (inv. 760).

¹⁸ Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Young Moor*, 1710, oil on canvas, H. 0,57 m; W. 0,43 m, Dunkirk, musée des Beaux-arts (inv. P.82.3).

¹⁹ Nicolas de Largillière, *Madame de Souscarrière and her Page*, 1729, oil on canvas, H. 1,37 m; W. 1,04 m, London, National Gallery.

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Fig. 1
Hyacinthe Rigaud, *August III of Poland*, 1715, oil on canvas, H. 2,50 m; W. 1,73 m, Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (inv. 760)



Fig. 2
Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Young Moor*, 1710, oil on canvas, H. 0,57 m; W. 0,43 m, Dunkirk, musée des Beaux-arts (inv. P.82.3), on long term loan at Paris, musée de l'histoire de l'immigration, Palais de la Porte Dorée

“Fantasy figures” in Europe

Some portraits of black people, like ours, can be linked to the phenomenon of “fantasy figures”.²⁰ These depictions of bust- or half-length figures are characterized by immediacy and freedom from convention. The model's features are borrowed or adapted to create a fictitious subject. This genre of painting includes French fantasy figures, Dutch *tronies* (“faces”),²¹ Venetian and Bolognese *teste di fantasia*, and British *fancy pictures*. Examples include Govert Flinck's *Head of a Black Man* (1615-1660) (Fig. 3) or the astonishing frontal depiction of a black man wearing the costume of a Magi, attributed, like our portrait, to an anonymous French artist (Fig. 4).²²

²⁰ Melissa Percival, “Les figures de fantaisie. Un phénomène européen”, *Figures de fantaisie du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris and Toulouse, 2015, p. 17-36.

²¹ Dagmar Hirschfelder, *Tronie und Portrait in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 2008; Franziska Gottwald, *Das Tronie. Muster – Studie – Meisterwerk: die Genese einer Gattung der Malerei vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zu Rembrandt*, Munich, 2009; Dagmar Hirschfelder, Léon Krempel (éd.), *Tronies: Das Gesicht in der frühen Neuzeit*, Munich, 2013.

²² French School, *King Balthazar*, c. 1700, oil on canvas, H. 0,88 m; W. 0,69 m, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum. An inscription on the verso attributes the painting to a painter from Valenciennes, Jacques-Albert Gérin (1640-1702). This attribution has been rejected for stylistic reasons.

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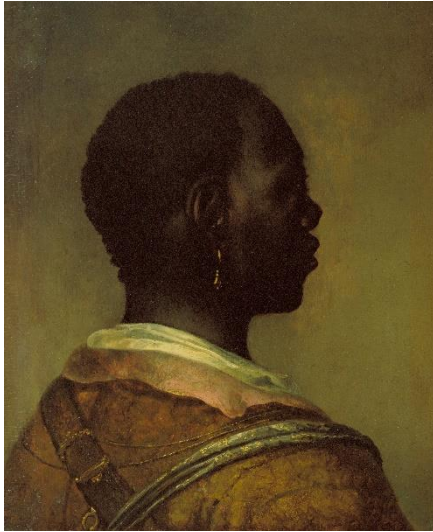


Fig. 3
Govert Flinck (1615-1660), *Head of a Black Man*, about 1640, oil on panel, H. 0,28 m; W. 0,21 m, Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (inv. 065003-000)



Fig. 4
French School, *Balthazar*, c. 1700, oil on canvas, H. 0,88 m; W. 0,69 m, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum

Our Page Wearing a Turban

The tight composition of our portrait reinforces the figure's presence. Depicted in profile, the face is enhanced by the interplay of light and skin texture. The carmine red emphasizes the turban's white cloth, while the opalescent pearl stands out against the brown skin. Unlike Hyacinthe Rigaud's *Young Moor* (Fig. 2), here the silver slave collar gives the impression of truly squeezing the model's neck.

By creating a luminous halo behind the figure, the light makes him stand out from a bright background and sets him against the neutral background, focusing our attention on the details of the face and costume.

Eighteenth-century Characteristics

Our painting can be linked to works from the first half of the 18th century, due to its creamy paint and the emphasis on the young man's exotic beauty, highlighted by an abundance of textures and colours.

His luxurious costume, gleaming yellow-orange and decorated with cord, is described with visible brushstrokes and small parallel streaks scraped with the handle of the brush. This treatment and similarly unctuous paint, combined with refined colour, are found in works by Jean Barbault (1718-1762), especially in his *Cheveau-léger* (Fig. 5),²³ the portrait of a man in a bright red suit richly trimmed with gold. The white impasto on a grey background used for the cords and turban can be found in the *Portrait of a Man* currently attributed to Jean-Baptiste Van Loo (1684-1745) (Fig. 6),²⁴ while the use of bright colours connects our painting to Joseph-

²³ Jean Barbault, *Cheveau-léger*, c. 1751, oil on canvas, H. 0,25 m; W. 0,18 m, Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts (inv. 71.7.1).

²⁴ Jean-Baptiste Van Loo (1684-1745) attr., *Portrait of a Man*, oil on canvas, H. 0,80 m; W. 0,64 m, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum.

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Marie Vien's (1716-1809) painted studies for *The Caravan of an Important Lord at Mecca*, paintings reminiscent of the pronounced taste for exoticism in the 18th century.²⁵



Fig. 5
Jean Barbault, *Cheveau-léger*, 1751 (?), oil on canvas, H. 0,25 m; W. 0,18 m, Orléans, musée des Beaux-Arts (inv. 71.7.1)



Fig. 6
Jean-Baptiste Van Loo (1684-1745) attr., *Portrait of a Man*, oil on canvas, H. 0,80 m; W. 0,64 m, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum

Copies and Variants of our Painting

The existence of several copies of our painting (seven paintings and one drawing are currently identified)²⁶ sometimes with important differences, confirms the success and importance of the original in which the model's face, imbued with great calm and dignity, is described with a naturalism that contrasts with the spirited treatment of the turban and the colourful costume. The face suggests the artist worked directly from a model. Some details, such as the double chin caused by the collar, are not found in any of these many variants.

A copy offered for sale at Christie's in New York in 1990 was attributed to the circle of Claude Vignon (1593-1670). This was rejected by Paola Pacht Bassani in her catalogue raisonné of the artist,²⁷ after which it was sold in London in 1996, this time attributed to a follower of Aert de Gelder (1645-1727). Another copy was sold in Paris in 2007 with an attribution to Matthäus Loder, a painter active in Germany from 1759 to 1790.

²⁵ *The Caravan of an Important Lord at Mecca* (overall title), three painted studies oil on paper (each H. 265 mm; W. 205 mm), Paris, musée du Petit Palais (inv. PDUT1093 à 1095). They were created for festivities organized by the residents of the French Academy in Rome during the 1748 Carnival. See Dominique Jacquot, exh. cat. *Jean Barbault (1718-1762)*, Strasbourg, 2010, p. 65-79.

²⁶ We are grateful to Pierre Rosenberg who generously shared his records on this subject.

²⁷ Paola Pacht Bassani, *Claude Vignon 1593-1670*, Paris, 1993, p. 510, R21.

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Page in Profile Wearing a Turban, oil on canvas,
H. 0,65 m; W. 0,54 m, Rasmussen sale, 18-22
November 1988, n° 326a (our painting).



1) *Head of a Man Wearing a Turban*, drawing
attributed to Géricault, trois crayons and red pastel
highlights on paper, H. 505 mm; W. 395 mm,
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon, inv. no. 1987-45-
D.

Both paintings, which have identical dimensions, are relatively faithful to ours, but do not express the same force. Their style with nervous strokes gives a more disjointed result, with less vigour, making them less intense than our version. The calm and dignity of the model in our painting has not been reproduced.

The Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon owns a drawn copy,²⁸ inscribed “Géricault”. The looser, slightly indecisive lines do not suggest that this is a preparatory drawing.

Mysterious Attribution

The attribution of our portrait remains a mystery to this day. As the hypothesis of a Dutch or Flemish painter has been definitively ruled out,²⁹ we believe that our picture was painted in France. The harmony, balance and certain restraint do indeed seem entirely French. We also believe that it was painted in the first half of the 18th century, when this iconography was fashionable. But its indisputable beauty and pictorial quality relegate its attribution to a secondary question.

²⁸ Géricault, attr. *Head of a Man Wearing a Turban*, trois crayons and red pastel highlights on paper, H. 505 mm; W. 395 mm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon, no. inv. 1987-45-D.

²⁹ According to Nadja Garthoff, curator at the RKD - Netherlands Institute for Art History, our painting was probably not painted by a Dutch or Flemish artist (E-mail dated 17 January 2023).

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2) Agnelli collection, Christie's Sale New York, 10 January 1990, n° 230A; then Christie's sale London 19 April 1996, n° 177, oil on canvas, H. 0,65 m; W. 0,53 m.



3) Million & Associés sale, Paris 14 December 2007, n° 13: "Attribué à Matthäus Loder (active in Germany from 1759 to 1790)", oil on canvas *Portrait d'un noir à la perle et au turban*, huile sur toile, H. 0,655 m; W. 0,54 m.



4) Sotheby's London sale, 8 July 2004, lot 334: French School, 18th Century, *Portrait of a Blackmoor, Head and Shoulders*, oil on canvas, H. 0,65 m; W. 0,52 m same work: Sotheby's 11 December 2003 and Sotheby's London, 25 April 2006, lot 423.



5) Sotheby's New York, 11 June 2020, n° 42:, lot 42: French School, c 1700, *Portrait of a Page in Profile, wearing a Turban*, oil on canvas, H. 0,97 m; W. 0,89 m.