

SALOMON LILIAN

DUTCH OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

Swabian School

c. 1480

Portrait of a Man with a Red Hat, possibly Eitel Friedrich II von Hohenzollern (1452-1512)

Oil on panel

52.5 x 35.5 cm.

Provenance:

Rome, collection of Cavaliere Ludovic de Spiridon

His sale, Amsterdam, Frederik Muller & Cie, 19 June 1928, lot 48, as attr. to Dieric Bouts

Spain, private collection until 2022

Literature:

W. Schöne, *Dieric Bouts und seine Schule*, Berlin/Leipzig 1938, p. 217, cat. no. 153, as follower of Dieric Bouts

The portrait

The recently surfaced *Portrait of a Man with a Red Hat* is a magnificent example of Northern renaissance portraiture. Depicted against a deep black background is a man wearing a high bright red hat and a blue cloak over a white chemise. In the red hat several *pentimenti* are visible – an earlier rendering of the hat was somewhat smaller – neatly revealing the creative process. The cloak might have once had a more purple hue, as microscopic pigment analysis has revealed.¹ Our sitter is clearly a man of stature, probably around thirty years old. His face is finely modelled, showing a subtle variety of pink tones for the incarnate and arresting care for detail around the eyelids. His half-length hair with vivid highlights is dark blonde, his eyes are blue, he

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has a double chin, and he boasts a particularly pronounced nose. During the portrait's recent restoration, a wart appeared next to the nose. The sitter's gaze, serious and fierce, is directed at the beholder. With his right index finger he points to his left hand, in which he holds a paper scroll. The painting's execution is exceptional, striking a neat balance between refined detail and monumental grandeur.

Dieric Bouts and a curious double portrait

During its recorded history, our portrait has only made one previous public appearance. In 1928 it featured in the Amsterdam sale of the collection of Ludovic de Spiridon, the son of the renowned collector Georges de Spiridon (1808-1887), originally from Beirut but operating from Rome between 1830 until his death.² Upon his father's death, Ludovic inherited a significant part of his father's collection. Nothing is known about the portrait's earlier provenance. Was it with the father since the nineteenth century? Or did Ludovic add it to the collection at a later moment? In any case, the painting was included in the Amsterdam sale as attributed to the famous Dieric Bouts (c. 1410-1475), a painter born in Haarlem but mainly active in Leuven. The auction catalogue does not reveal if the attribution was longstanding, or rather of a more recent date. However, one can make an educated guess. It seems that whoever was responsible for the attribution – Ludovic de Spiridon or someone else – was aware of an article discussing the London art trade, that appeared twenty years prior to the Amsterdam sale, in 1908, in the German art periodical *Monatshefte Für Kunstwissenschaft*.³ This small contribution lists interesting works currently for purchase at Mayfair and St James's galleries. At Sackville Gallery, the article notes (and illustrates) among others a surprising double portrait of a man and a woman, according to the article by Dieric Bouts (fig. 1). There can be no doubt that the man in this double portrait – a work of limited quality, but intriguing nonetheless – is the same sitter in the same outfit and pose seen in our portrait. The article even gives a brief description of the painting:

‘This picture was painted in Louvain during the same time as the well-known large diptych by Bouts in the Brussels Museum, *The Justice of Emperor Otto III*. For the large figures in that work

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show a remarkable affinity with the painting discussed here, especially in the drawing and the position of the hands. The man wears a blue jacket and a big red hat, his wife a red dress and a large white headdress. Size of the panel: 50 x 65 cm.’⁴

Looking at this Brussels diptych (fig. 2), it follows that the attribution of the Sackville work to Bouts was triggered by a comparison with the man on the Brussels’ left wing, who wears a red hat, a blue cloak and holds a scroll in his hand (fig. 3). The superficial parallels are all there, although the comparison is unfavorable for the Sackville work, which’ quality, even judging from the black and white photograph, does not hold up to Bouts’ brilliant effort.

Nonetheless, the Sackville double portrait’s attribution to Bouts was adopted by the art-historical field.⁵ And as said, it probably furnished the subsequent attribution to Bouts of the Spiridon work, an attribution that was further fueled by the delicate portraits of men with red hats and blue coats painted by Bouts, such as those in the National Gallery, London, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (figs. 4, 5).⁶ These portraits’ captivating expression, and the emphasis on the sitters’ hands shows certain affinity with the present portrait. In 1938 the Bouts attribution was brought up once more, this time by the German art historian Wolfgang Schöne (1910-1989). In his monograph on Bouts, Schöne lists the Spiridon work as no. 153, an ‘interesting portrait from the Bouts school’, comparing it with Bouts’ London portrait. For the Sackville Gallery’s double portrait, he had little admiration.⁷

After 1938, nothing was heard anymore from either work; the Sackville copy, for that matter, is still under the radar. Before continuing, let us consider the implications of the existence of the copy. If our work is the original portrait, the Sackville copy implies that either our work had a female pendant, and that both pendants were subsequently merged into one double portrait by a proactive copyist; or, that our painting was initially twice its current width, and is actually the left half of a former double portrait, cut in two separate halves.⁸ In either case, one would expect

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there to be a female portrait, the appearance of which is known through the Sackville copy. As it turns out, such a hypothetical female portrait actually exists.

Two ladies with rosaries

The history of the female pendant portrait can be tracked to the 1930s. In October 1932, a small add in the art historical periodical *Weltkunst* announced a sale to be held in The Hague by the auction house Van Marle en Bignell, in which a number of early German and Swiss paintings were to be sold.⁹ The announcement is illustrated with one of the lots to be auctioned, a ‘Frauenbildnis’, canvas on panel, measuring 50 x 32 cm., there attributed to the Swiss Renaissance painter Hans Fries (c. 1465-c. 1520) (fig. 6). The woman in this painting, with her white headdress and a rosary in her hand is clearly identical to the lady in the Sackville copy. Would she, then, be the pendant of our man with the red hat?

After the 1932 advertisement nothing was ever seen or heard of the *Weltkunst* ‘Frauenbildnis’ anymore.¹⁰ However, the story does not end here. In a 1949 New York auction another version of the same female portrait surfaced, clearly again depicting the same woman, again holding a precious rosary. This *Portrait of a Young Woman* (fig. 7), of a distinctly higher quality than the *Weltkunst* ‘Frauenbildnis’, came with an attribution to – not surprising – Hans Fries. The New York sale catalogue mentions the Swiss art historian Walter Hugelshofer (1899-1987) as the expert behind the attribution, and the support of the eminent museum director Wilhelm Valentiner (1880-1958).¹¹

In 1953 the newly surfaced female portrait was published by the German art historian Ernst Buchner (1892-1962) in his seminal *Das deutsche Bildnis der Spätgotik und der frühen Dürerzeit*.¹² Buchner, who had included the *Weltkunst* ‘Frauenbildnis’ in his book, and only became aware of the newly surfaced original after the printing of his text (but just in time to add

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an image of the newly surfaced portrait, with an explaining caption), describes the portrait as follows:

'68. Swabian Master around 1470. *Portrait of a young woman*. Konstanz, Collection Kisters (The original, surfaced after [the text] going to press, painted on panel. The painting on canvas discussed in the text and catalogue is evidently an old copy, known to the author only from a weak illustration.)'

By 1953 the *Portrait of a Young Woman* had thus landed in the collection of the German art dealer Heinz Kisters (1912-1977), had been scholarly established as the original portrait, and now carried Buchner's careful attribution to the 'Swabian School', the German region west of Bavaria, that historically coincided roughly with the modern German state of Baden-Württemberg, with Stuttgart as its capital. Other art historians, though, made efforts to be more specific. In 1957 Alfred Stange (1894-1964) in his *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik : Zwaben in der Zeit von 1450 bis 1500* put forward an attribution to Ludwig Schongauer (c. 1440-1494), an artist from the Swabian region, mainly active in Ulm and Augsburg: 'The delicately shaped, almost front view portrait with the head tilted to the side and covered by a wide, white hood, the large, dark eyes, the flowering mouth and the slender hand once again reveals the grace of Schongauer's art.'¹³ Two years later, Kurt Bauch (1897-1975), best known as one of the most eminent Rembrandt-scholars of the twentieth century, attributed the portrait to Ludwig's younger brother, the famous Martin Schongauer (1450/53-1491), who worked in Colmar.¹⁴ It was Bauch's attribution that remained with the portrait at the time.¹⁵

A double portrait

What can be said about the relationship between the Kisters Collection's *Portrait of a Young Woman* and the present *Portrait of a Man with a Red Hat*? Unfortunately, the female portrait has not been on public view since 1970.¹⁶ And to the present author's knowledge no technical examining of the panel or the paint layer was ever undertaken. Still, it is very clear that the

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woman's finesse, her soft emotional expression, and the long and almost geometrical folds in her dress completely concur with the high-quality execution of the present portrait, our sitter's psychological realism and the stylized drapery of his robe. There can, in other words, be no doubt that these two portraits, of near exactly the same size, belong together.¹⁷ The question is, how? As noted, the Sackville copy shows the two sitters – husband and wife, we may presume – in intimate physical proximity, as the woman holds her right hand on the man's shoulder in a gesture of deep affection (fig. 8). However, the woman in the Kisters painting lacks a visible right arm or hand. Rather, her arm is covered with a greenish robe or mantle. Would the hand on the shoulder, then, be an addition by the Sackville copyist, an addition with the intention to unify two separate portraits into one cohesive double portrait? No. The recent restoration of our male portrait has, in fact, revealed the woman's original hand on our sitter's shoulder (fig. 9). One can even see the remains of the precious red stone that once adorned the ring on her index finger, and the remains of the ring around her thumb. This discovery, then, proves unequivocally that the two portraits once formed one painting, and that they were separated at a certain moment in time. A semi-transparent layered image of the male and female portraits on top of the Sackville copy gives an idea of their original appearance (fig. 10). Analogous with the painted-out hand of the woman on her husband's shoulder in the present portrait, we can expect the remaining part of her hand, and the remaining part of the man's left hand holding the paper scroll, to hide underneath the paint layers that now constitute the green robe and part of the dark background in the lower left corner of the female portrait.

Swabian School

Although the Kisters *Portrait of a Young Woman* has not been seen in public for over half a century, its attribution to Martin Schongauer has gradually made way among scholars for the more neutral attribution to the Swabian School, as proposed early on by Buchner. Given the fact that our portrait once formed one artwork with the Kisters portrait, this attribution obviously extends to our work as well. More recent art historical literature has connected the Kisters work

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specifically with three other high-quality portraits, all with similar measurements and all attributable to the Swabian School. The earlier is the *Portrait of a Woman of the Hofer Family* in the National Gallery, London (fig. 11), datable to around 1470.¹⁸ As indicated by the caption above her head, this delicately painted portrait depicts a lady of the Hofer family, who holds in her left hand a forget-me-not, referencing the primary function of her portrait. Hofer, though, was not an uncommon name in Southern Germany, and the caption regrettably has not led to further details concerning her identity. As with the Kisters portrait and the present work, the artist of the London portrait has successfully struck a balance between realism and idealism. That said, the carved quality of the Hofer portrait – both in the definition of the sitter’s facial features, and in the folds of her impressive headdress – has given way to a softer nuance in our work and the Kisters portrait, which must have been painted about a decade later. This stylistic observation is confirmed by a recent dendrochronological analysis of the present panel which, like the London portrait, is made of spruce wood (*Picea*), and was ready for use from 1481 onwards.¹⁹

The other two associated portraits, which form a pendant pair, are both preserved in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection, Madrid (figs. 12, 13).²⁰ Painted on pine wood panels, the *Portrait of a Man* and *Portrait of a Woman* have been steadily attributed to the Swabian school since 1930 and depict sitters not unlike those in the present portrait and the Kisters work.²¹ The woman wears a very similar white headdress, rings on her fingers, and holds an incarnation and a rosary in her hands. As with the Kisters sitter, her facial features are softly modelled, although her disposition seems more energized, as opposed to the gentleness of the Kisters model. The male portrait – capably executed with similar care of detail around the eyes but lacking the present portrait’s vigour – shows a corpulent man in his thirties. Like our sitter he wears a red hat, although a smaller variant. In contrast to our sitter though, he does not address the beholder, but instead looks at his female companion, which makes for a less arresting effect. He, too, holds a rosary and a little flower in his hands. Based on both sitters’ clothing, the Madrid pendants have been dated around 1480.²² While these portraits were in all probability not painted by the same artist

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responsible for the present portrait and the Kisters work – which seem of a superior quality – they do furnish the fitting artistic and geographical context.

Identification – Eitel Friedrich II von Hohenzollern?

What, lastly, can be said about the identity of our sitter? Clearly, whoever was in the position to commission such a high-quality double portrait belonged to the uppermost echelons of society. We might assume that the double portrait was meant to commemorate the obvious bond between the sitters, so strongly emphasized by the woman's hand on the man's shoulder. Moreover, the paper scroll to which the man emphatically points his finger seems to likewise address this union. Is the scroll a marriage contract? That could just be. With further identifying captions and/or attributes lacking, we are left to the sitters' physical profile. Our man has a very recognizable long and slightly curved nose next to which, as said, reappeared a wart during the recent restoration (figs. 14, 15). It so happens that among the highest nobility in Swabia we find a candidate with an neatly fitting profile – both physical and social. This candidate is count Eitel Friedrich II von Hohenzollern (1452-1512), a leading member of the Swabian branch of the Hohenzollern family that ruled the Swabian lands from the magnificent Hohenzollern Castle, exactly between Colmar in the west, and Ulm and Augsburg in the east.²³ Eitel Friedrich's father Jobst Nikolaus I (1433-1488) was the ruling count of Hohenzollern until his death in 1488, after which Eitel Friedrich took over. We are informed about Eitel Friedrich's appearance through a painting and an engraving. The painting, now in Jagdschloss Grunewald and attributed to the painter Hans Leonhard Schäußelein (1480-1538/40), depicts Eitel at a later age, in any case well after 1501, when his intimate friend the Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519) awarded him the membership of the Order of the Golden Fleece, which' collar hangs around his neck (fig. 16). Evidently Eitel Friedrich, with his long, slightly curved nose, double chin and the somewhat leaning eyes, significantly resembles our sitter, who would have been at least twenty years younger in our portrait. It is, though, the engraving that gives additional body to the identification. In contrast to the painted portrait, the print depicts Eitel Friedrich specifically with

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a wart next to his nose (fig. 17). While this wart is located at the ‘wrong’ left side of Eitel Friedrich’s nose, this ‘mistake’ is easily explained by the engraving technique, which reproduces all imagery in reverse (fig. 18). Admittedly, the engraving is of a later date, but the inclusion of the wart is extremely specific, and was surely based on earlier information.²⁴ Moreover, assessing Eitel Friedrich’s biography we find that he married Magdalene of Brandenburg (1460-1496), member of the Brandenburg branch of the House of Hohenzollern, in Berlin on 17 June 1482. Their marriage – of great significance to the Hohenzollern’s, as it strengthened the bond between its Swabian and Brandenburg branches – aligns perfectly with the presumed age of our sitter (about thirty), with the age of the bride (around twenty-two), with the dating of the panel, which was ready for use in 1481, and with the imagery of the double portrait, which clearly alludes to the bond between the sitters.

One final question concerns the sitter’s clothing. Would a member of a ruling noble family have worn such a tall red hat? It has been suggested that the sitter of Bouts’ *Portrait of a Man* in the National Gallery (fig. 4) depicts the physician Jan van den Winckele, a *magister artium* at the university of Leuven.²⁵ A scholar thus, but did the high nobility wear this headgear as well? The answer is yes. Around 1461/62 Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400-1464) depicted Anthony of Burgundy (1421-1504), the bastard son of Philip the Good (1396-1467), the Duke of Burgundy, with exactly such a tall-shaped red hat (fig. 19).²⁶ In the portrait, Anthony wears the red hat in combination with a violet-brown doublet and a white chemise. It should be remembered here that the cloak of our sitter probably had a more purple appearance earlier on. And where Anthony of Burgundy proudly wears the collar of the Golden Fleece, this honour befell Eitel Friedrich only later, in 1501. Could, then, our sitter be Eitel Friedrich II von Hohenzollern, and would the Kisters portrait depict Magdalene of Brandenburg, in her early twenties? It is quite possible. If so, the double portrait could well have been painted at the occasion of their betrothal – hence the paper scroll – or to celebrate their marriage bond, so very important to the House of Hohenzollern.

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¹ Microscopic pigment analysis was undertaken by Studio Redivivus in The Hague during the recent restoration of the work. See Technical Report Studio Redivivus, February 2024: 'The pigment mixture observed is a common recipe observed in early Northern paintings [...] This was usually meant to imitate a purple hue. However, the use of lake pigments can sometimes lead to age degradation.' The panel is intersected with a horizontal wooden inlay strip of c. 2.5 cm in width about halfway the panel's surface. Report available on request.

² According to the introduction written by the Italian professor of art history Lionello Verturi (1885-1961) in the 1928 Amsterdam sale catalogue, Ludovic de Spiridon was the eighth child son of Georges de Spiridon (1808-1887), who was born Beirut but came to Rome in 1830 to study art, and who from the mid-19th century assembled an enormous collection, several works apparently obtained from the famous collection of Cardinal Joseph Fesch (1763-1839). Upon the father's death, his collection was supposedly divided between two of his sons, Ludovic and his older brother Joseph de Spiridon (1845-1930), the latter continuing his father's collecting activities in Paris (see on Joseph and his wife Marie Octavie Dangu: M. Laclotte et al., *Les donateurs du Louvre*, Paris 1989, p. 326, and Joseph's sale, Berlin, Paul Cassirer/Hugo Helbing, 31 May 1929). An article in the New York Times of 3 September 1964 (p. 26), reports on an art theft at the villa of the 81-year old countess Margherita Gallotti Spiridon, in Grottaferrata, 20 miles southwest of Rome. The countess told the police that two paintings by Raphael and a self portrait by Antonello di Messina had been stolen from her villa on July 12 that year. According to the article, 'The Countess is a niece of Ludovic Spiridon, one of the collector's [Georges de Spiridon] sons who inherited a share of his more than 8,000 paintings.' Although conceivable, it cannot be substantiated that the present work had already been part of Georges de Spiridon collection.

³ 'Einiges vom Londoner Kunsthandel', in: *Monatshefte Für Kunstwissenschaft* 1 (1908), Halbband 2, pp. 710-714. The article depicts the painting, mentions it being with Sackville gallery, and gives a brief description.

⁴ 'Einiges vom Londoner Kunsthandel' 1908, p. 714.

⁵ M. Conway, *The Van Eycks and their followers*, London 1921, p. 164: 'if by him [Bouts], it must have been painted early in his career.'

⁶ For these portraits, see C. Périer-d'Ieteren, *Dirk Bouts : het volledige oeuvre*, Brussels 2005, pp. 114-119, 268, 297, cat. nos. 13, 23.

⁷ Schöne 1938, p. 217, under cat. no. 153, a), with reference to the *Monatshefte Für Kunstwissenschaft* (see note below).

⁸ A third option, entailing the copyist inventing a female portrait alongside the man with the red hat, seems less likely.

⁹ *Weltkunst* 6/40 (2 October 1938), pp. 2-3.

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¹⁰ The *Weltkunst* advertisement is said to refer to a Van Marle & Bignell sale in The Hague, featuring important early German paintings. In the literature (E. Buchner, *Das deutsche Bildnis der Spätgotik und der frühen Dürerzeit*, Berlin 1953, p. 196, cat. no. 64) one finds reference to a sale in The Hague, Van Marle & Bignell, 21/22 December 1932. However, the portrait does not feature in that auction, which does not include other early German paintings, either. Auction catalogue consulted January 2024, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum library.

¹¹ Sale New York, Parke-Bernet Galleries, 24 February 1949, lot 67, as Hans Fries (from the collection of J.K. Schneider, Royal Oak, Michigan). The sale catalogue entry mentions a note dd. 12 December 1945 by the art historian William Suida (1877-1959) who likewise thinks of Hans Fries. Apparently – although not mentioned in the catalogue entry – Hugelshofer and/or Suida were aware of the *Weltkunst* copy portrait.

¹² Buchner 1953, pp. 74, 196, cat. no. 64, fig. 68.

¹³ A. Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik : Zwaben in der Zeit von 1450 bis 1500*, Munich/Berlin 1957, p. 20.

¹⁴ K. Bauch, 'Bildnisse von Martin Schongauer', in: editors? *Studien zur Kunst des Oberrheins : Festschrift für Werner Noack*, Konstanz/Freiburg 1959, pp. 73-76.

¹⁵ See P. Strieder, D. Stemmler, *Sammlung Heinz Kisters : altdutsche und altniederländische Gemälde*, exh. cat. Nuremberg, Germanischen Nationalmuseum 1996, p. 11, cat. no. 51, pl. 37, with literature references.

¹⁶ Sale London, Christie's (Highly important pictures from the collection formed by the late Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, the property of Heinz Kisters, Esq. and others), 26 June 1970, lot 23. The painting had been part of the Kisters collection at least since 1953, but probably earlier (see Buchner 1953) until 1963, when it was included in an exhibition on the Kisters Collection in Nuremberg (see Nuremberg 1963). Apparently Kisters sold the painting to the chancellor of Germany Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) after the 1963 exhibition. At least, that appears from the fact that the painting was later included in the 1970 London sale. After Adenauer's death, Kisters was supposedly forced to buy back a number of paintings he had sold to the chancellor.

¹⁷ The woman seen in the 1932 'Frauenbildnis' depicted in *Weltkunst* resembles the woman in the Sackville copy more explicitly than the woman in the portrait in the Kisters Collection. However, the quality and execution of the Kisters portrait completely matches that of the present work, whereas that is not the case with the mediocre *Weltkunst* portrait (an opinion already aired by Buchner 1953). How and when the *Weltkunst* portrait came into being remains unclear at this moment. No male pendant has ever been recorded.

¹⁸ See A. Smith, *Early Netherlandish and German paintings : The National Gallery schools of painting*, London 1985, pp. 300-301, cat. no. 34; C. Bugler, *Strange beauty : German paintings at the National Gallery*, London 2014, p. 17.

¹⁹ I thank Prof. Dr. Peter Klein (Universität Hamburg, Zentrum Holzwirtschaft) for his dendrochronological research, dd. April 2022. Report available on request.

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²⁰ Buchner 1953, p. 195, cat. nos. 59, 60; I. Lübbecke, *The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection : Early German painting 1350-1550*, London 1991, pp. 100-105, cat. nos. 19, 20; J.M. Pita Andrade, M. del Mar Borobia Guerrero, *Old Masters : Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum*, Barcelona/Madrid 1992, p. 172, cat. nos. 264, 265; M. del Mar Borobia, *Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza : Old Masters*, Madrid 2009, p. 142.

²¹ Lübbecke 1991, p. 104, and note 12, who proposed – explicitly in connection with the Kisters portrait – the Upper Rhine region (between Basel and Bingen), on the west side of the Swabian lands, over a previous suggestion of Ulm (on the east of Swabia) as the place of creation for the Madrid pendants.

²² Lübbecke 1991, p. 104, and note 5.

²³ On Eitel Friedrich II von Hohenzollern, see M. Dressel, *Graf Eitelfriedrich II. von Zollern (1452-1512)*, Wetzlar 1995.

²⁴ The engraving was done by the Flemish/Augsburg engraver Dominicus Custos (1560–1612) after an original drawing by the sixteenth century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Fontana (1524-1587), who worked for Ferdinand II, Archduke of Austria (1529-1595). It is included in the *Heldenbuch* of 1603, which reflected the so-called ‘Heldenrustkammer’ of Ferdinand II, a collection of weapons, armour, portraits and other items of famous knights and generals from the 15th and 16th centuries – among them Eitel Friedrich II von Hohenzollern – which the Archduke had brought together at Ambras Castle.

²⁵ Périer-d'Ieteren 2005, p. 114.

²⁶ For Van der Weyden’s portrait, see D. de Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden : Het volledige oeuvre*, Antwerp 1999, pp. 311-313, cat. no. 29; V. Bücken, in: V. Bücken, G. Steyaert, *De erfenis van Rogier van der Weyden : de schilderkunst in Brussel 1450-1520*, exh. cat. Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium 2013-2014, pp. 102-103, cat. no. 1.