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## REMBRANDT'S JEWISH BRIDE: SISTER AND SPOUSE\*

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The subject of Rembrandt's large-scale painting known as "The Jewish Bride" (**Figs. 1, 2**) has given rise to more discussion than perhaps any of his other works.<sup>1</sup> Signed and dated only 16. . . , experts agree that it was executed between 1662 and 1666, but there the agreement stops. The picture portrays an amorous couple conjoined in extraordinary ways: the man places his right hand against the woman's breast and his left arm around her shoulder; the woman superimposes her left hand on the man's right and lowers her right hand over her groin. The figures do not look at the other, but lower their gazes downward and out of the picture space. Both are richly dressed. The man wears a black hat over his long, curling auburn hair, an elegant suit with a slashed doublet, an opulent cape, and lustrous, inflated silk sleeves. The woman wears a cap with beaded head-band, a red gown with tight, embroidered bodice, a tippet or shawl, and shirred and tucked white sleeves. Her jewels include earrings, bracelets on both wrists, rings on each hand, a string of pearls at the neck, and a jeweled necklace hanging from her shoulders. The restorers say that the canvas has been cut down slightly on all four edges, possibly by the artist himself before framing. The gentleman's hat, originally "an orange-brown small beret or skullcap," was later enlarged. Further additions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century black paint have been removed.<sup>2</sup> It has been generally assumed that the popular title is misleading, since the

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\* To Eva and Jörg Traeger, *sposi to sposi*.

<sup>1</sup>. This essay is one of three devoted to related themes first published in Italian in *Liturgia d'Amore: Imagini dal Cantico dei Cantici nell'arte di Cimabue, Michelangelo, e Rembrandt*, Modena, 1999, 215-244; successively revised and expanded English versions appeared in *The Liturgy of Love: Images from the Song of Songs in the Art of Cimabue, Michelangelo, and Rembrandt* (The Franklin D. Murphy Lectures XIV, University of Kansas), 2001, 84-104, and in Möseneder and Shüssler 2002, 147-86. Some further observations are incorporated here.

Traeger 1997, 76-85, 238-45.

We wish to acknowledge the generosity of Dr. Guido M .C. Jansen, curator, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, for providing us with a copy of the bibliography on this painting in the museum files, a list that contains more than eighty-five entries. Those pertinent to our discussion will be cited as we proceed. All information on the current condition of the painting comes from a brochure, *Presentation of Seven Restored Paintings by Rembrandt*, published by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1993, kindly supplied to us by Dr. Jansen. We are also grateful to Jan Kosten, Department of Old Netherlandish Art, Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague, for assistance in following the nineteenth-century history of the painting, and for sending us photocopies of obscure published material.

woman in the painting lacks the loosened hair appropriate to Jewish brides.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, red hair was commonly taken as a Jewish ethnic characteristic, and the woman wears a red gown and a ring on the index finger of her right hand, both signs among the Jews that a marriage is complete.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay we offer new insights into the significance of the picture by considering it—for the first time, to our knowledge—in relation to the Song of Songs. Correspondences are too numerous, too precise, and too meaningful to be merely casual. Formal and symbolic references in the painting to long-established and widely known interpretations of the text that lies at the heart of the Western understanding of the relationship between God and mankind, shed new light on Rembrandt’s late disquisition on love.

From the painting’s first appearance in the inventory of John Smith in the 1830s arguments concerning the subject fall generally into four, sometimes overlapping, categories: 1) genre, 2) Old Testament subjects, 3) portraits, and 4) ideological allegory. We begin with a brief survey of these categories.<sup>5</sup>

1) John Smith, who bought the painting in 1825, described the man as the woman’s father, assuming a difference in the figures’ ages. Smith sold the painting in 1833 to the Amsterdam collector Adrian Van der Hoop, in whose inventory its popular name first appeared: “a picture of a Jewish bride, whose father is ornamenting her with a necklace.”<sup>6</sup> The parental

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the repainting was an effort to reinforce the man’s “Jewishness,” since the shape of the hat recurs in one of Rembrandt’s portraits known to be of a Jew: *A Bearded Man*, 1654, Groningen Museum (Bredius 1935, 271).

<sup>3</sup> Rembrandt’s etchings “The Great Jewish Bride” and “The Small Jewish Bride,” ca. 1635, are now also thought to be spuriously named. See White 1969, 1:114ff., 2, pls 146–148, who gives St. Catherine, Minerva, and a sibyl as alternative subjects.

<sup>4</sup> Bredius 1935 and Gerson 1971, 586, no. 416. For Jewish marriage customs, see *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 8:340–344, especially 342; with special reference to the wedding ring in Jewish and Christian art of the Renaissance, Traeger 1997, 76–85, 238–45. On the red hair of the Jews, see Mellinkoff 1973 and Lavin 1993, 91–92.

<sup>5</sup> A chronological collection of opinions concerning the subject of the painting will be found in the unpublished dissertation of Christian Tümpel 1967–1968, 1:34–54 (copy in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Library). When this essay was completed, the most recent contribution was that of Hoekstra 1996, 59–65.

<sup>6</sup> Smith 1834, 7, 144, no. 430. The description in Van der Hoop’s inventory, in the Amsterdam City Archives, is as follows: “eene voorstelling van de joodsche bruid, die door den vader versierd wordt met eene halsketting;”. Van de Hoop donated the collection to the city of

theme was followed by Bode who said it was a Jewish father taking leave of his daughter.<sup>7</sup> The man touching the woman's breast presumably led Bürger (Thoré) to describe the scene as an old man seducing a young girl.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Rembrandt's painting does indeed evoke one of the most characteristic themes of Northern painting of the period, commonly known as the Unequal Lovers (**Fig. 3**).<sup>9</sup> In this explicitly lascivious formula an old man embraces a young woman—who often furtively steals his wallet—in the gestures familiar from and doubtless indebted to the tradition associated with the Song of Songs, left hand behind her neck, right hand on her breast: “His left hand is under my head and his right hand doth embrace me” (2,6; 8,3). Shown in icon-like isolation, the pair appeared in endless variations, vesting a serious moralistic message in a cloak of salacious ridicule and irony.

2) Such views of the relationship portrayed in Rembrandt's picture establish the second type of interpretation, couples from the Old Testament. This process began in Rembrandt's own ambience; in fact, the earliest evidence we have suggests that Rembrandt intended his work to be seen against a background of Old Testament love. One of the master's closest followers, Arent de Gelder, appropriated the group in a painting of the 1680's inscribed "Rembrandt f 1639" (**Fig. 4**), which has been identified as the marriage of Tobias and Sara.<sup>10</sup> Here the reserved attitude of Rembrandt's pair is converted into a low-comedy depiction of the signing of a Jewish wedding contract, where libido and money are again grossly juxtaposed. In a similar vein, Woltmann believed that the picture alluded to the unfortunate union of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38, 6–27). Tamar was angered by Judah, her father-in-law, for failing to provide his third successive son for her to wed. She veiled herself to impersonate a harlot, thereby tricking the old man into having intercourse and producing off-spring. In Pieter Lastman's version of the subject (**Fig. 5**) the two are caught “in flagrante,” with Judah's hand grasping Tamar's nude breast as she sits in his lap,

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Amsterdam in 1854; in the catalogue published in the following year (*Catalogus* 1855, 13, no. 98) the picture is described as: “schilderij, bekend onder den naam van de joodsche bruid” (painting, known under the name of the Jewish Bride). Information from Drs. Jansen and Kosten.

<sup>7</sup>. Bode 1883, 553.

<sup>8</sup>. Bürger 1858-60, 2:8.

<sup>9</sup>. On Unequal Lovers: Stewart 1977 and Silver 1984, 143-5.

<sup>10</sup>. Von Moltke 1994, 43, 81.



one leg thrown licentiously over his.<sup>11</sup> Other, less salacious Old Testament stories were also nominated: Ruth and Boaz, after she offers herself in exchange for food (Ruth 1, 4); Tobias and Sara, after he exorcises the devil to survive his first night with her (Tobit 6–7); the heroic story of Ahasuerus and Esther, after she becomes his queen and saves her people (Esther 1ff.); and a series of patriarchal couples from Genesis—Abraham and Sarah, Rebecca and Isaac, and, finally, Jacob and Rachel (**Fig. 6**).<sup>12</sup>

3) The third category identified the subject as a portrait of living people. Valentiner proposed Rembrandt's son Titus and his fiancée, Magdalena van Loo (married in 1668). Zwartz argued, on the basis of two unidentified painted portraits and an allegorical engraving by Aron de Chaves, that they were the Sephardi poet Don Miguel de Barrios (1625–1701) and his second wife, the wealthy Abigail de Piña. Other scholars see the figures as portraits of real people, but as protagonists in other narrative subjects: Tolnay (who accepted Zwartz), Landsberger and, by implication, Tümpel in his many and varied publications.<sup>13</sup>

4) In 1935, Tolnay added the possibility of allegory when he observed the similarity of the composition to an illustration of “Marital Concord” in Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (**Fig. 7**). He defined, with great sensitivity and perspicuity, the devotional and spiritual quality of the couple’s relationship.<sup>14</sup> An important key to the enigma is provided by associations of the picture with one biblical subject in particular, that of Isaac and Rebecca, which is now the painting’s official title in the Rijksmuseum. This association, in its reference to characters from the Old Testament, lends a measure of justification to the popular name. Rembrandt’s transformation of the traditional rendering of this theme from Genesis (24, 10–26, 10) is so profound, however, as virtually to create a new subject.

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<sup>11</sup> Woltmann 1878, 14. On the Lastman see Larsen 1957; the painting is in the Arnon Collection, New York.

<sup>12</sup> Tümpel 1994, 35–36, 50, 240. On the painting reproduced in Figure 111, see Rosenberg 1968, 130; the work is attributed to van Hooren (ca. 1620–1651/2) in the files of the Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague. Information from Dr. Kosten.

<sup>13</sup> Valentiner 1923/4; Zwartz 1929; Tolnay 1935; Landsberger 1946; for Tümpel see Bibliography.

<sup>14</sup> Tolnay 1935; Ripa 1625, 113. See below, note 29.

### Isaac and Rebecca: The Chosen People

The patriarch Isaac and his wife Rebecca are a seminal couple in the history of God's relation to humanity. Their role as progenitors is fulfilled in an extraordinary way. When Isaac is forty years old, he is told by Abraham, his father, that it is time for him to marry. With the help of the servant Eliezar, Rebecca is found to be suitable and willing. Isaac takes her "into to his tent," and she becomes his wife. Soon she produces the twins, Jacob and Esau. Later, to escape a famine, they take refuge in the land of Gerar, Philistine territory ruled by King Abimelech. There Isaac receives the second covenant with God when he is told that his seed will propagate the race.

And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed (26, 4).

Fearing that the rapacious Philistine men will kill him to take his beautiful wife, Isaac represents Rebecca as his sister.<sup>15</sup>

And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon (26, 7).

A crucial development takes place when Abimelech discovers their true relationship:

And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife (26, 8). And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife; and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her (26, 9). And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us (26, 10). And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death (26, 11). Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him (26, 12).

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<sup>15</sup> The same subterfuge had been used earlier by Abraham when he and Sarah traveled in Gerar; see Gen. 20, 1–17. His explanation was that he did not know the Philistines were God-fearing men, but thought they would kill him to take his wife.

Isaac's deception—to King Abimelech an abomination because it placed his men at risk of committing adultery—is thus revealed as a clever, even divinely clever, ruse. When Abimelech catches the couple making love he realizes they are married and that their relationship is licit; Abimelech reacts to the deception by forbidding his people to touch Isaac or Rebecca, who are thereby protected and able to fulfill the Lord's promise.

The picture's reference to this subject emerged about 1925 through a series of nearly contemporary, interconnected observations by Wilhelm Valentiner, Cornelius Müller-Hofstede, and Hans Kaufmann. They related the composition to a drawing by Rembrandt (**Fig. 8**), clearly identifiable as “King Abimelech Discovering Isaac and Rebecca as They Make Love” because it follows motifs from Raphael's famous fresco in the Vatican Logge (**Fig. 9**).<sup>16</sup> Raphael's depiction of licit romance, with the woman's left leg thrown over that of her husband, was probably known to Rembrandt though the reversed engraving, with the man on the left, by Sisto Badalocchio, published in 1607 and widely circulated (**Fig. 10**).<sup>17</sup> In the drawing, the couple is smiling happily as they embrace, with the man on the left. On this basis, one can read the very loose passage in the upper right of the drawing as the watchful figure of King Abimelech who realizes the couple are not siblings. The woman's position on the man's lap is also vaguely visible, and thus we are assured that Rembrandt was familiar with the intertwined leg motif and its erotic meaning. The couple's arm gestures and the outdoor setting are present in the drawing, which includes a balustrade, a tall drinking glass, and a potted plant. The reference to the biblical subject is confirmed by an x-ray of the painting (**Fig. 11**) which shows that, as in the drawing and following Raphael, the couple was originally seated, with the woman on the man's lap. Later, Rembrandt rendered the poses ambiguous by enlarging the lower, back part of the woman's gown and scumbling over the surface of the legs, as if to merge the erotic implication of Raphael's pose with the righteousness expressed by Ripa's depiction of Marital Concord.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Valentiner 1925, 1:262; Müller-Hofstede 1925; Kaufmann 1926; Benesch 1973, 5:284, no. 988, fig. 1267. On the Raphael see Davidson 1985, 69–71.

<sup>17</sup> Badalocchio-Lanfranco, *Historia del Testamento vecchio* (Rome, 1607), pl. 22. Tümpel was evidently the first to recognize the erotic symbolism of the interlocking legs motif in relation to Rembrandt's picture, 1967-1968, 2:99, 102f.

<sup>18</sup> Again this information is from the restoration brochure mentioned in note 1, which says that the repainting resulted in making “the woman...more separate from the man and standing.”

More recently, Christian Tümpel introduced an engraving by Crispijn de Passe the Elder first published in 1612, which shares many elements with the Logge fresco, including the embracing couple, the closed garden with a fountain, and Abimelech gesturing from his window (Fig. 12).<sup>19</sup> It is important to bear in mind, however, that both of these popular depictions are, like Raphael's own fresco, a part of elaborate series of Old Testament illustrations that include many biblical episodes. Badalocchio and his colleague Giovanni Lanfranco copied the whole of the famous "Bible of Raphael," as the Vatican frescos were commonly known, and De Passe's *Liber Genesis* comprises sixty plates. Rembrandt purposely isolated the Isaac and Rebecca story, and Crispijn de Passe's caption, which depended on a long tradition of biblical exegesis, provides a reason why. The inscription reads:

Coniugis hic dilectae Isac amplexibus haerens,  
Optatis fruitur votis, ut compleat orbem.  
Semine Abrahami; populi fundamina Sancti

Electique Deo incipiens, regnumq. nepotum.

(Here, cleaving to the embraces of his beloved wife, Isaac obtains his fond wish that he might complete the circuit from the seed of Abraham, laying the foundations of the people hallowed and elected by God, and the reign of his descendents.)

The point is explained even more succinctly in the Dutch edition of De Passe's suite, which proliferated after 1616:

Isaac syne beminde Rebecca genietende, begint de vermenigvuldigen van het zaed Abrahams (Isaac, enjoying his beloved Rebecca, begins the proliferation of the seed of Abraham).

What Abimelech discovers, and we through him, is that the relationship between Isaac and Rebecca is not only licit, it is divinely inspired for the purpose of creating the children of Israel,

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<sup>19</sup> Crispijn De Passe the Elder, *Liber Genesis, continens originem* (Antwerp, 1612); Hollstein 1949-1998, 15:289–90.

God's Chosen People. What is missing, and becomes crucial in Rembrandt's interpretation, is that the process is achieved through an uncanny conflation of sister and spouse.

### **The Garden of Love**

In the final composition Rembrandt carried the process of isolation still further, virtually suppressing the narrative content of the earlier works by omitting Abimelech and focusing, instead, on the enlarged couple. He shifted the figures' positions, redirected their heads, and recast their facial expressions from jocular to pensive meditation. He also transformed the fountain in the prototypes into a potted plant, but retained the garden setting. A garden backdrop is appropriate for such a subject, as the proverbial Garden of Love, justified by the relevant passage in Genesis which says that Abimelech looked out of his window to see the sporting couple. In the case of Isaac and Rebecca, as in Raphael's depiction, the setting also entails a reference to the "hortus conclusus," the enclosed garden, to which the poet likens his beloved in the Song of Songs.<sup>20</sup> The passage provides a clue to much of the painting's ulterior meaning, both through the image and the manner in which it is painted. In the fourth chapter of Canticles, a brilliant metaphor occurs in which the paradisiacal Garden of Love is specifically linked to the very same conundrum in which the drama of Rebecca and Isaac in Genesis is played out, that of the beloved as both sister and spouse. In fact, the dual personal relationship, in which brotherly and conjugal love are conflated into what in the case of Isaac and Rebecca was a divinely ordained genital love—that of Jahweh for his Chosen People—is actually identified as an enclosed garden containing a fountain.

A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed  
(hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa hortus conclusus fons signatus) (4, 12).

The following verse is no less important, since it indicates that Rembrandt understood and developed the ultimate point of the story, as it is explained in Crispijn de Passe's inscription. Verse 4, 13 adds:

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<sup>20</sup> In her analysis of Raphael's composition, Davidson 1985, 71, names the Song of Songs as the source for the fountain and the garden background.

Thy plants are a paradise of pomegranates, with fruits of the orchard. (Emissiones tuae paradisi malorum punicorum cum pomorum fructibus).

Here is the motivation for the critical change Rembrandt made in substituting the flourishing plant (**Fig. 13**) for the fountain, which in the Christian tradition was one of the most famous epithets of the Virgin Mary.<sup>21</sup> The pomegranate was a ubiquitous botanical symbol (**Fig. 14**), subsuming in its form the qualities of unity and multiplicity, that is, in the Christian tradition, chastity and fertility, based notably on the very passage of the Song of Songs as applied to Mary. The locus classicus is the commentary on Canticles by Alanus de Insulis, for whom the essential characteristics are the red color and the many seeds in a single fruit:

the pomegranate is red outside and has many seeds in one fruit: so we can contemplate the multitude of good works of the Virgin Mary enclosed by her faith in our Lord's Passion ... By the fruit of the pomegranate we signify the utterings of the chaste and pure Virgin Mary and their fruit, by which the minds of the faithful are informed.<sup>22</sup>

Richardus a Sancto Laurentio, in his treatise on the praises of the Virgin, interpreted the flowering plant in this vein:

Mary is called pomegranate, whose flower was the lord Christ, who was white at birth, purple in suffering, rosy, that is, most beautiful, in resurrection, when his flesh reflowered. She herself was also white in her virginity, purple in her compassion, rosy in her most intense charity, since she is rosy of intense modesty.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Much discussed in the history of art; see Purtle 1982, 107f. It should be recalled that in the tradition of "typology," finding prophesy in the Old Testament of the coming of Christ, Rebecca is seen as a "type" for the Virgin Mary, and her marriage to Isaac as a type for the marriage of Christ and the Church. See e.g., Origen's commentary on Genesis 1982, X, 164.

<sup>22</sup> *Malum punicum exterius rubens est, in uno cortice multitudinem habet panorum; ita in virginem multitudo bonarum operationum inter fidem dominicae passionis tuetur inclusa ... Per fructus pomorum honestae et pudicae virginis locutiones significantur, ex quibus in mentes fidelium fructus informationis processit* (Compendiosa in Cantica Canticorum elucidatio, P.L. 210, cols. 82f.; cited by Behling 1967, 152, and by Levi d'Ancona 1972, 315, whose translation we have adopted).

<sup>23</sup> *Maria dicitur malus, cuius flos Christus dominus, qui fuit candidus nascendo, purpureus patiendo, roseus, id est, pulcherrimus resurgendo, quando reflowerit caro eius. Ipsa etiam fuit candida virginitatis, purpurea compassione, rosea intensissima caritate, quia rosea intensissimi ruboris est.* Cited by Behling 1967, 152.

In our context the plant must refer to the purity of the couple's love and to the fruits and innumerable seeds of Abraham's descendancy.<sup>24</sup> In the end, it seems that Rembrandt eliminated Abimelech's discovery of the deception precisely in order to focus instead on the paradoxical, one might say mystical substance of the couple's dual relationship in fulfillment of the Lord's will—sibling and matrimonial, chaste and fruitful.

With the Song of Songs the picture begins to reveal something of the nature of its mystery. We have shown elsewhere that in the late thirteenth century, Cimabue depicted Mary and Christ in a position of sexual union in a scene of the Assumption of the Virgin in the apse of San Francesco in Assisi to symbolize the Marriage of Christ and Maria-Ecclesia and the Franciscan belief in Mary's bodily assumption.<sup>25</sup> We have also shown that the amorous relationship between bridegroom and bride, between lover and beloved, had a vigorous later life in depictions of the Madonna and Christ Child.<sup>26</sup> The motif of entwined legs, whose erotic import depended on the context in which it appeared, had a long life both in narrative and genre subjects, and was adopted by Raphael for his portrayal of the seemingly incestuous, but actually licit, love of Rebecca and Isaac, to which Rembrandt in turn was indebted.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from the motif of entwined legs (albeit ultimately obscured), Rembrandt alludes directly to the imagery of the Song of Songs with his lovers' gestures. His man follows the same passage that had inspired the medieval vision of Christ's divine embrace:

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<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most familiar and prominent role of the pomegranate as symbol of both chastity and fertility is in the legend of the hunt of the unicorn. In the final tapestry of the series in The Metropolitan Museum, the Cloisters (New York), the plant, in suitable chimeric form, is actually identified with the elusive creature in the center of the garden of Paradise, where they are ultimately enclosed together. See Freeman 1976, 131–32. With remarkable perspicuity De Tervarent (1958, 1:204–05, s.v. “Grenade”) recognized the pomegranate's dual significance, linking it to the same passage in the Song of Songs, and noting that “cette scène [the unicorn under the pomegranate] emblème des fiançailles, fut tissée à l'occasion de mariages.” Rembrandt made the same association.

<sup>25</sup> . Lavin and Lavin, 2001, 5-47. His motif was copied a decade later by the Cesi Master in Spoleto; Lavin and Lavin, 1999, 99-107..

<sup>26</sup> Lavin and Lavin, 1999, 119-140, and 143-213; and Lavin and Lavin, 2001, 8-47, and 48-83.

<sup>27</sup> For the evil connotation in Rembrandt's own work, see e.g., his preliminary drawings for the theme of profligacy in the story of the Prodigal Son: Mayer-Meintschel 1970–1971, figs. 1 and 2.

His left hand is under my head and His right arm embraces me. (Laeva eius sub capite meo et dextera illius amplexabitur me) (2, 6 and 8, 3).

Rembrandt interpreted the second part of the verse, that is, Isaac's act of laying his hand on Rebecca's breast, in a way that has often been misunderstood. Tolnay, followed by Tümpel, realized that this gesture, which some have taken as prurient, is actually a touching of the heart. The meaning of the gesture is evinced in the remarkable volume on gestures of the hands, written about 1654 by John Bulwer, which gives evidence to how Rembrandt's contemporaries would have considered it proper to express faith. Bulwer says: "To lay the hand open to our heart, using a kind of bowing gesture is a garb wherein we affirm a thing, swear or call God to witness a truth; testimony of our conscience, or take a tacit oath, putting in security that no mental reservation doth basely divorce our words and meaning, but that all is truth that we now protest unto."<sup>28</sup> Here, too, Rembrandt refers to a verse in the Song of Songs:

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm, for love is strong as death (Pone me ut signaculum super cor tuum, ut signaculum super braccium tuum, quia fortis est ut mors dilectio) (8, 6).

In the Bible Moralisée (thirteenth century), and later illustrations of the Canticum itself (**Fig. 15**), this line was represented by a protective image with the Crucifixion as a promise of salvation through Christ's sacrifice for the beloved worshipper.<sup>29</sup> The motif also appears in Canticum illustrations where the Christ Child lays his hand on his mother's heart (**Fig. 16**). In the Rembrandt, too, the man's gesture is surely a pledge of profound and everlasting devotion, which the bride reciprocates and confirms by placing her hand on his, "as a seal upon thine arm." And the mood of quiet contemplation reflects the final phrase of the same verse, "for love is as strong as death."

## Marriage Made in Heaven

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<sup>28</sup>. Bulwer 1974, 42, Gestus XIV: Protego [I protect]. Illustrated on p. 115, Pl. A "o."

<sup>29</sup>. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Ms.lat. 11560, fol. 70r; Laborde 1912, 2:pl. 294 and *Canticum* 1949, 16, 1.



In their reciprocal acts of devotion, Rembrandt's figures evoke another concept of the relationship between man and wife that is deeply imbedded in Jewish tradition, the "marriage made in heaven." We tend to use the phrase unconsciously and conventionally in reference to any well-suited couple. In Jewish tradition, however, the term referred quite specifically to a union resulting not from the arrangement of the marriage broker ("Shadkan") but from the mutual desire and consent of the participants, often despite the disapproval of parents. It has recently been shown that this last situation, always problematic, gave rise to a great deal of consternation and debate, especially from the latter part of the sixteenth century on, as restrictions on women eased and the validity and importance of mutual consent increased.<sup>30</sup> The development was equally, if less legalistically, true in Christian society, and hence it may not be coincidental that this very concept underlay the image of marital concord in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*—a work that fairly exudes the Counter-reformatory spirit—cited by Tolnay on purely visual grounds in relation to the spouses' gestures in Rembrandt's picture. Ripa's text makes the point quite explicit, defining marital concord in precisely this sense. Speaking of the heart suspended from the golden chain (reminiscent of the "signaculum" of the Song of Songs), Ripa explains that the image shows that matrimony is composed of love, friendship, and benevolence between the man and the woman, ordained by nature and by the divine laws, which desire that the husband and wife be of one flesh, to be separated only by death.<sup>31</sup> But the concept is preeminently and primordially Hebrew, and if ever there was a marriage made in heaven it was surely that between Isaac and Rebecca. In fact, the great Hebraist of the last century, Israel Abrahams, demonstrated in a pioneering study of the concept's history, that the primary, quintessential definition of the marriage made in heaven is none other than the speech of Laban and Bethuel (Rebecca's brother and father) to Abraham's servant in the passage in Genesis referring to Isaac's betrothal to Rebecca:

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<sup>30</sup> Stow 1995.

<sup>31</sup> Vn'huomo à man dritta di vna donna, ambi vestiti di porpora, & che vna sola catena d'oro incateni il collo di ambidue, & che la detta catena habbia per pendente vn cuore, il quale venghi sustentato da vna mano per vna di detti huomo, e donna. La collana nella guisa che dicemmo, dimostra, che il Matrimonio è composto di amore, di amicitia, & di beneuolenza trà l'huomo, & la donna, ordinate dalla natura, & dalle diuine leggi, le quali vogliono, che il marito, & la moglie siano due in vna carne, che non possino essere diuise se non per la morte. Ripa 1603, 80.

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good (24, 50). Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken (24, 51).

To our minds, the solemn, meditative, even humble bliss conveyed by Rembrandt's couple is the visual expression of just this relationship. The text and the concept give specific meaning to Jacob Rosenberg's observation that while Rembrandt: "obviously painted a bridal pair from life ... he has endowed the figures with a symbolic character as if he wished to express through this portrait the meaning of marital relationship in general. He has suggested this meaning in profound human terms that are both emotional and spiritual, but intimate and monumental."<sup>32</sup> With respect to Isaac and Rebecca, the quality of pensive, otherworldly grandeur bespeaks the role of this particular couple, and that of all their descendents, as propagators of the biblical race.

### **Venus Pudica**

Seen in this light, the woman's gestures may be understood as alluding to a still larger theme that is correlative to the pledge of devotion. Placing one hand over her breast and the other over her groin, she enacts the ancient and venerable pose of the "Venus Pudica," portrayed by innumerable artists in antiquity and the Renaissance.<sup>33</sup> Stemming from the statue of the Cnidian Aphrodite, carved by Praxiteles in the mid-fourth century B.C.E., the motif developed from a pose with the right hand covering the pudenda and the other extended, to the Hellenistic version with the right arm covering the groin and the left arm over the breasts. This delicately suggestive posture, to which the adjective "pudica" was attached in the Middle Ages, was revived in the early fourteenth century, with specific moralistic intent, by Giovanni Pisano for the figure of Temperance or Chastity, one of the four Cardinal virtues on his Pisan pulpit.<sup>34</sup> By

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<sup>32</sup> Rosenberg 1968, 128; see also Clark 1966, 143–45, whose analysis is both moving and just.

<sup>33</sup> In a remarkable article of 1905, Schmidt-Degener noticed this pose in one of a series of small bronze statues in the Musée Néerlandais, Amsterdam, which he attributed to Jan van Eyck, and which he said inspired Rembrandt. Although his attributions and identifications of the fifteenth-century statuettes were rather far-fetched, Schmidt-Degener's insight into Rembrandt's relationship to the early Flemish painter was exceptional.

<sup>34</sup> The adjective "pudica" was introduced by medieval mythographers who used it to describe one of the two aspects of the goddess Venus. "Duae autem secundum Remigium sunt Veneres;

the early seventeenth century two spectacular, life-size sculptures of Venus in this guise had become famous; the so-called Medici Venus and the Capitoline Venus (**Fig. 17**). Titian emulated this type in his Venus with a Mirror (**Fig. 18**), where the goddess is shown gazing into a mirror held by cupids, one of whom crowns her with a wreath of marriage myrtle.<sup>35</sup> Both Rubens and Van Dyck were so struck by this composition that they made copies which they carried back to the Netherlands.<sup>36</sup> Here it is important to bear in mind that the pudica pose resonates with the same paradoxical associations as the pomegranate: chastity and fecundity were aspects of the goddess's nature that formed a constant part of her literary and visual heritage since antiquity.<sup>37</sup> In the former sense, Rembrandt had used the motif twice before, first is his 1633 portrait of Johannes Uytenbogaert, where it evidently envisages the ideals of purity and perfection that were essential doctrines of the Remonstrants, the liberal Protestant sect of which Uytenbogaert was the leading light (**Fig. 19**).<sup>38</sup> Three years later, in 1636, Rembrandt

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una casta et *pudica*, quam honestis praeesse amoribus quamque Vulcani dicit uxorem; dicitur altera voluptaria, libidinum dea, cuius Hermaphroditum dicit filium esse. Itidemque amores duo, alter bonus et *pudicus*, quo sapientia et virtutes amantur; alter impudicus et malus, quo ad vitia inclinamur. Mythographer III, cited in Panofsky 1962, 148 n. 66. When the Pisa pulpit (1302–1310) was dismantled in 1595, a list of parts was drawn up in which this figure was named as “Temperance” (see Bacci 1926, 69). Bober and Rubinstein 1986, 59–62, trace verbal descriptions of the classical statue through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In 1638, François Perrier published three prints after the figure. The first to apply the term to statues of the ancient goddess was the German archaeologist Blinkenberg (1933) in describing copies of Praxiteles' Venus in its fully developed later form. See the discussion in Havelock 1995, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> Wethey 1969–1975, 3:69ff., reproduces all of the many versions and copies. Stephen Poglayen-Neuwall in *Art Bulletin* 16 (1934):358–84, was the first to use the term “pudica” to describe this painting. See also Goffen 1997, 133–39, whose sensitive analysis includes the fact that the vestment Venus uses partially to cover herself is a man's coat recuperated from an earlier composition on the same canvas. This painting remained in Titian's possession throughout his life.

<sup>36</sup> See Wethey as above, and Held 1967. It should be recalled that among the 363 objects recorded in the 1656 inventory of Rembrandt's possessions (reprinted in Clark 1966, 193–209) there are many prints after both artists.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich 1978, 65–69, 181–91.

<sup>38</sup> See van Os 1992, 343–45 and *Biografisch lexicon* 1978–, 4:464–68. The Remonstrants were in direct opposition to strict Calvinist dogma of predestined salvation only for the elect. Something of Uytenbogaert's character and the esteem in which he was held in Rembrandt's circle is evident from the epigram inscribed by the great scholar and poet Hugo Grotius on Rembrandt's 1635 etched portrait of the preacher, which describes him as admired by the pious people, the military and the court (Hinterding et al., 2000, 144). In an illuminating lecture

represented the innocent and incorruptible wife Susanna with the pudica pose, protecting herself from the elders' prurient gaze (**Fig. 20**).<sup>39</sup> It has been suggested that what the bride in Rembrandt's painting holds in her right hand is not, as commonly assumed, a clutch of drapery, but a pomegranate.<sup>40</sup> In that case the conflation of classical with biblical tradition is complete and explicit: the pose of Rebecca, the wife of the patriarch Isaac and mother of Israel, fully embodies the dual aspects of the Venus tradition, her chastity and her fecundity. The garden setting also embodies the same conflation, since in the classical tradition it evokes the Garden of Love of which Venus is mistress.<sup>41</sup>

### Jan van Eyck

Rembrandt's picture might thus be described as melding together the two quintessential themes of the Isaac and Rebecca story, the legitimacy and productivity of the couple's relationship. Considered in this way, we believe that Rembrandt's so-called Jewish Bride cannot be fully understood without reference to perhaps the best known and most discussed marriage painting in the history of art, the portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife by Jan van Eyck, the

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(2004), as yet unpublished, David A. Levine related the gesture of Uytenbogaert's left hand to the traditional gesture of Christ as the Man of Sorrows alluding to the side wound. The gesture, we might add, is also common in depictions of the act of devotion or vow-taking. Levine's presentation called our attention to the distinct reference to the pudica pose in Albrecht Dürer's etched Man of Sorrows of 1515; the right hand covering the groin there is in turn suggestive with respect to such images as Maarten van Heemskerck's ithyphallic Man of Sorrows (Steinberg 1996, 81-90, Lavin, in course of publication).

Schama 1999, 327, whose book appeared simultaneously with the Italian edition of the present work, aptly relates Uytenbogaert's gestures to the traditions of honesty (hand on heart) and fidelity (the glove); we would perhaps say devotion and integrity. Though without reference to the Song of Songs or the pudica tradition, Schama 1999, 664-6, also offers perceptive observations on the hallowing nature of the gestures in the Jewish Bride.

<sup>39</sup> The Christian notion of conjugal chastity was defined by St. Ambrose, who distinguished it from widowed and virginal chastity (*New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 3: 515). Broos 1987, 289-90, observes Susanna's Venus Pudica position. Brown 1991, 196-97 points out that Susanna's right foot planted on a slipper, closing off the opening, is another allusion to chastity; in the seventeenth century the shoe was a symbol of the pudenda. A second version of the composition was completed in 1647. (The woman is now generally thought to represent Bathsheba; see the catalogue of the Mauritshuis, 1977.) The pudica pose, following Titian, had previously been appropriated for Susanna in a composition by Hendrick Goltzius recorded in engravings by Johan Bara (1598; Hollstein 1949-1998, 1:88) Jan Saenreadam (Strauss 1978ff., 4:42) and Jacob Matham (after Cornelis Cornelisz, Strauss 1978ff., 4:92).

<sup>40</sup> Held 1969, 30f., n. 108.

<sup>41</sup> Dempsey 1992, 151-52.

artist proclaimed from the beginning, and certainly known to Rembrandt, as the founder of Netherlandish painting (Fig. 21).<sup>42</sup> In Rembrandt's time the Arnolfini portrait was in Spain, where it is documented over a long period in several inventories.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, tantalizing descriptions were given, first in 1569 by the historian Marcus van Vaernewijck: “a small panel on which was depicted the wedding of a man and woman who were married by Fides.” This account was elaborated by the founder of the Netherlandish art historiographical tradition, Karel van Mander, in his great *Lives of Illustrious German and Netherlandish Painters* published in 1603: “The same Joannes also made, in one little painting in oils, two portraits of a man and a woman who offered each other their right hand [sic!] as though they were embarking on matrimony; and they were married by Fides who bound them together.”<sup>44</sup> Neither writer had seen the original, and controversy developed about the identity of the work because the extant picture lacks a third figure (who would represent Faith). But the term “married by Fides” is the translation of a legal expression “desponsari per fidem,” and it refers to a kind of marriage effected simply by two people pledging their troth (truth) to each other before God.<sup>45</sup> The question that has recently arisen whether the event represented is a betrothal or a marriage proper is, to our purpose at least, nugatory.<sup>46</sup> What is pertinent here is Arnolfini's gesture: he raises his

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<sup>42</sup>. Although we came to our conclusion quite independently, we find great comfort in the fact that Linda Seidel (1993, 190ff.), following a suggestion of José Lopez Rey, has recently made a compelling parallel argument for Velasquez's obsession with the art of Van Eyck, particularly the Arnolfini portrait and the nude “bather,” (see Fig. 24) in relation to *Las Meñas* and the Rokeby Venus.

<sup>43</sup>. Davies 1954, no. 47, 117–28, pls. 282–301.

<sup>44</sup>. Marcus van Vaernewijck, *Iden Spiegel der Nederlandscher Audtheyt*, 1568, or *Historie van Belgis*, 1574: “Vrau Marie die moeye van onzen edelen Coninc Philips/ die eens getraut hadde Ludovicum die Coninck van Hungarien / die weghens den Turk int velt bleef / heeft eens een cleen tafereelkin vanden zelven Meester ghedaen / welcx name was Joannes van Eyck, waerin dat geschildert was / een trauwinghe van eenen man ende vrouwe / die van Fides ghetrouwt worder / eenen Barbier diet toebehoorde / betaelt met een officie / die hondert guldenen tsiaers in brachte.” Van Mander 1994, 1:69, fol. 202v: “Desn Ioannes had oock gemaect in een Tafereelken twee conterfeytzels van Oly-verwe / van een Man en een Vrouwe / die malcander de rechter handt gaven / als in Houwlijck vergaderende ‘ en worden ghetrouwt van Fides, diese t’ saman gaf. Dit Tafereelken is namaels in handen van eene Barbier ghevonden te Brugghe (als ick meen) / die dit selve toequam.” Both passages are quoted from Davies 1954, 126.

<sup>45</sup>. Van Mander 1994, 2:222. The starting point for discussions of the meaning of this painting, which by now has a vast bibliography, is of course Panofsky 1934.

<sup>46</sup>. Hall 1997; for other suggestions, see Schabaker 1972, Sandler 1984, and Seidel 1993.

right hand in a solemn demonstration of rectitude as he takes the woman's right with his left. From time immemorial, the sign of lifting the right hand has manifested the swearing of an oath or pledge. That the gesture was universally understood as such is evident from John Bulwer's text, where the definition is as follows: "To lift up the right hand to heaven is the natural form and ceremony of an oath, used by those who call God to witness and would adjure, confirm, or assure by the obligation of an oath."<sup>47</sup> Indeed, swearing an oath bound by faith, "per fidem," is precisely what Giovanni Arnolfini is doing.

Van Mander's mistake concerning which hands are joined represents a reasonable assumption, historically speaking, since the "dextrarum iunctio," a right-handclasp between a married couple, was an ancient tradition well understood since the Renaissance. Van Mander may have been led to his misstatement, as well as his curious description of the marriage itself, by the attention that had been lavished on one notorious classical portrayal of the nuptial relationship, an Augustan gravestone today in the Vatican, in which faith plays a central role (**Fig. 22**). A couple is shown clasping right hands with between them a small bust of a boy inscribed "amor." The funerary relief was copied in stone in the 1490s, and then restored and further inscribed in the sixteenth century. The new inscription consists of the names of three marital virtues: honor, faith, and truth, with "Fidii" in the central uppermost position (recalling the classical deity Medius Fidius, evoked by the Romans in their oaths). The relief and its inscriptions became the very image of classical marriage, made famous by the many engraved copies that were circulated throughout Europe (**Fig. 23**).<sup>48</sup> The phrase "per fidem" did not refer to a "pronuba" personification, often present in depictions of marriage (in the relief identified as "love"), but to the spouses' verbal oath, a profession of faith. It seems likely, however, that with respect to the Arnolfini portrait, the phrase married "per fidem," and Van Mander's correlative "who bound them together," were inspired by the gravestone, which is, to our knowledge, the one and only representation of that very subject, *expressis verbis*, as it were. The relief is also the one and only representation of a couple bound together by Love, *expressis verbis*.

We believe Rembrandt's picture to have been conceived in emulation of Van Eyck's marriage portrait. The figures, however, do not perform a specifically legal act. Rather,

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<sup>47</sup> Bulwer 1974, *Gestus XVII: Juro (I swear)*, 47, 117.

<sup>48</sup> Williams 1940–1941, 47–66.

Rembrandt's spouse "plights his troth" by placing his hand as a "seal" on his beloved's heart, and she responds by placing her hand as a seal upon his arm. Their actions, following the Song of Songs, execute a specifically nuptial pledge of mutual devotion. Through the complex interplay of their gestures Rembrandt's couple incorporates and merges the two conjunctive concepts defined by the words that identify the central personification in the tombstone: faith and love become interdependent aspects of a single, connubial embrace.

Julius Held in 1957 boldly suggested that the Arnolfini portrait was only one half of a sort of conjugal diptych, the counterpart of which was another painting by Van Eyck, now lost. The work is evidently recorded in a copy in the Fogg Museum (**Fig. 24**), and in a picture shown in perspective in Willem van Haecht's *Archduke Albert Visits the Kunstkammer* of Cornelius van der Geest (**Fig. 25**). The composition was indeed very similar to the Arnolfini portrait: a nude woman stands near a small chest bathing herself from a basin, accompanied by another woman who grasps a liquid-filled flask. The nude holds a folded towel over her pudenda with her left hand while squeezing the water out of a cloth into the basin with her extended right hand. It is possible that Rembrandt actually knew this painting since it was in the Netherlands in the 1660s.<sup>49</sup> In relating the picture to the Arnolfini portrait, he speculated that the subject was the bride at her "prenuptial bath," preparing herself for the wedding.<sup>50</sup> He noted that such ritual bathing was long a standard part of Jewish marriage custom, frequently represented in art, and he assumed that the practice was also followed by Christians.<sup>51</sup> There was also a tradition in the ancient world that involved ritual bathing for both men and gods, and we submit that Van Eyck was alluding to this classical tradition by giving his nude the specific pose of the Cnidian Aphrodite: one arm over the pudenda and the other extended. There are even some versions of the Venus in which the goddess holds a piece of cloth over her genitals. That Van Eyck would

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<sup>49</sup>. It is listed in the catalogue of a sale held in Brussels in 1668; Van Mander 1994, 2:216.

<sup>50</sup>. 1982. What Held did not observe was the second flask held in the right hand of the clothed woman. (he said he thought it "might be a fruit" ) She is actually pouring liquid from one flask to the other in the manner of an allegory of Temperance. Her action thus reinforces the ritualistic point of the image since Chastity is a subcategory of the cardinal virtue Temperance; see Sandler 1984, 491f., who observes the pudica pose (see below) and gives references to discussions of the virtues.

<sup>51</sup>. Held's idea was developed in relation to Christian sacramental nuptial imagery by Baldwin 1984, 66; Seidel adds several examples, 206. For the Jewish ritual bath, see Heuberger 1992.

make such a classical reference should come as no surprise, since his status as a practiced humanist is quite well documented. His knowledge of Roman epigraphy is evident in his painted inscriptions, and throughout his career, in various circumstances—including on his very tombstone—he was compared favorably to Apelles.<sup>52</sup> The Genoese humanist at the court of Naples, Bartolommeo Fazio, lavishly praised Van Eyck’s skill and attributed his knowledge in painting directly to his familiarity with Pliny.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that he knew directly the famous description of the Cnidian Venus attributed to Lucian, as well as the Fifth Homeric Hymn in which she bathes in preparation for various couplings with other gods and with mortals. The Homeric poem is particularly significant here because there Venus washes and perfumes herself prior to coupling with the Trojan shepherd Anchises, the result of which union is the birth of Aeneas, and through him the “gens Julia,” Caesar and the emperor Augustus. The bath of love is thus directly associated with the procreative power of Venus Genetrix, and hence the origin of the Romans, whose empire made possible the dominion of Christianity.<sup>54</sup> In a spirit of emulation of the great founder of Netherlandish painting—and in turn of the great masters of antiquity—Rembrandt conflated van Eyck’s two masterpieces.

The Jewish Bride fuses in a single, surpassing image the ideals of marriage, chastity, and fecundity. If he knew of the ancient marriage relief inscribed Faith and Love, he certainly also knew it was a tombstone, and the mood of his painting suggests that he may have associated this note of eternal commemoration with the Canticle passage in which the “seal upon the heart” and the “seal upon the arm” gave witness to a “love as strong as death.” Rembrandt was not the first to combine the gestures of the Song of Songs with those of the Venus Pudica, and it is a remarkable fact that the precedent, perhaps even the prototype, was intended to illustrate the victory of true love over death. In a series of engravings published in 1599, devoted to amorous themes with moral content, one of the scenes portrays a kind of amatory version of the Choice of Hercules (**Fig. 26**): a handsome youth grasps the breast of his ideal beloved, while she touches

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<sup>52</sup> And to Phydias and Policretus. There is some question as to whether the inscription is contemporary or not; Van Mander 1994, 1:61, 69, and 2:223.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Panofsky 1953, 1:2, 361 n. 7; see also 179.

<sup>54</sup> Lucian 1925, 4:263; 8:169. A fourteenth-century manuscript of the Hymn was once in Leyden; *Homeric Hymns* 1936, xi, 64–75 and commentary. Both sources are cited in Havelock 1995, 10, and 24.



his hand with one of hers and with the other holds a clutch of drapery to her groin; he looks down upon the tempting wealth offered by an old woman, behind whom lurks the spectral emblem of transience.<sup>55</sup>

One further association is critical to an understanding of the astonishing and otherwise paradoxical conflation of Jewish, Christian, and classical allusions in Rembrandt's painting. His work of visual synthesis reflects a traditional ideological synthesis in which the race of the Jews stemming from Isaac and Rebecca merges with the race of the Romans stemming from Anchises and Venus, to create a new community of all mankind. From this point of view Rembrandt stands firmly on one of the cornerstones of Christian ideology, that the universal church of Christ was itself the conflation of the Chosen People and the Roman imperium, the "ecclesia ex circumcissione" and "ex gentibus."<sup>56</sup>

### **The Song of Songs as Social Intercourse**

The meaning of Rembrandt's Jewish Bride as an expression of undying love based largely on the imagery of the Song of Songs, derives partly from the way the text was interpreted in the Reformation.<sup>57</sup> The Protestants were in principle opposed to any sense of the Scripture other than the literal. Luther quite clearly said that "an interpreter must as much as possible avoid allegories (which) are empty speculation, and, as it were, absurd, invented, obsolete loose rags." The one exception to his interdiction was, not surprisingly, the Song of Songs, the "locus classicus" of allegorical interpretation of the Bible, about which Luther himself wrote a lengthy commentary.<sup>58</sup> While insisting that his was a literal account of what Solomon, the author, actually said, Luther proclaimed that the poem could never be any kind of a love song. Instead, he offered a radically original, socio-political understanding of the text. Solomon is thanking

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<sup>55</sup> *Hortus voluptatum qui sua nihilominus etiam producet moralia*, n. p., 1599. Many of the prints bear the signature of Crispijn de Passe the Elder; cf. Boon and Verbeek 1949, 285f. Cited by Tümpel 1967-1968, 2:99, 387 n. 339, and 1969, 164, 168. Versions of the same composition, without the skeleton: drawing by Goltzius dated 1600 (Reznicek 1961, 1:127, 2:314f.; engraving by Jacob Matham after Goltzius (Strauss 1978ff., 4:280).

<sup>56</sup> On this tradition and its relevance for Caravaggio's merger of Jewish and pagan references, see Lavin 1974, 78, and 1993, 99.

<sup>57</sup> See the exemplary work of Scheper 1974.

<sup>58</sup> Luther 1972, 15:189-264.

God for his divinely established and confirmed kingdom and government, and commending this government to us as a sort of encomium to God for that highest blessing.<sup>59</sup> When he came to line 2, 6 of the Song, which he translates “O that His left hand were under my head, and that His right hand embraced me!” Luther says that although this, too, is a figure drawn from the love of the bride and groom, which is a holy and lawful love, it includes two special blessings belonging to the people: the kingdom, or government, which he calls the left hand; and the priesthood, or worship of God, the right hand. These embraces make it possible for this rose to endure the thrust of wild beasts and brambles, since it is wholly within the embrace of God whether you look at the church or the kingdom, for the Word of God is in both.<sup>60</sup>

Luther's political reading did not take hold, but the Song's continued importance for later Protestant interpreters may be gauged by the fact that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were more commentaries on the Song of Songs than on any book of both Testaments, except the Psalms. While concern for the idea of “a single sense” remained pre-eminent among these authors, they replaced the ecstatic sacramental mysticism of the medieval tradition by a more rationally, moralistically, and socially based Christian spirituality. Their allegorizations came to reflect new, often controversial interpretations of the doctrine of justification by faith and the imputed righteousness of Christ.<sup>61</sup> A conciliatory view of predestination and free will was a particular tenet of the Dutch Remonstrants, the unorthodox sect with which Rembrandt must have been familiar since painting and etching portraits of its heroic leader Johannes Uytenbogaert in the 1630's. In a radically liberal and ecumenical vein the Remonstrants maintained that Christ died not only on behalf of the saved but for all humanity. In general, the Protestant conception of the Canticle's central metaphor, the nuptial theme, might be said to have followed and enlarged upon the ancient Hebrew tradition.<sup>62</sup> With complete single-mindedness

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<sup>59</sup> Kallas 1988, 323–41, suggests a source for the “political” idea was an essay by Emperor Maximilian.

<sup>60</sup> Luther 1972, 15: 216. For Luther's commentary on lines 8, 3 and 8, 6, see pp. 255–57.

<sup>61</sup> For surveys of the medieval tradition see Astell 1990, Matter 1990, and the excellent account of Scheper 1974, esp. pp. 556–59. Two massive studies of the later literature of the Songs of Songs are now available: Engammare 1993, and, for Holland in particular, Verduin 1992. For overviews of the Dutch religio-political controversies and Uytenbogaert's role see Israel 1995 and Parker 1997.

the lyric was described as the spiritual truth, the highest mystery of all, that is, the love between God and his people. Rembrandt is said to have developed in his late works an “iconographical style” coordinate with a broadened painting technique, deepened color palette, and more profound psychological expression. Starting with a specific, clearly defined subject, he eliminated incidental elements to distill the essence and endow the theme with general validity.<sup>63</sup> for them and their heirs. Within the framework of depictions of "amorous partnership," the merger assimilated the tradition of Old Testament narrative illustration to that of isolated images of moral precepts. A third ingredient produced a paradoxical coincidence of opposites that was, however, essential to the import of Rembrandt's iconographical style: as the conventional elements became more universal, the protagonists became more individual. It may never be known whether the figures in the Jewish Bride represent real people, but the fact that they are often taken as such is indicative of the intensely personal associations with which the artist imbued abstract traditions. From the anecdotal, genre-like scene in the drawing of Abimelech discovering Isaac and Rebecca's dalliance, the composition is magnified and takes on the quality of a monumental double portrait. At the same time, the painting's quasi-sacral sexual overtones transform the original subject into a meditation on the equally paradoxical relationship between physical and spiritual love, here embodied in a solemn ritual of embrace upon which Rembrandt's golden light sheds its blessing. So it was with the story of Isaac and Rebecca, which became the Jewish Bride. In this case the account in Genesis of God's plan to establish his chosen people through their progenitors' sacrosanct marriage was conflated with God's own expression in the Song of Songs of his love

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<sup>62</sup> There was, in fact, a powerful tendency to identify the newly emergent Dutch republic with the Israel of the Old Testament; see especially, Groenhuis 1981, 118–33, and Schama 1988, 93–125.

<sup>63</sup> See Tümpel 1991, among others. Panofsky in particular, in a wonderful essay of 1920 published posthumously in 1973, which came to our attention only after the present work was in proof, emphasized this merger of the individual and the universal in Rembrandt's late pictures on Jewish themes, which he related to Spinoza's concept of understanding *sub specie aeternitatis*; Panofsky does not discuss the *Jewish Bride*.

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## Illustrations



Fig. 1 Rembrandt van Rijn, The Jewish Bride, 1662-1666. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



## Illustrations

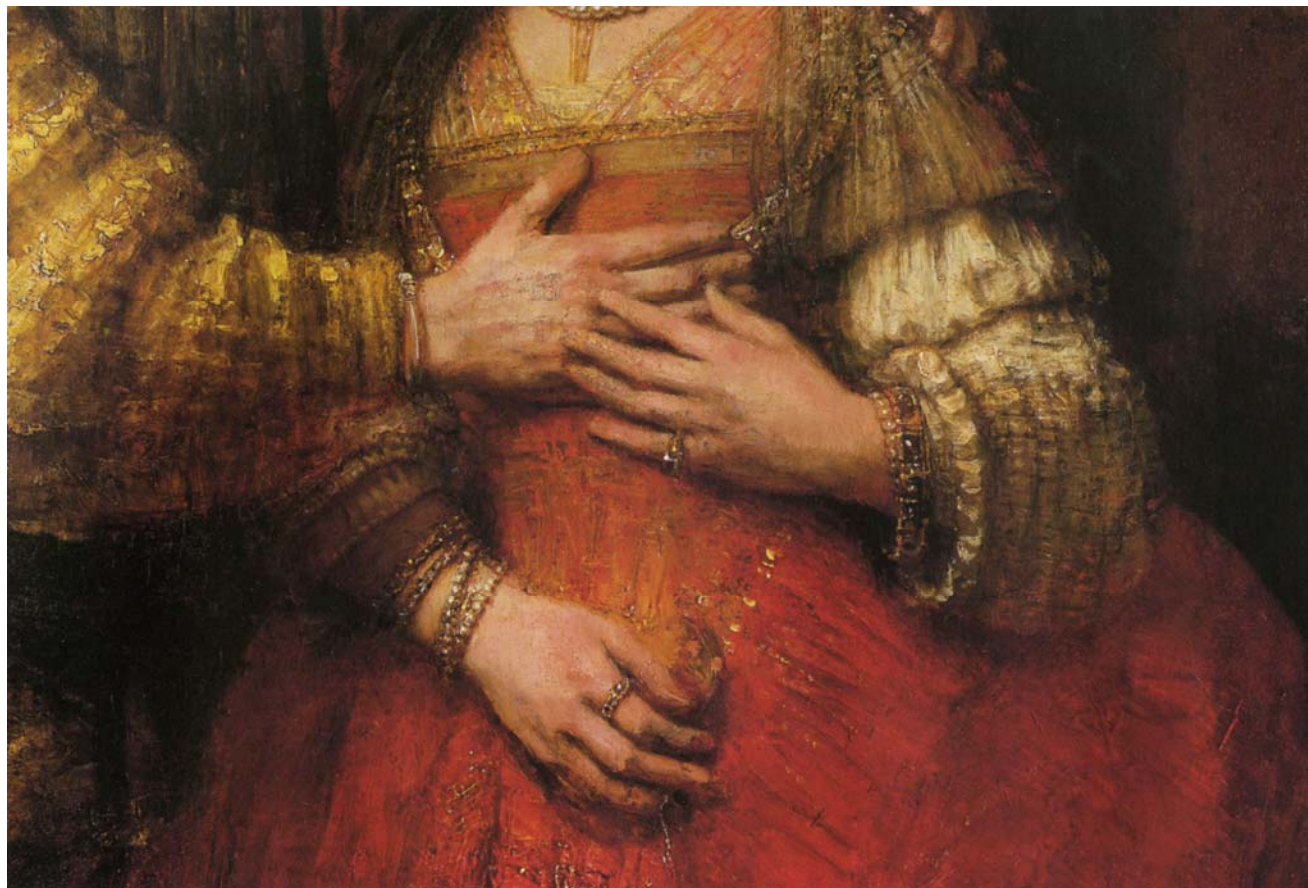


Fig. 2 Detail of Fig. 1.

## Illustrations



Fig. 3 Attributed to Wolfgang Krodell the Elder, Unequal Lovers.  
Sotheby's April 17, 1996, Lot. 126.

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## Illustrations



Fig. 4 Arent de Gelder, *The Jewish Marriage Contract (Tobias and Sara)*. Brighton, Brighton Art Gallery and Museum.



Illustrations



Fig. 5 Jan van Noordt, Judah and Tamar, etching after Pierer Lastman.

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Fig. 6 Attributed to Isaac Jacobsz van Hooren, Jacob and Rachel, present whereabouts unknown.





Fig. 7 Concordia Maritale, woodcut (after Ripa 1625).

## Illustrations



Fig. 8 Rembrandt van Rijn, Isaac and Rebecca, drawing, New York, Kramarsky Collection.



## Illustrations



Fig. 9 Raphael, Isaac and Rebecca, fresco, 1518-19. Rome, Vatican Palace, Logge.



## Illustrations

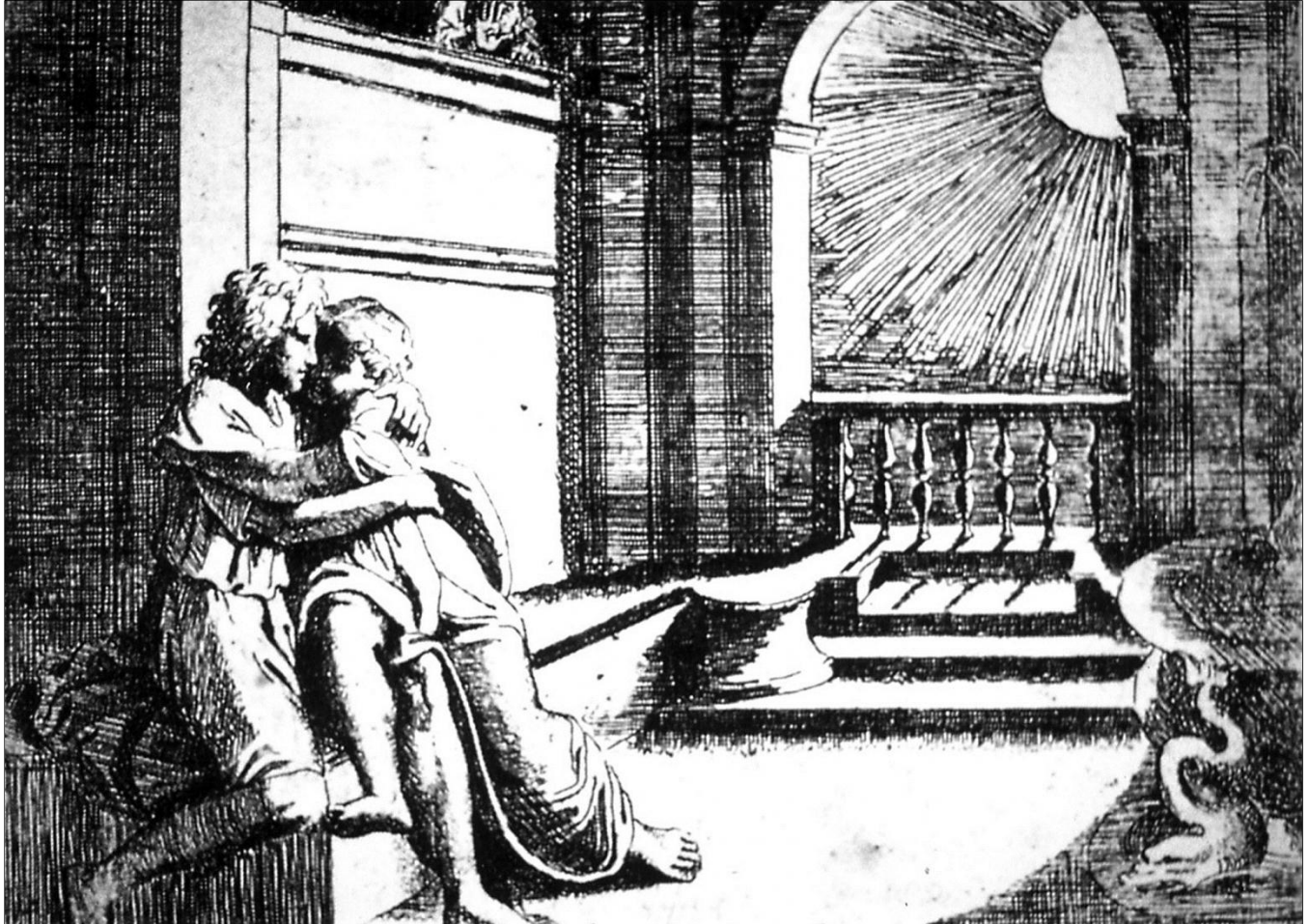


Fig. 10 Badalocchio, Isaac and Rebecca Observed by Abimelech, engraving after Raphael (after Historia1607).

## Illustrations

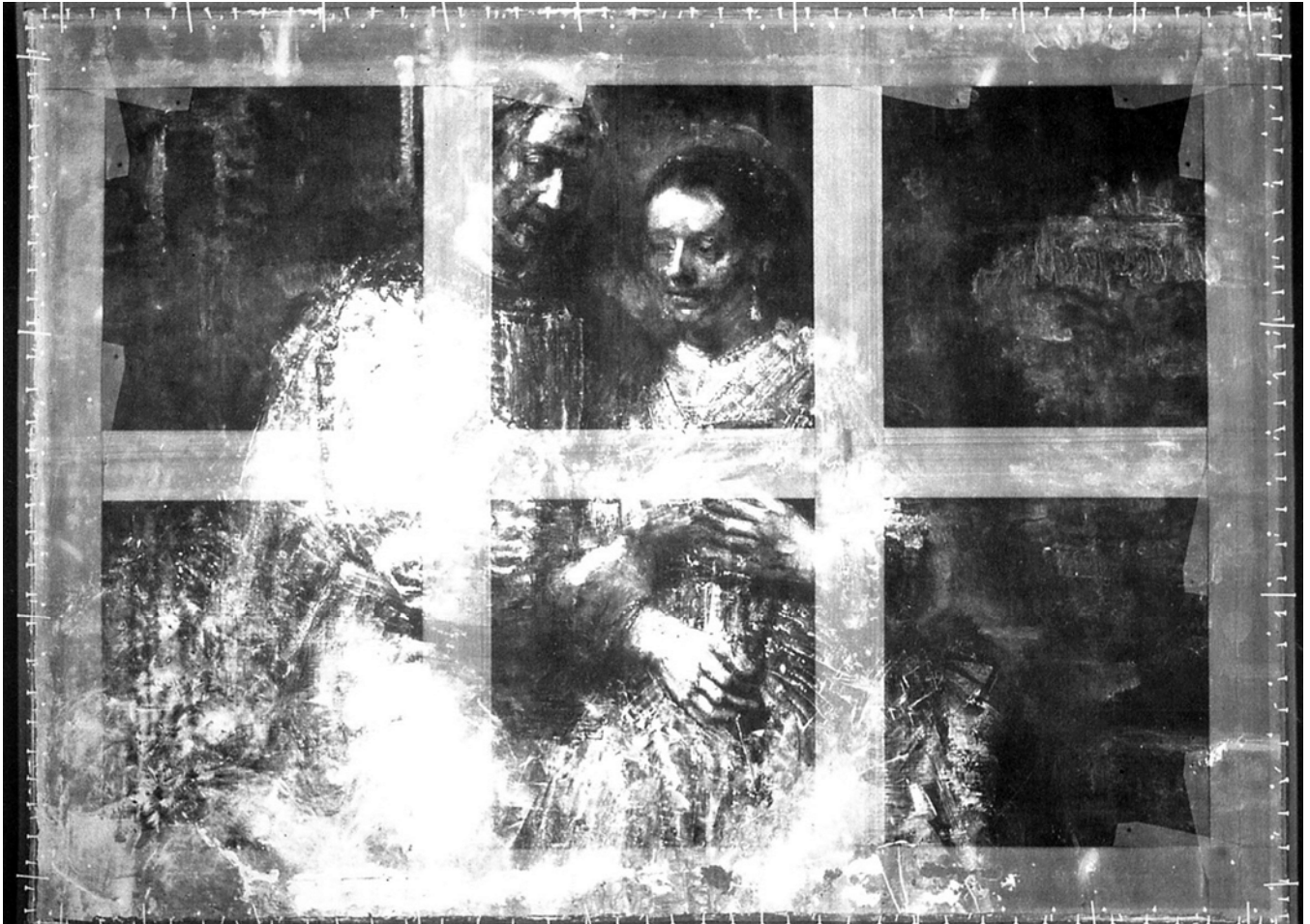


Fig. 11 X-Ray, The Jewish Bride. (Photo: Rijksmuseum).





Fig. 12 Crispin de Passe the Elder, Isaac and Rebecca Observed by Abimelech, engraving (after Passe 1612).



## Illustrations



Fig. 13 Flowering Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*).

## Illustrations

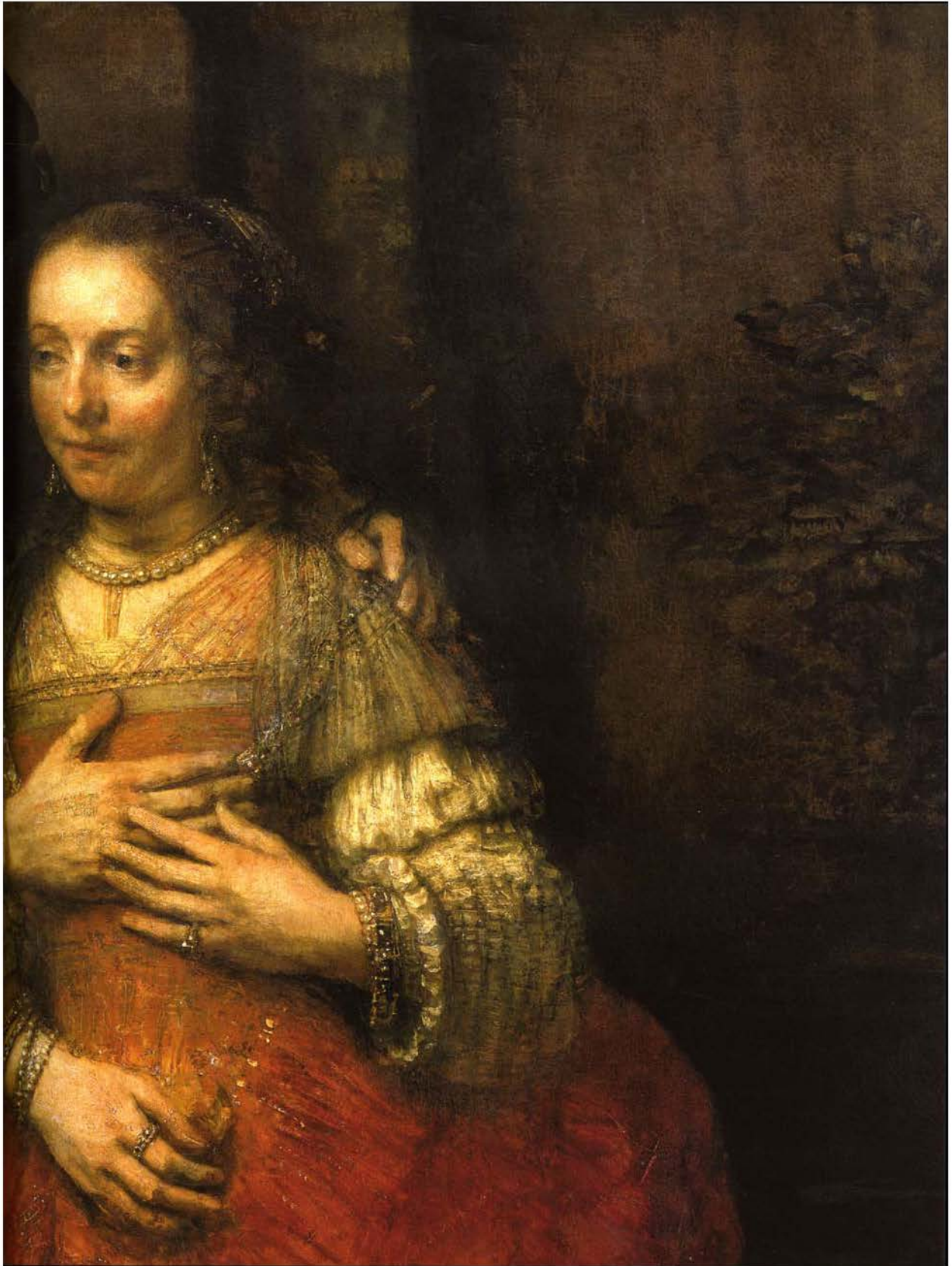


Fig. 14 Detail of Fig. 1.

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Fig. 15 Christ and Mary with the seal of the Trinity, woodcut, ca. 1465.

## Illustrations



Fig. 16 Enthroned Madonna and Child, after 1200, manuscript illumination. Bible, Madrid, Museo Lázaro Galdiano, MS 15289, Bible, fol. 197v.





Fig. 17 Capitoline Venus. Rome, Museo Capirolino.

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## Illustrations



Fig. 18 Titian, Venus with a Mirror. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art.

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## Illustrations



Fig. 19 Rembrandt van Rijn, Portrait of Johannes Uytenbogaert. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

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Fig. 20 Rembrandt van Rijn. Susanna and the Elders. The Hague, Mauritshuis.

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## Illustrations



Fig. 21 Jan van Eyck, Arnolfini Wedding. London, National Gallery.

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Fig. 22 Augustan relief. Rome, Musei Vaticani.





Fig. 23 Augustan relief, woodcut (after Boissard 1597 -1602).



## Illustrations

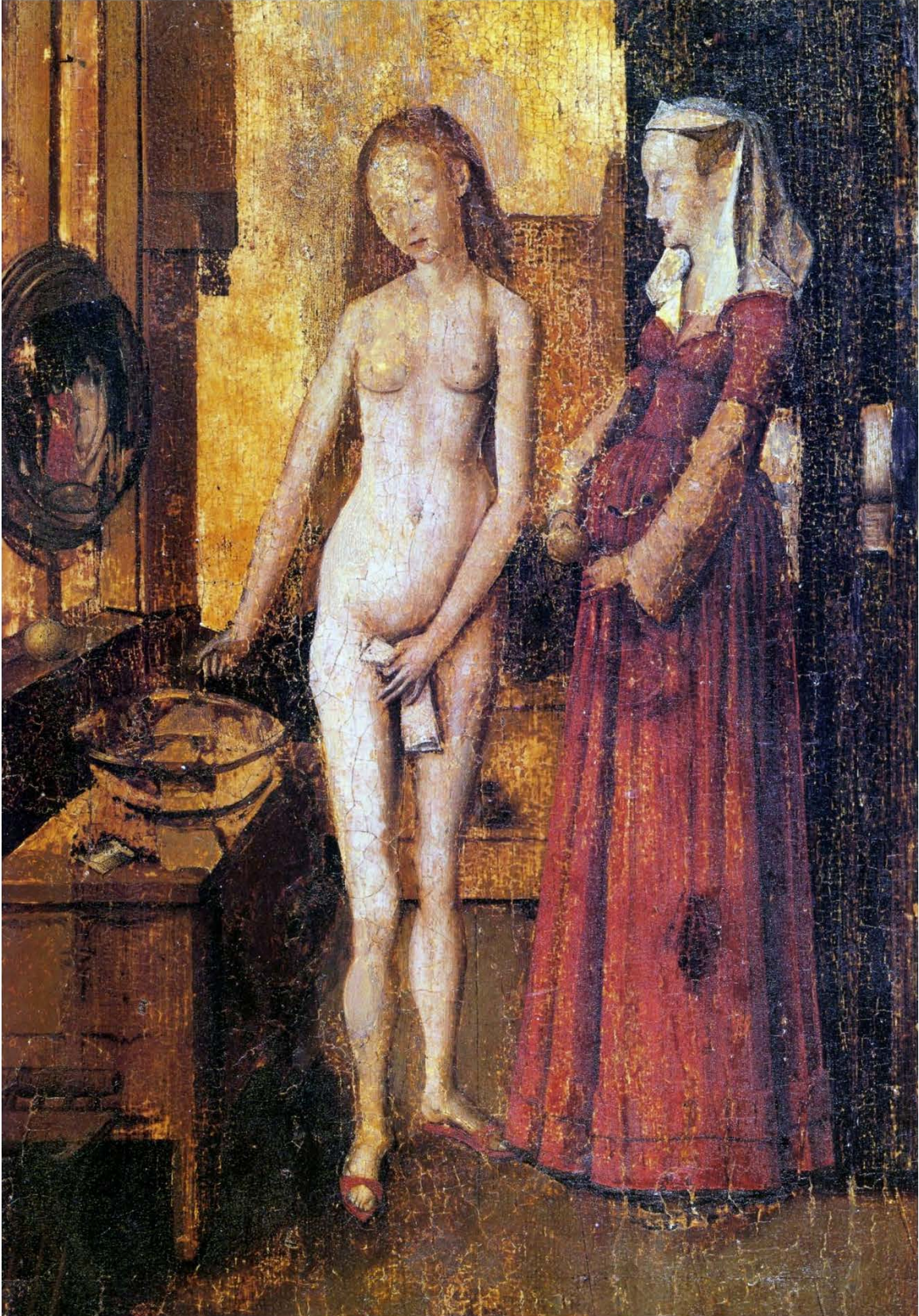


Fig. 24 Woman at Her Toilet, copy of Jan van Eyck. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Fogg Arc Museum.

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## Illustrations

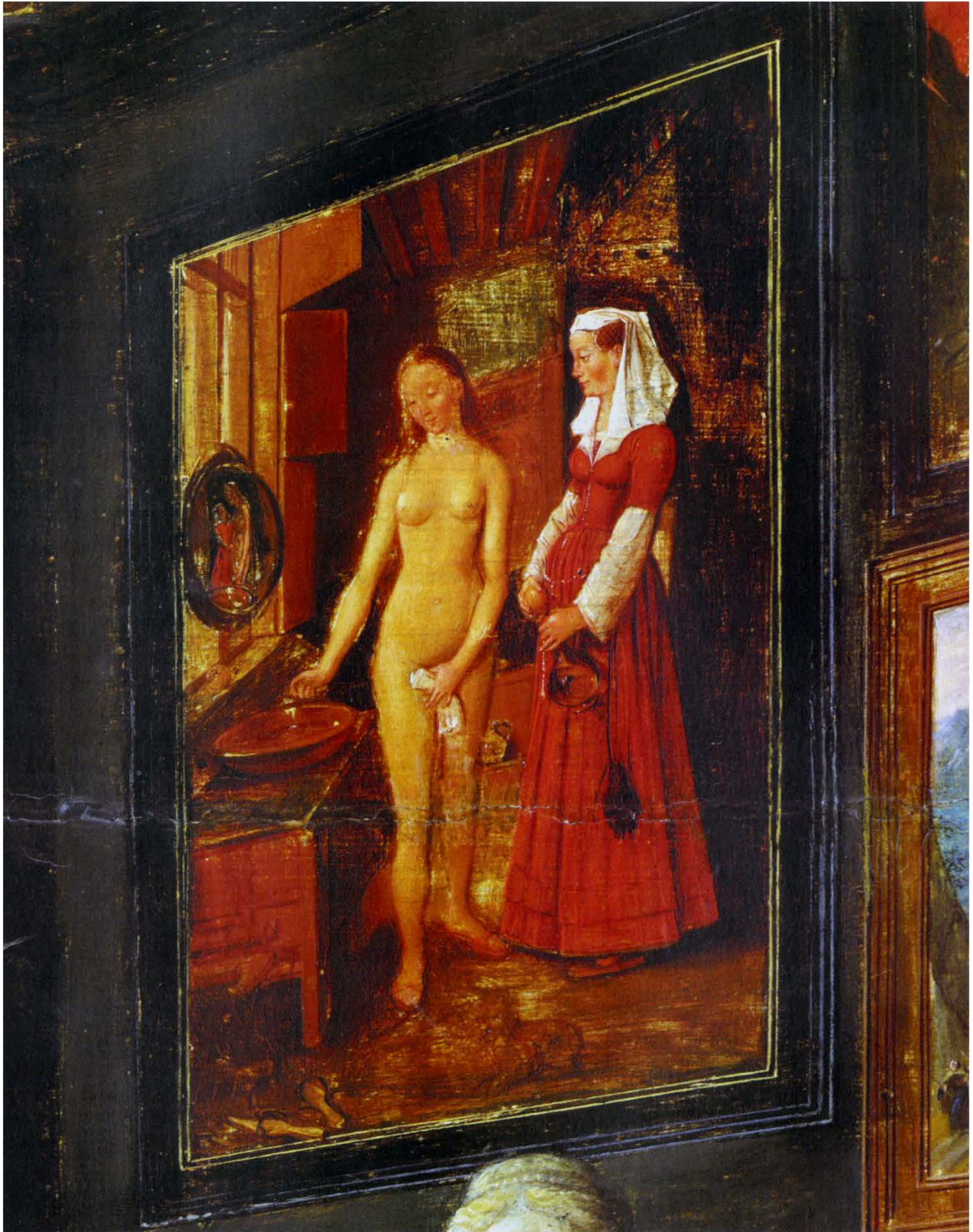


Fig. 25 Willem Van Haec he, Gallery of Cornelis Van der Geese, detail (Woman at Her Toilet). Antwerp, Rubenshuis.

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Fig. 26 Crispijn de Passe the Elder(?), Choice between Love and Wealth, engraving (after Hortus 1599).