



Parable of the Lost Piece of Silver

Godefridus Schalcken
(Made 1643 – 1706 The Hague)

ca. 1680–85

oil on canvas

39.5 x 49.3 cm

signed or inscribed in red paint, center of lower
foreground: “G Schalcken.”

GS-108



How to cite

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After completing his artistic training with Gerrit Dou (1613–75) in Leiden, Godefridus Schalcken returned to Dordrecht and began to paint—in his teacher’s somewhat stiff manner—genre pieces that usually feature sausage-stuffing kitchen maids, Rommel-pot players, and quack doctors. Throughout the 1670s Schalcken continued to prefer small formats, but he gradually replaced the protagonists from the lower echelons of society with handsome youngsters in costly attire, inhabiting an elegant setting. The manner in which Schalcken executed these more bourgeois figure paintings was lighter, looser, and livelier than that of his teacher, and with a better sense of color, too. He soon developed an unmistakable idiom of his own that is readily distinguishable from the work of Dou and that master’s many other followers.

In the 1680s Schalcken began to concentrate more and more on subjects typical of history painting, the category ranked most highly by art theorists. The hierarchy of genres had no doubt been instilled in the artist by his first teacher, Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), also known for his writings on art.^[1] In any case, Schalcken made sure that even in subjects derived from ancient history or classical mythology, he made intelligent use of his technical skill in portraying artificial illumination. A good example is his depiction of the story of the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who carries a burning lamp in broad daylight as he searches the market square for “an honest man.”^[2] For an artist who came from a family of clergymen and theologians, the Bible was naturally a rewarding source of subjects in which artificial lighting—whether by torch, candle, or oil lamp—could be used to advantage. *Denial of Peter*, *Mocking of Christ*, and *Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins* were only three of the nocturnal scenes from the New Testament that he rendered in paint.^[3]

Around 1680–85 Schalcken painted *Parable of the Lost Piece of Silver*, in which he adhered closely to the text of Luke 15:8–10: “Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” As the words of Christ indicate, the parable is always interpreted in the various exegeses of the different religious groups as the joy of repentance, with the lamp symbolizing the Word of God. This interpretation applies in every way to Schalcken’s portrayal, but it is also evident that the master deliberately sought a text in Holy Scripture that would allow him to put his exceptional technique to good use.

There is no other known painting of this subject in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch art.^[4] It appears, however, that Schalcken’s composition was inspired by a

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Jan Collaert I after Ambrosius Francken, *The Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Piece of Silver*, 1585, engraving, 203 x 291 mm, The British Museum, London, Bequeathed by Sir Hans Sloane, 1753, 1968,1018.1.271, © Trustees of the British Museum



Fig 2. Godefridus Schalcken, *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, 61.3 x 49.8 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, inv. no. 368, © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Fig 3. Godefridus Schalcken, *Girl with a Waffle in Her Hand*, 1680s, oil on canvas, 25.5 x 21.5 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Kassel, #GK 303

sixteenth-century work—a print made in Flanders. One of the first large series of engravings after biblical texts, *Thesaurus Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, which was published by Gerard de Jode (1509–91) in Antwerp in 1585, contains prints after texts from the New Testament, including a series of twelve engravings of the parables of Christ. They can be found in the section titled *Thesaurus Novi Testamenti*, which was supplied with a separate title page and probably added to the edition only after 1591.^[5] One of the twelve prints, engraved by Jan Collaert I (ca. 1530–81) after a drawing attributed to Ambrosius Francken (1544–1618), portrays *Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Piece of Silver* (fig 1).^[6] It depicts the Good Shepherd carrying the lost sheep on his shoulders, but the left part of the engraving is more important to us because it portrays two scenes from the Parable of the Lost Piece of Silver. In the left foreground we see the woman looking for the coin by the light of the lamp she holds, while the scene in the background shows her displaying the recovered drachma to her friends and neighbors. This print and the *Thesaurus* as a whole were widely disseminated. Claes Jansz Visscher (1587–1652) republished the engravings under the title *Theatrum biblicum* in Amsterdam in 1643, with reprints following in 1646 and 1674.^[7]

Considering that Schalcken was a descendant of a family of clergymen, and one expected to study theology, it is more than likely that one or more of the above-mentioned editions could be found in the artist's parental home; if not, then he could easily have seen the edition published in 1674 by Nicolaes Visscher (1618–79). Nevertheless, by following the biblical text closely, Schalcken created an extraordinary composition, for the rejoicing on the part of the friends and neighbors upon learning of the recovery of the piece of silver is the focal point of the picture, in contrast to the composition of the engraving (fig 1). Thus Schalcken represents the positive quintessence of the story, precisely as described in the Bible. In executing the painting, he remained faithful to the small format he preferred, but the richly appointed interior, the pleasingly light palette, unusual in a nocturnal scene (see, for example, the light green dress of the girl at the lower right), and the supple brushwork demonstrate that by this time the painter had completely abandoned Dou's idiomatic style and subject matter. A dating to the early 1680s is therefore plausible, additionally supported by the fact that the artist painted this picture on canvas.^[8]

Such a dating is corroborated by the man at the far left, the top half of whose face is concealed in shadow. This man, who looks at the viewer, closely resembles the painter, who was approximately 40 at the time, so presumably the master used himself as the model for this personage. Perhaps he did so because of some connection he felt with this biblical passage, but he may well have done it to highlight his own accomplishment: the creation of a thematically unique painting. It has already been pointed out in another context that Schalcken always gave close consideration to



Fig 4. School of Godefridus Schalcken, *Woman Holding a Candle (after the Parable of the Lost Piece of Silver)*, early 19th century, oil on canvas, 78 x 58.4 cm, The Leiden Collection, New York

his choice of subject matter.^[9]

The painting was first published in the 1783 catalogue compiled by Simon Causid of the paintings in the collection of the landgraves of Hessen-Kassel. That catalogue records no fewer than 11 paintings by Schalcken, which means that the Dordrecht-Hague painter was certainly a favorite of the collector Wilhelm VIII of Hessen-Kassel (1682–1760).^[10] This landgrave spent a long time in the Netherlands as an officer in the States army and also served as governor of Breda and Maastricht, so his warm feelings toward the Low Countries and his fondness for Dutch art went hand in hand.^[11] Causid's description of the painting is striking, particularly the information imparted in the second half: "The woman from the Gospel, who shows her friends the found coin by the light of a burning lamp. Take note: the figures in this piece are portraits of the painter himself and his family"^[12]; compare with (fig 2). This notion was reason enough to list the work among the portraits when the first inventory of the Kassel collection was drawn up in 1749. The presence of the artist at the left seems plausible, but it is highly questionable whether the other figures should be seen as portraits of family members. The same catalogue describes *Girl with a Waffle in Her Hand* (fig 3), for example, as follows: "Schalcken. This painter's wife in a blue gown, holding a waffle in her hand." But it is evident that Françoisia van Diemen, Schalcken's wife since 1679, did not pose for this genre painting.^[13]

The artist's presence in *Parable of the Lost Piece of Silver* was described in the sale catalogues of both auctions held by Alphonse Giroux in Paris in 1816 and 1819, at which the painting was put up for sale after having been stolen in 1806 along with 47 other major works from the collection in Kassel by French troops under the command of General Lagrange.^[14] The painting must have acquired a certain fame soon after its arrival in Paris, since high-quality copies on panel were offered at auction as early as 1818 and again in 1819 ("It would be difficult to find a copy more similar to the original").^[15] In fact, a partial copy of this painting now in the Leiden Collection (fig 4) came from a French collection.^[16] Other copies continue to appear at French auctions.^[17]

Remarkably, however, within two generations the subject of the painting had been completely forgotten. At the Paris sale of the collection of the Utrecht physician Munnicks van Cleeff in 1864, the painting was interpreted as a scene of seduction and described in a completely different way. Despite the fact that Theodor Demmler exhibited the painting in 1917 as *Parable of the Lost Piece of Silver*, it was sold again in 1924 as a seduction scene. Even Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, the son of a theology professor, did not recognize the biblical subject when he viewed the pieces for sale at that auction, no doubt because of Schalcken's highly original manner of portrayal.^[18]



- Guido Jansen, 2017

Endnotes

1. After returning to Dordrecht, Schalcken must have met Samuel van Hoogstraten frequently. Evidence of this is the fact that both painters signed a document drawn up by the notary Govert de With on 11 August 1677; Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst, Dordrecht, ONA 20.238, fol. 125.
2. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 46.
3. Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), nos. 11, 12, and 10.
4. Cf. Andor Pigler, *Barokthemen: Eine Auswahl von Verzeichnissen zur Ikonographie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Budapest, 1974), 1: 366.
5. On this subject, see Hans Mielke, “Antwerpener Graphik in der 2. Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts: Der Thesaurus Veteris et Novi Testamenti des Gerard de Jode (1585) und seine Künstler,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 38 (1975): 29–83, esp. 31, 81, and 82, no. 50.
6. Ann Diels, Arnout Balis, and Marjolein Leesberg, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450–1700; The Collared Dynasty*, 8 vols. (Ouderkerk aan den IJssel, 2005–6), 2: 63, no. 292 with ill. The subject of the engraving is attributed to Ambrosius Francken, and this drawing is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford; for a reproduction, see Hans Mielke, “Antwerpener Graphik in der 2. Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts: Der Thesaurus Veteris et Novi Testamenti des Gerard de Jode (1585) und seine Künstler,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 38 (1975): 43–44, ill. 20. Before this, the Swiss artist Urs Graf (ca. 1485–1527/28) had combined the two parables in a small woodcut, which served as an illustration in an edition of William of Auvergne’s *Postilla super Epistolas et Evangelia* (Basel, 1511). For a reproduction, see the British Museum collection website, registration number: 1927.0614.127.
7. Ann Diels, Arnout Balis, and Marjolein Leesberg, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450–1700; The Collared Dynasty*, 8 vols. (Ouderkerk aan den IJssel, 2005–6), 2:63, no. 292. For reprints, see 1: 22, and nos. 13–15. An impression of the second state of the print is discussed and reproduced in Achim Riethel and Marc Gundel, *Dem Himmel entgegen: Niederländische Bilder des 15. bis 18. Jahrhunderts erzählen die Bibel; Sammlung Christoph Müller* (Exh. cat. Rottenburg, Diözesanmuseum) (Ulm, 2000), 112–13 (entry by Barbara Renftle). The print by Collaert was no doubt also known to Domenico Fetti (1588/89–1623), who is the author of the only other seventeenth-century paintings of the parable, both of which he executed during his stay in Mantua around 1620. These works emphasize the woman’s search with the lamp, the scene Collaert placed so prominently in the left foreground. In Mantua, the influence of Flemish art was at an all-time high in the first decades of the seventeenth century, after such artists as Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and Frans Pourbus (1569–1622) had been working there for many years. For the two painted versions by Fetti, see Eduard A. Safarik and Gabriello Milantoni, *Fetti* (Milan, 1990), nos. 28, 28a–e.
8. See, for instance, Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 2 (*Annunciation*) and no. 35 (*Latona*), which are painted on panel and, in my opinion, must therefore date earlier.

9. Peter Hecht, “Candlelight and Dirty Fingers, or Royal Virtue in Disguise: Some Thoughts on Weyerman and Godfried Schalcken,” *Simiolus* 11 (1980): 23–38; and Peter Hecht ed., *De Hollandse fijnschilders: van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 182–216. Perhaps too much emphasis is placed here on the figure’s resemblance to the artist. In Schalcken’s *Virginity Threatened*, which is certainly not a self-portrait, a young man who closely resembles the figure in this portrait is chased by a matron who in turn closely resembles the old neighbor at the rear in our painting; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 174; Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Maarsse and The Hague, 1989), no. 44.
10. It must be noted that Schalcken’s son-in-law, the architect Pieter Jacobsz Roman (1676–after 1733), was employed by the landgrave as *intendant des bâtiments* from 1721 until his death in 1733. Françoisia Schalcken (1690–after 1743), the only of the artist’s children to live to adulthood, married Roman in The Hague in 1713. The couple would have one child, a boy named Jacobus Godofridus (baptized in Rijswijk in 1717), who would not reach adulthood. On Roman, see Wouter Kuyper, “Dichtung und Wahrheit in tekeningen van Adriaan Dortsman en Pieter Roman,” *Bulletin KNOB* 83 (1984): esp. 261 and 274.
11. On Wilhelm VIII as the founder of the painting collection in Kassel, see Everhard Korthals Altes, *De verovering van de internationale kunstmarkt door de zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst: Enkele studies over de verspreiding van Hollandse schilderijen in de eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw* (Leiden, 2003), 185–205.
12. “Die Frau aus dem Evangelie, welche ihren Freunden den wieder gefundenen Grosschen bey einem brennenden Lichte zeigt. NB Die Figuren auf diesem Stück sind des Malers selbst und seiner Familie Portraits.” Simon Causid, *Verzeichnis der Hochfürstlich-Hessischen Gemälde-Sammlung in Cassel* (Cassel, 1783), 206, no. 61; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), 209, no. 75.
13. “Schalcken. Dieses Malers Frau in blauem Habit, einen Eisenkuchen in der Hand haltend.” Simon Causid, *Verzeichnis der Hochfürstlich-Hessischen Gemälde-Sammlung in Cassel* (Cassel, 1783), 206, no. 61; Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 145.
14. Oscar Eisenmann, *Katalog der königlichen Gemälde-Galerie zu Cassel* (Cassel, 1888), XVIII–IX.
15. Sale, Paris, Alphonse Giroux, expert’s appraisal by Charles Paillet, 24–26 November 1818, lot 116, as: “Schalcken (d’après). Jésus, voulant faire comprendre aux Pharisiens la joie qu’excitait dans le ciel la conversion d’un pêcheur, leur propose la parabole suivante: Une femme qui avait dix drachmes, en ayant perdu une, alluma sa lampe, balaya sa maison et la chercha avec un grand soin jusqu’à ce qu’elle l’eût retrouvée, et l’ayant retrouvée, elle appela ses amies et voisines, et leur dit; ‘réjouissez vous avec moi, parceque j’ai retrouvée la drachme que j’avais perdue.’ Schalcken a peint son portrait dans celui du jeune Israélite” (Schalcken [after]. Jesus, trying to make the Pharisees understand the joy that the conversion of a sinner aroused in heaven, proposes the following parable: A woman who had ten drachmas and, having lost one, lit her lamp, swept her house, and searched for it very carefully until she found it, and, having found it, she called her friends and neighbors, and said to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have

found the drachma I had lost.” Schalcken has painted his portrait in the [personage of the] young Israelite). Oil on panel, 15 x 17 pouces (approx. 40 x 46 cm). The other work is described in the sale of 6–7 December 1819 (expert’s appraisal by Henry), lot 27, as: “Schalken (d’après Godefroi) Hollandais. La drachme perdue et retrouvée: parabole de Jésus-Christ. La femme qui a retrouvé sa drachme, tient d’une main la lampe qui lui a servi à la chercher, et de l’autre montre cette pièce à plusieurs personnes qui lui en témoignent leur satisfaction. Dans le coin du tableau, à gauche, est le portrait de Schalken. Il serait difficile de trouver une copie plus approchante de son original” (Schalcken [after Godefridus], Dutch. La drachma lost and found: a parable of Jesus Christ. The woman who found her drachma holds in one hand the lamp that helped her find it, and with the other shows this piece to several persons who display their satisfaction. In the corner of the picture, at the left, is a portrait of Schalcken. It would be difficult to find a copy more similar to the original). Oil on panel, 15 x 18 pouces (approx. 40 x 48.5 cm). One of these copies is perhaps identical with the painting sold at Christie’s in London on 12 December 2003; lot 121, illustrated in the catalogue, oil on canvas laid down on panel, 38.4 x 48.2 cm, with a date of 1698, present location unknown. The work from the collection of Erick W. Bergmann of Monroe, Michigan, which was sold as an original by Schalcken at Parke-Bernet Galleries in New York on 24 February 1949 (lot 8, 38.1 x 45.7 cm, present location unknown) was undoubtedly an old copy, although this can no longer be verified, because the work was not reproduced in the catalogue.

16. It is remarkable that the Leiden Collection boasts a copy after the principal female figure not in the original small format, but twice as large: oil on canvas, 78 x 58.4 cm. Since it came from a private collection in Paris, we may assume that this partial copy was also produced in Paris in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Another partial copy with some variation in the same female figure is to be found in Thierry Beherman, *Godfried Schalcken* (Paris, 1988), no. 313.
17. A copy on canvas (39 x 49 cm) was offered by Demade Enchères in Bernay on 26 June 2010, lot 41, as attributed to Michiel Versteegh (1756–1843). On 4 December 2011 in Deauville, Artcurial offered a copy on canvas (40 x 50 cm, lot 6), again with an attribution to the Dordrecht artist Michiel Versteegh, a follower of Schalcken.
18. RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie/Netherlands Institute for Art History) Databases, Excerpts, HdG-fiche 1484959.

Provenance

- Wilhelm VIII (1682–1760), Landgraviate of Hesse-Kassel; by descent to his grandson Wilhelm I (1743–1821), Elector of Hesse, possibly seized by General Joseph Lagrange (1763–1836) in 1806.
- (Sale, Alphonse Giroux, Paris, 1816, no. 357.)
- (Possible sale, Alphonse Giroux, Paris, 1819, no. 298.)
- Dr. Gerard Munnicks van Cleeff (1797–1860), Utrecht (his sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 4–5 April 1864,



no. 85 [to Mr. Meffre for 1,720 francs]).

- Mr. Meffre (his sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 1 May 1865, no. 58 [to Febvre for 1,300 francs]).
- Marquise d'Aoust, by 1917 (her sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 5 June 1925, no. 83 [possibly to Heuvel, for 1,050 francs]).
- (Sale, Sotheby's London, 4 July 2007, no. 35 [to Johnny Van Haeften, Ltd.].)
- [Johnny Van Haeften, Ltd., London.]
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

Exhibition History

- Valenciennes, Musée de Valenciennes, "Kunstwerke aus dem besetzten Nordfrankreich," 1918, 70, no. 320 [lent by the Marquise d'Aoust].
- Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, "Schalcken – Gemalte Verführung," 25 September 2015–24 January 2016; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, 21 February–26 June 2016, no. 59 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017, no. 44 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 23 September 2017–25 February 2018, no. 44 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 28 March–22 July 2018, no. 67 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 5 September 2018–13 January 2019, no. 67 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre," 14 February–18 May 2019, no. 67 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, "Rembrandt and his Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection," 4 February–27 August 2023, no. 22 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H'ART Museum, "From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, "Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].

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Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum. Moscow, 2018.

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Versions

Versions

1. Godefridus Schalcken, *Parable*, n.d., medium unknown, 38.1 x 45.7 cm, current whereabouts unknown, previous sale, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, 24 February 1949, no. 8).
2. After Godefridus Schalcken, *The Parable of the Lost Piece of Silver*, 1698, oil on canvas laid down on panel, 38.4 x 48.2 cm, current whereabouts unknown, previous sale, Christie’s, London, 12 December 2003, no. 121.

Technical Summary

The support, a single piece of fine, plain-weave fabric, has been lined. All four tacking margins have been removed and paper tape extends into the face of the painting along all four sides. Cusping and outer stretcher-bar creases along the upper, left, and right edges suggest the original dimensions have not been significantly altered in these three directions. There is one red wax seal but no canvas stamps, inscriptions or labels along the lining or stretcher.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied. The paint has been applied wet-into-wet through the flesh tones, and with loose fluid brushstrokes in thin, smooth glazes with no use of impasto through the drapery. Small strokes of slightly raised paint are used to create the highlights of the gold sash and the brocade along the bodices worn by the two female figures along the right.



There are no obvious pentimenti, and no underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers or in the X-radiograph.

The painting has been inscribed in red paint in the center of the lower foreground, to the right of the dog. The inscription continues across the fine network of craquelure that has formed through the brown paint in the foreground, which suggests it is a later inscription rather than a signature.

The painting was cleaned and restored in 2007 and remains in a good state of preservation.