



Short Notice*

An Acquisition Rediscovered:

The Sacrament of Marriage, a Drawing by Hans Bol

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Sometimes things need time, particularly in a discipline as cautious as art history. It is quite possible for a work of art to languish for decades in a museum collection, overlooked, not valued, unknown and unloved. But, happily, every now and then justice prevails and the neglected object can at last take its rightful place in the collection. Let me introduce you to one such lost soul that has found its way home.

In April 1903 the Rijksmuseum Print Room, the Rijksprentenkabinet, paid twenty-five guilders for a drawing depicting, as the Latin inscription states, one of the seven Sacraments – marriage (fig. 1).¹ At the time, the drawing was entered in the inventory as ‘in the manner of H. Goltzius’, a description that is less than encouraging. After all, ‘in the manner of’ means no more than that someone thought the drawing style bore some resemblance to that of Hendrick Goltzius – but then again, not enough to be able to attribute the sheet with any conviction to the artist himself. Later generations of curators really did not know what they were supposed to do with the drawing. It does not appear in K.G. Boon’s monumental catalogue of the early Netherlandish drawings in the Rijksprentenkabinet, nor in *Nederlandse tekeningen omstreeks 1600*, which is a follow-up and supplement to Boon’s book. In the early nineteen-nineties

Fig. 1
HANS BOL, *The Sacrament of Marriage*, c. 1576.
Pen and brown ink, brown wash, 248 x 192 mm.
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-T-1903-A-4765.

I noted on the drawing’s inventory card: ‘By the same hand and from the same series as a drawing in Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie, Graphische Sammlung’ with a reference to the exhibition catalogue in which that drawing was published.² The first part of this remark is unquestionably correct: the drawings in Amsterdam and Stuttgart are unmistakably the work of one and the same artist. It will, however, emerge as the story progresses that they do not belong to the same set. The drawing in Stuttgart was attributed at that time – with a question mark – to Adam van Noort, a hypothesis that proved not to hold water and need not trouble us here.

After that, everything goes quiet for years. The inventory card vanished into a suspension file and the drawing ended up in a box marked ‘sixteenth century miscellaneous’ – until 2010, when an article by J. Jacoby appeared in the magazine *Delineavit et Sculpsit*.³ In it the author demonstrates that the drawing in Stuttgart and one similar in style and composition in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes are both design sketches for prints by Philips Galle, part of a set of the *Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy*. The drawing in Rennes is a preliminary study for the engraving of *Comforting the Afflicted*; the one in Stuttgart is an initial design for *Instructing the Ignorant*.

Jacoby's article is in two parts. Having explained what the function of the two sketches might have been, the author makes a valiant attempt to attribute them to the man who engraved the designs into the copper plates, Philips Galle. This is understandable. There is no mention of an *inventor* – designer – on the title sheet to the set. The only name that appears is that of the engraver, so the suggestion that the design and execution may have been by a single hand is by no means a foolish one. Unfortunately, there is nothing in Philips Galle's presently known, very meagre drawn oeuvre that can be meaningfully compared with the two sketches. Jacoby's attribution is therefore unconvincing. The author is on much surer ground in the second part of his exposition, in which he goes into the original function of Philips Galle's set of prints. Jacoby comes to the conclusion that the set of *Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy*, along with two other sets, the *Seven Corporal Works of Mercy* and the *Seven Sacraments*, must have been the remnants of an enterprise that was never completed – a joint venture between the Antwerp printer and publisher Christoffel Plantijn and the engraver Philips Galle.⁴ Jacoby speculates that the three sets of prints are the only parts that were executed of what was to have been a much larger work, an illustrated edition of the *Catechisms* by the Jesuit Petrus Canisius.

After some time, a wholly satisfactory answer was found to the question as to the authorship of the two sketches in Stuttgart and Rennes. In a later issue of *Delineavit et Sculptit* Stefaan Hautekeete wrote a follow-up to Jacoby's piece in which he convincingly showed that the designs were the work not of Philips Galle but of an artist of the next generation, Hans Bol. Grounding his argument in a number of comparisons, he demonstrated that both sketches are typical examples of Bol's late, spontaneous drawing style, with rapidly delineated forms.⁵

Articles like those by Jacoby and Hautekeete often cause the scales to fall from the eyes of others; they generate new finds. And that brings us back to the drawing in Amsterdam. With the material presented by Jacoby and Hautekeete to hand it is abundantly clear that the drawing in the Rijksprentenkabinet was part of the group of designs that Hans Bol drew for the three sets of prints: it is the preparatory drawing for the print of *Marriage* in the set of the *Seven Sacraments* (fig. 2). All the engravings in the three sets – save for the title page prints – have the same layout. The principal scene, which takes place in the centre foreground, is surrounded by a sort of gatehouse. Standing on plinths on either side of the gate, as if they were statues, are the figures of prophets, apostles or saints. The 'gates' are also decorated with all sorts of scenes relating to the main theme, and the images are elucidated by numerous Latin texts, the great majority of them quotations from the Vulgate. It is clear that prints with such a complicated scheme, which also had to convey absolutely sound religious doctrine, would not have been conceived by the artist. It seems incontrovertible that one or more theologians must have been involved in the whole project. In his article Jacoby outlines one possible scenario: he suggests that a sort of 'package of requirements' was compiled, and on this basis the artist could draw his sketches. The designs were then subjected to critical commentary, after which the artist produced second versions to put before the client. It would not have been until final approval had been received that work would commence on the actual production of the prints. If this was indeed the course of events, it is quite possible that each print was preceded by at least three drawings: an initial sketch, a second, corrected design and the final, fully finished drawing that the engraver used as his



Fig. 2
PHILIPS GALLE
AFTER HANS BOL,
*The Sacrament of
Marriage*, 1576.
Engraving,
258 x 191 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.
RP-P-2004-575;
purchased with the
support of the
F.G. Waller-Fonds.

model. The engraver must also have been given precise instructions as to the texts that had to be placed here and there between the scenes. The three drawings we currently know all appear to be initial sketches.

Closer examination of Galle's engraving of the *Sacrament of Marriage* gives us an impression of the complexity of prints of this kind and also allows us to see how the end result differs from the first sketch. Evidently the client

and the artist did not make things too difficult for one another in this case, since the differences between the drawing and the print are not that great – but they do exist. In the centre foreground we see the solemnization of a marriage. The man and wife have joined right hands and the priest has sealed their union – *indissolubilis*, as the inscription says – by crossing the ends of his stole and laying it on their hands. The long quotation immediately

below the scene comes from St Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, in which the apostle likens the bond between man and woman to the bond between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:31-33).⁶ Paul, who is repeatedly quoted elsewhere in this print, is also physically present: he is the large standing figure on the left. Also on the left, behind and above the marriage scene, as if on a raised stage, we are given a glimpse of the most famous wedding feast in the New Testament – the wedding at Cana. When the wine runs out, Jesus has the servants bring in pitchers of water and turns the water into wine. The quote from the Gospel of John, chapter 2, says nothing more than that Jesus and his disciples were present at the feast. To the right of the wedding at Cana there is another New Testament scene. When Pharisees, trying to test Jesus, ask him whether it is lawful for a man to reject his wife for any reason, he reminds them that God made man and woman for one another and that the two will be one flesh. *Quod Deus Coniunxit homo non separet* – what God has joined together let no man put asunder (Matthew 19:3-6). If we compare this central part of the drawing and the print, it appears there have not been any significant changes. Hans Bol had already taken into account in his sketch the fact that the image would be reversed in the print: in his drawing the bride and groom are giving one another their left hands. The reversal is not complete in the other two scenes. Individually each scene is reversed relative to the drawing, but the scene with the Pharisees in the print is on the right of the wedding at Cana, as it is in the drawing.

The principal theme of the central section, the indissolubility of marriage, is repeatedly emphasized and elaborated upon in the border. On the left, as we have seen, stands St Paul. His right hand rests on a tablet bearing a quotation from Paul's first epistle to the Christian community in Corinth:

'And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord: Let not the wife depart from her husband. But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband depart from his wife' (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Opposite St Paul stands the prophet Moses. He rests his hand on the passage on the union of man and woman that Jesus referred to in his dispute with the Pharisees (Genesis 2:24). In the upper left corner we see God giving Eve to Adam as his mate. The accompanying text expresses Adam's joy at seeing the woman: 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2:23). This is where we see the first clear difference between the sketch and the print. In his drawing Bol illustrated an earlier moment in the story, God creating Eve from the sleeping Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21-22). Evidently the theological adviser felt that this scene did not refer explicitly enough to the bond between man and woman instituted by God, and the design was changed in the final version.

Something similar happened in the vignette upper right. There we find a scene from the charming tale of Abraham sending his servant to his – Abraham's – country, to find a wife for his son Isaac. When he reaches his destination, the servant kneels and prays to God: 'Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master' (Genesis 24:13-14). And lo, Rebekah appears on the scene. She is of marriageable age, she is a virgin and she is beautiful. Abraham's servant addresses her; she lets him quench his thirst and draws water for

his camels. In short, all goes according to plan; nothing stands in the way of a happy outcome. Hans Bol drew the moment when Rebekah lets Abraham's servant drink from her pitcher. In the print this scene has been consigned to the background and a slightly later event takes place in the foreground: in front of her father and brother Rebekah agrees to go with the servant and become Isaac's wife (Genesis 24:57-58). Here again, apparently, the client felt that there was not enough emphasis on marriage.

There remain the two compositions on the plinths on which St Paul and Moses stand. The two scenes are as good as interchangeable: in both a bride is being given away. The stories pictured can only be identified from the accompanying quotations from the Vulgate. Left – in the print – Jacob marries Rachel (Genesis 29:28); on the right Raguel asks for God's blessing for the alliance between his daughter Sarah and the young Tobias (Tobit 7:15). Immediately below the scene, across the full width of the sheet, is a quotation from Paul's first letter to the

Christians of Thessalonica, in which the apostle exhorts the members of the community to abstain from fornication (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Beneath this are four lines of verse whose source has not yet been discovered. The tenor will instantly strike a chord with readers: marriage is described as a sacred gift from God and an effective protection against unbridled lust.⁷

Art historians have to live day in and day out with the knowledge that much has been lost over the centuries: they have perforce to make do with the paltry remnants of what were once far greater treasures. And this is true of drawings by Hans Bol. Much has survived, but there must have been a great deal more. A swift calculation tells us that if three sketches did indeed precede each print in the three sets produced by Philips Galle, there must once have been seventy-two preparatory drawings. At the moment we know of the existence of just three. This is a little depressing, but there is of course always a chance that someday more will come to light. Hope springs eternal...

NOTES

* Short Notice is a new series of brief articles in which single objects or findings are presented. Short Notice articles are not peer reviewed.

- 1 The seller was one J.G. van de Velde, who on the same occasion also sold a pair of pendant portraits of an unknown man and woman by Pieter Cornelisz van Slingelandt (1640-1691) (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. nos. RP-T-1903-A-4763, 4764).
- 2 H. Geissler et al. (eds.), *Zeichnungen des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts Vermächtnis Richard Jung*, exh. cat. Stuttgart (Staatsgalerie, Graphische Sammlung)/Karlsruhe (Staatliche Kunsthalle) 1989-90, pp. 117-18, no. 64 with fig.
- 3 J. Jacoby, 'Amendments: Two Drawings for Prints by Philips Galle', *Delineavit et Sculpsit* 33 (2010), pp. 2-24.
- 4 The three sets of prints are described at length in M. Selling and M. Leesberg, *Philips Galle*,

Part II, The New Hollstein Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450-1700, Rotterdam 2001, nos. 249-72. In 2004 the Rijksmuseum Print Room acquired the three sets, printed on sheets with wide margins, in a nineteenth-century binding (inv. nos. RP-P-2004-570 to 590-c).

- 5 S. Hautekeete, 'New Amendments: Drawings for Prints by Hans Bol', *Delineavit et Sculpsit* 35 (2012), pp. 1-9.
- 6 For the identification of the quotations from the Vulgate I used the *Internet Sacred Text Archive*: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/vul>.
- 7 'God himself first confirming the nuptial ties of the fruitful bed, has strengthened it with sacred honour. Marriage dedicates the sweet children, the dearest proofs of love, as gifts to God; it keeps the misdeed of uncurbed love at bay.' With thanks to Dr P. van de Wiel for her translation of the Latin into Dutch.