

How Theseus was Insured and Odysseus Saved from Ruin

MYTHOLOGY IN THE INSURANCE CHAMBER AND THE BANKRUPTCY CHAMBER
by Eric Jan Sluijter



Fig. 1
Civil Affairs Department at Amsterdam
Town Hall, 2015

Nowadays Amsterdam's city council communicates with its citizens on brightly coloured websites, where cheerful young people represent the virtues of the work of the city's civil servants. In the Golden Age the powerful role of the city government and its officials was similarly legitimized with images of attractive youngsters. Today, subtle messages about higher ideals in society are conveyed in wholly contemporary terms. [fig. 1] In the seventeenth century words and images from Classical Antiquity were harnessed to raise the contemporary and the commonplace to a higher plane and present the council's dignity and ideals in a timeless and prestigious wrapping. This was true above all of the sculpture and decorations for Amsterdam's Town Hall, for they would have to express the power and the values of the city fathers for centuries to come.

Joost van den Vondel's ode to the new Town Hall reveals that the Amsterdam elite's image of itself and of the council was one of supreme self-confidence and extraordinary idealism. In the last few lines of this long hymn of praise, Vondel writes that the city council knows when to loosen the reins and when to tighten them; it gears taxation to the prosperity of state and trade, grants everyone a place, whatever his origins, and takes compassionate care of the poor. Freedom of conscience is protected, everyone may think what they wish and nobody's rights are infringed. Loyalty to the community is rewarded, virtue is prized above all, the arts flourish and the sciences are held in esteem, while peace is fostered by remaining friends with everyone all over the world—as far as our ships sail.¹ This distinctly propagandist poem rings with unflagging pride in all that the city and its government have achieved. In our time, no one would dare to blow their own trumpet in this way, and there are certainly many caveats to Vondel's overblown exultation about the city government and his rose-tinted picture of freedom and prosperity through trade, tolerance, care and justice. It was, though, a city ideology that the authorities took every opportunity

¹ Vondel 1645-1656 (ed. 1931), p. 904, ll. 1349-79: 'De Burgemeester weet den breidel hier te vieren, / En aen te halen; weet alle ampten te bestieren / ... / De lasten minderen, zoo veel de Staet dit lijdt, / Eer 's koopmans koopkans keere, en winste en welvaert slijt.' / Uitheemschen gunt hy plaets, en welkomtze uit ontfarmen, / 't Geweten, min of meer door onverstant verruckt, / Beschut hy, niemant wort in zijn gemoedt gedrukt, / Noch in zijn billijck Recht verkort, of opgehouden, / Getrouwheit aen 't Gemeen wort rijckelijck vergouden. / De deughden draven hoogh, op 't voortreën van den Heer, / De boosheit smilt allengs, geen gout gaet boven eer, / De kunsten winnen velt, de nutte wetenschappen / Geraecken op den troon, ... / ... / Men koestert pais en vre, tot daer de zeevaert stuit, / Houdt ieder een ten vriend, ...'

to proclaim and one in which the Amsterdam elite believed. These notions also resonate in the Town Hall decorations. The paintings in the Bankruptcy Chamber and the Insurance Chamber are prime examples of this thinking. [figs. 2 and 6]

Stories from Classical mythology were co-opted with great ingenuity for these civil offices in order to present officials and visitors alike with ideals that were seen as appropriate to the functions of these rooms. In other rooms in the Town Hall, there were no qualms about comparing the burgomasters with Roman consuls and projecting very masculine images of Roman republican virtues like austerity, intrepidity, justice and incorruptibility on to the governors of the *respublica amstelredamensis*.² The officials of the Bankruptcy Chamber and the Insurance Chamber, by contrast, could look at images of mythological women to portray the virtues of compassion, sympathy and insuring against risks.

Some regents with a humanist background, supported by Jacob van Campen, must have delighted in seeking out fitting subjects, for they display an originality that was highly unusual. In his ode, which was written several years before the decorations were executed, Vondel referred to other, equally uncommon scenes. For the Bankruptcy Chamber he mentioned the story of Odysseus, who was saved by the beautiful goddess Calypso after his ship was wrecked (from Homer's *Odyssey* V) and for the Insurance Chamber the tale of Medea, who gave Jason magic herbs to render the dragon of the Golden Fleece harmless (from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* VII, 84-158). Although Vondel sometimes proves well informed about the decorations that were yet to be painted, in this case either he or Daniel Stalpaert, the superintendent of the building works who, as Vondel reports, had given him a guided tour and explanation, must have been mistaken.³ Perhaps one of them could only recall that the story for one of the rooms came from the *Odyssey* and was about Odysseus's shipwreck, and that the other was taken from the *Metamorphoses*. Remembering only this much, Vondel may well have come up with a tale himself.⁴ These, though, were not suitable subjects. A painter could do little with the story of Calypso, for instance, because Homer provides no details whatsoever about Calypso's rescue of Odysseus, while Medea with her magic powers, who murdered her brother, her children and others, was anything but an exemplary woman.

² Van de Waal 1952, vol. 1, pp. 215-20; Blankert 2004.

³ Vondel 1645-1656 (ed. 1931), p. 898, l. 1169: 'Toen Stalpaert mij de kunst aldus liet zien en hooren.'

⁴ Oddly enough, both stories immediately precede those that were actually chosen.



Fig. 2
Odysseus en Nausicaä, 1657

Thomas de Keyser (1596-1667)
Oil on canvas, 200 x 167 cm
Location: Bankruptcy Chamber



Fig. 3
Odysseus en Nausicaä, 1619

Pieter Lastman (1583-1633)
Oil on panel, 91.5 x 117.2 cm
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

THE BANKRUPTCY CHAMBER

Odysseus's reception by Nausicaä, on the other hand, was a very apt choice for the Bankruptcy Chamber. [fig. 2] Not only was the subject one that had previously been depicted by Pieter Lastman, a universally admired painter of an earlier generation, it was also a story in which Homer had given a great many expressive details, so that an artist had plenty to go on.⁵ Lastman had made grateful use of them and many people must have been familiar with the painting he made in 1619 [fig. 3], among them Thomas de Keyser, who painted the overmantel for the Bankruptcy Chamber.⁶ The work probably hung in the house of one of the Amsterdam regents. As far as we know, Lastman was the first artist to choose this dramatic confrontation as the subject for a painting.⁷ He may well not have had an example in the form of a book illustration or print,⁸ as was often the case, because unlike Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had not been illustrated at that time. It is clear from both paintings, however, that Lastman had undertaken a close reading of Homer's wonderful story, in Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert's translation, and had reproduced many of the details in it. The location described by Homer and the occupations of Nausicaä and her handmaidens before they were alarmed by Odysseus, washed up on the shore, are clearly represented. The girls are on a sheltered beach which they had reached on a donkey-cart. They have washed clothes and are now folding them up and loading them on to the cart, having enjoyed a picnic of delicacies and wine provided by Nausicaä's mother. Awakened by their voices, the naked Odysseus, covering himself with a leafy branch, has crept out from the bushes; the startled girls scatter in all directions. Only Nausicaä (supported, although she does not know it, by Athena) stands calmly and courageously, while Odysseus kneels at some distance before her.⁹

In the 1619 painting Nausicaä's monumental figure immediately draws the eye—both Odysseus's and the viewer's. Her outflung arms reflect her surprised reaction to the sudden appearance of the dirty, wretched Odysseus, but at the same time

- 5 Homer/Coornhert/Weevers 1561 (ed. 1939), V, pp. 445-93 and VI, pp. 1-216. For Coornhert's translation see note 9. On the relationship between text and images in Lastman's paintings see Sluijter 2000a, p. 40.
- 6 For Lastman's works and all the paintings derived from them see Seifert 2011, pp. 101, 230-34, 275-76, 289.
- 7 Lastman's first version of this subject dates from 1609 and is now in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig.
- 8 Tümpel reproduced a woodcut from a German edition of the *Odyssey* dating from 1537 depicting the same moment. A print like this may have given Lastman the idea, but there is no formal relationship whatsoever. Tümpel 1974, pp. 135-36.
- 9 Homer/Coornhert/Weevers 1561 (ed. 1939), p. 128, ll. 152-57 and 160-63: 'Dies vloten zij verschrikt ginds en herwaarts al te zamen, / Behalven Nausikaa; die heeft alleen voet gehouen, / Door Pallas die haar gesterkt had met goed betrouwen; / Dies bleef zij moedig staan om Ulysses te verwachten / Die peinsde oft hij dicht bij haar zijn knien zoude vouwen / Dan van verre bidden met smekelijke klachten / ... / Daar docht hem best, om troost in zijn lijden te verpachten / Van verre te verwekken tot meedogende minne / Om haar niet te vertoornen t'zijnen ongewinne, / En begon aldus met zijn listige tonge te smeken.' In the 1609 work he also pictured a songbook—an allusion to the fact that the girls had been singing, as the story relates. There is no reference to the ball game Homer mentions.

suggest that she receives the stranger with open arms. Because the viewer is looking from Odysseus's viewpoint, it seems that she is also addressing him. The key idea, a hospitable welcome, is clearly expressed. The difference between Nausicaä's steadfastness and the other girls' fear is palpable, as is the contrast between the rich king's daughter and the poor and wholly destitute shipwreck survivor. This painting was probably designed to hang on the overmantel in the reception room of an Amsterdam patrician. This is certainly true of a painting of the same scene made more than twenty years later by Joachim von Sandrart as an overmantel for the reception room in the house of the powerful burgomaster Joan Huydecoper [fig. 4], who a decade later was probably also involved in the decoration and furnishing of the Town Hall.¹⁰ The house no longer exists, but the magnificent mantelpiece designed by Philips Vingboons, with Sandrart's painting, has come down to us unscathed. [fig. 5]¹¹

Lastman chose the moment when sudden physical movements on the part of the protagonists could be used to express a powerful emotion whose aim was to 'move' the viewer and awaken his compassion. Sandrart chooses a calmer moment, for he also wanted to picture idealized grace and beauty.¹² Here we see how, despite the miserable state he is in, Odysseus kneels gracefully before Nausicaä as he addresses her beseechingly. Nausicaä, standing in an elegant *contrapposto*, takes clothes from a basket held by a handmaiden so that he can cover his nakedness, while another young woman offers a bowl of fruit. This takes place after Nausicaä has commanded her friends to stay calm and give this stranded man clothes and food. Sandrart chose to present not the reception of a frightening stranger, but the image of civilized people offering one another help and hospitality—after all, Nausicaä swiftly recognized that despite his alarming appearance Odysseus was not an ordinary stranger but a man of high rank.

Thomas de Keyser must have been very familiar with both Lastman's work and Sandrart's. He opted for a middle way and pictured both the reception and the help given to someone who has lost his home and possessions, for these were the ideals that the city fathers wanted to convey. The commissioners of the Bankruptcy Chamber, appointed by the magistrates and burgomasters, ruled in bankruptcy cases in this room. On the one hand they acted severely; property was immediately seized, taken into safekeeping and inventoried. On the other they provided the bankrupt with the means to live, tried to collect any outstanding debts he might be owed and called the creditors together to reach an accommodation. Creditors had to support their claims with evidence and had to be satisfied with only a percentage of the sums they were claiming.¹² The fact that the cause of the misery pictured in the painting was a devastating storm at sea would have struck a chord with the seventeenth-

¹⁰ Sluijter 2015, pp. 87-88. On Huydecoper's house see Ottenheym 1989, pp. 34-42.

¹¹ On the painting by Sandrart see Sluijter 2006, pp. 217-18.

¹² For the history, organization and function see the Archives of the Commissioners of the Bankruptcy Chamber: <https://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/overzicht/5072.nl.html>.



Fig. 4
Odysseus en Nausicaä, 1641-1642

Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688)
Oil on canvas, 104 x 168.5 cm
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



Fig. 5
Odysseus en Nausicaä by Joachim von Sandrart in the original mantelpiece designed by Philips Vingboons, from Joan Huydecoper's house.



Fig. 6
Theseus Returns the Ball to Ariadne, 1657

Willem Strijcker (1606/07-1663/67)
Oil on canvas, 201 x 167 cm
Location: Insurance Chamber

century citizens of Amsterdam. Many a bankruptcy was the result of investments in ships and cargoes that were lost—a disaster of this kind may even have contributed to Rembrandt's bankruptcy.¹³

This subject consequently placed the emphasis on the image of assistance and compassion, not on the hard-headed pragmatism that was equally essential in a commercial culture. The fact that sympathy for the bankrupt had its limits was made plain before one ever entered the Bankruptcy Chamber. Above the door to the room was a stark warning of the pride that comes before a fall: Icarus plunging to his death because he believed he could fly higher and higher, and flew so close to the sun that the wax holding the wings to his back melted. As Karel van Mander wrote in a moralizing explanation of the tale, it shows that excess is dangerous: 'Moderation stands fast / Immoderation perishes.'¹⁴

Like Lastman, De Keyser chose to place us in the position of the unfortunate, destitute shipwreck survivor looking at the steadfast Nausicaä, who makes a gesture of welcome. At the same time the maidservant beside her is already reaching for a length of fabric to clothe Odysseus; this, as in Sandrart's painting, refers to the assistance that is offered at once. De Keyser added more elements of the story than Sandrart had, among them the wagon on which the laundry is being loaded (admittedly not drawn by Lastman's donkeys—faithful to the text—but by high-bred white horses). The still life on the right is curious. In Lastman's work it was a reference to the meal that Nausicaä and her friends had just enjoyed, but here there is no sign of food. The profusion of silver and gold chalices, dishes and ewers would have reminded seventeenth-century viewers of the many paintings in which such valuable objects allude to vanity and the transience of all riches.¹⁵

Nausicaä is dressed in a loose robe of white fabric falling in narrow folds—a reference to a classical past that has no connection with contemporary dress. There can be no doubt that De Keyser studied a live model for Odysseus's naked back and legs, and rendered what he saw. He also provided the officials and visitors with a little entertainment by adding some female nudes; he painted two virtually naked young women, walking away from us as if they were Diana's nymphs who had just bathed (these figures must originally have been much clearer). De Keyser, who had little experience in painting nudes, made things easy for himself. He used the same figure seen from behind twice—once in mirror image. In terms of pose and form it bears a remarkable resemblance to the model that appears in the Rembrandt etching

¹³ Marten van den Broeck, who traded, among other things, a number of important paintings by Rembrandt in exchange for more than 8,000 guilders' worth of ship's fittings, was bankrupted by a shipwreck in 1650; Montias argued that Rembrandt's paintings represented a stake in this enterprise. At his *cessio bonorum* (surrender of goods) he himself stated as the cause 'losses suffered in trade as well as damage and losses at sea' ('door verliesen geleden in de negotie alsmede schaden ende verliesen bij der zee'). Montias 2002, pp. 180-86. See also Crenshaw 2006, pp. 38-39.

¹⁴ 'De maet houdt staet / Onmaet vergaet.' Van Mander 1604, *Wtleggingh*, fol. 71v.

¹⁵ See the emblem in Roemer Visscher's *Sinnepoppen 'Ad Tragoedias, non ad Vitam'*. Visscher 1614, no. 53.

known as *Pygmalion*.¹⁶

THE INSURANCE CHAMBER

The subject chosen for the Insurance Chamber was the story of the hero Theseus, who returns to Ariadne after killing the Minotaur—a monster, half man, half bull, that was imprisoned in the Labyrinth and fed with young men and maidens from Athens. Theseus had found his way back out of the Labyrinth with the aid of a ball of yarn given to him by the lovesick Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete. In Willem Strijcker's painting, Theseus, gazing gratefully up at her, returns the ball to Ariadne. [fig. 6] This mythological tale occurs in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (VIII, 169-175). Using Ovid as a source was a much more obvious choice at that time than Homer. Almost all the mythological subjects in seventeenth-century paintings are based on the *Metamorphoses*. No other writer of Classical Antiquity was as popular or wrote as expressively on classical mythology as Ovid. In consequence, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards—the period when books illustrated with prints really began to flourish—no other book, aside from the Bible, was published so often in translations with illustrations.¹⁷ Ovid touched on the story of Theseus only briefly and seemed to assume that it would be familiar (in Amsterdam, for that matter, it would have been known chiefly through Hooft's *Theseus and Ariadne* of 1614).¹⁸ In translations of the *Metamorphoses*, however, it was always accompanied by an illustration, and all these illustrations were always variations on the same pictorial scheme—the woodcut reproduced here had been reprinted countless times for almost a century since 1566. [fig. 7] They show two moments in the story: in the foreground Ariadne gives her beloved Theseus the ball of wool to find his way back out of the Labyrinth. In the middle ground, situated somewhat lower, we see the Labyrinth and discover the Minotaur with Theseus facing him, ready to strike. In the woodcut we look at a maze created with fences. In an Italian print, however, the Labyrinth has monumental brick walls [fig. 8], as we also observe in the background to Strijcker's painting. Strijcker could not let us view it from above, though, because this would have meant that he had to violate the perspective, and a seventeenth-century painter could not possibly compromise reality in that way. The story is thus rather less clearly told, for the structure looks more like a fort than a labyrinth.

Such prints were clearly Strijcker's starting point, but he selected a different moment to depict. The artist shows Theseus returning the ball to Ariadne when he

¹⁶ On this etching see Sluijter 2006, pp. 281-85. The pose originally derives from the famous Hellenist *Venus de' Medici* (Roman copy of the type *Aphrodite of Knidos*), which Claes Moyaert also used in his *Odysseus and Nausicaä* of 1649.

¹⁷ On *Metamorphoses* translations and illustrations see Sluijter 2000a, Appendix I, pp. 170-79 and Appendix II, pp. 194-95.

¹⁸ At slightly greater length, but still very summarily, Ovid recounts Theseus's defeat of the monster in Ariadne's famous lament in *Heroides* X, 101-10. On Hooft's play see the following note.



Fig. 7
Theseus Receives the Ball from Ariadne, copy after Virgil Solis

In: P. Ovidius Naso (trans. Johannes Florianus), *Metamorphosis dat is: Die Herscheppinghe oft Veranderinghe*, Amsterdam 1650, p. 236 (first edition Antwerp, 1566)



Fig. 8
Theseus Receives the Ball from Ariadne, c. 1470

Attributed to Baccio Baldini (1436-c. 1487)
Engraving, 20.1 x 26.4 cm
British Museum, London

has carried out his heroic deed.¹⁹ Behind him lies the slain Minotaur, whose hind legs and tail can only be made out on a closer examination; he consequently looks more like a satyr than a terrifying monster. In the prints he had the body of a bull, and only his chest and head were those of a man; there, the much more familiar type of the centaur was used. According to the legend, the Minotaur actually had a human body with a bull's head, but we only encounter him in this form on Greek vases and in much more recent images. Theseus seems to have hastened back to Ariadne immediately: his sword, which he holds by the hilt and has not yet returned to its scabbard, is still smeared with the Minotaur's blood. One of the girls behind Ariadne, a smile on her lips, makes contact with the viewer, as does the little dog in the foreground that spots us and appears to be barking at us furiously. These are devices to include the viewer more directly in the action.

While De Keyser had made his protagonists look as classical as possible, Strijcker was far less concerned about this, and dressed his classical heroes in the sort of hybrid costumes that were customary on the stage in those days.²⁰ Elements of Roman and contemporary soldiers' uniforms are fancifully combined in Theseus's garb. His moustache and long hair lend him a rather fashionable seventeenth-century air, but the baggy drawers emerging from under his tunic and his spindly legs do not look very heroic to us, used as we are to the toned, muscular bodies of today's Hollywood stars in roles like Odysseus. How this struck the seventeenth-century viewer is, however, impossible to say. Ariadne is dressed in a sumptuous costume that is a whimsical variation on mid-seventeenth-century dress. In this period the black slave girl was a familiar motif for denoting wealth and power; in reality, too, black servants could be found in the households of rich Amsterdam citizens.

This moment was probably chosen because the aim of the painting was to demonstrate not so much that Theseus 'insured' himself as that he benefited from this 'insurance' and was grateful to his 'insurer'. The Insurance Chamber was where insurance policies were registered and rulings handed down in the event of disputes in matters of insurance. It is unlikely, though, that people were intended to think too deeply about the parallel, since Theseus, of course, did not pay any premium—unless we interpret as such his promise to marry Ariadne if she helped him. In fact, he broke this promise. Admittedly he did take her with him when he left, but he abandoned her on the island of Naxos, where the grieving Ariadne was subsequently found by Bacchus, who fell in love with her. The insured thus brought the insurer grief, after

¹⁹ Ovid does not describe this event in the *Metamorphoses* or *Heroides*. Buchbinder-Green suggests that Strijcker was inspired by a passage in Pieter Cornelisz Hooft's *Theseus and Ariadne* of 1614 (Buchbinder-Green 1974, p. 147), but this seems unlikely. When Theseus comes to greet Ariadne, he simply says, "Voorsichtige Princes, ten waer u heussche gave / Mij immers alsoo veel behouden hadd' als zij" ('Far-seeing princess, I owe my survival as much to your gift [the skeins] as to them [the gods]') (Hooft 1614 (ed. 1972), p. 77, ll. 772-73). Strijcker and his clients must have come up with this logical scene of the return of the skein themselves.

²⁰ This emerges from the title page prints of tragedies, such as the 1656 edition of Jan Vos's smash hit *Aran and Titus* (Hummelen 1967, fig. XVI).

profiting from her.

The idea that the viewer should not think about the rest of the story and that the meaning was contained solely in the episode depicted was customary in the seventeenth century. Married couples would have themselves painted in the guise of the lovers Meleager and Atalanta, Venus and Adonis, Venus and Paris, and even Jason and Medea, in what were known as *portraits historiés*, although all these tales have gruesome endings.²¹ Like the Bible exegeses of the period, stories from mythology were cut into pieces in the seventeenth century for the purpose of explaining them, and these fragments were interpreted without paying any heed to what followed. In depicting love stories it was the idyllic picture of a loving couple that acquired timeless prestige from the context in classical mythology. Strijcker's painting is about gratitude for the benevolent insurance against impending hazard; it was this that was the function of the work and the reason why this unusual scene was chosen.²²

WHY THESE ARTISTS?

The makers of the paintings discussed here were not among the most famous painters of the Golden Age. We may wonder why they, rather than any other artists, were awarded these important commissions. To start with, we have to remember that the Bankruptcy Chamber and the Insurance Chamber were not offices for the burgomasters, council members or magistrates; they were two public spaces where civil servants who were lower in the hierarchy performed their duties. (The artists commissioned to paint the overmantels for the Burgomasters' Chamber, the Burgomasters' Cabinet, the Council Chamber and the Magistrates' Chamber were Govert Flinck, Ferdinand Bol and Jan Lievens, celebrated painters who asked and got high prices.²³) Economies were evidently made in these public rooms, and the commissions went to painters who were much less expensive. But what prompted the improbable choice of a painter by whom no other work is known (Strijcker) and an artist who had virtually given up painting some considerable time before and was in any event primarily a portraitist (De Keyser)?

There was no question of open tenders in the seventeenth century; commissions were awarded to the artists with whom one had close ties. Commercial dealings were

²¹ For Ferdinand Bol's portrait of a married couple as Jason and Medea, which was previously also taken to be Theseus and Ariadne or Bacchus and Ariadne, see Grijzenhout 2009-2010.

²² The learned viewer could project on to the picture Van Mander's moral explanation that it was necessary to conquer desire and follow the thread of reason through the winding paths of the world, but this is of little relevance in this context (Van Mander 1604, *Wtleggingh*, fol. 71r.). On Van Mander's *Wtleggingh* see Sluiter 2000a, pp. 179-83. How Renckens arrived at the far-fetched interpretation that the scene 'symbolized the difficulties often encountered in establishing losses at sea' is not clear to me (Renckens 1952, pp. 117-18).

²³ For the few payments about which we have any information see among others Vlaardingerbroek 2011, p. 148; the difference between the payments for the decorations in the Council Chamber by Flinck and Van Bronckhorst, for instance, is significant; Flinck was paid 2,500 guilders, Jan van Bronckhorst 1,000 guilders. I estimate the prices for De Keyser and Strijcker at around 200 to 500 guilders. Given the difference in reputation, De Keyser would undoubtedly have been paid more than Strijcker.

confined as far as possible within one's own circle, because people had the greatest trust in their carefully constructed networks of family and friends.²⁴ Where the commissions to painters for the Town Hall decorations are concerned, the relationship in Strijcker's case would have been with Jacob van Campen, the Town Hall architect, and Thomas de Keyser's brother, Willem Hendricksz de Keyser, who was closely involved in the building works as the city stonemason and drafting assistant to Van Campen. True, Willem de Keyser was removed from his post because of alleged bookkeeping irregularities in 1653 and Jacob van Campen left after a row in 1654, but by then the commissions would already have been granted to these painters. One salient detail: in 1658, as a bankrupt, Willem would have been able to contemplate his brother's painting in the Bankruptcy Chamber, where it had been installed a year earlier.²⁵

As a result of a misreading of the signature, Willem Strijcker acquired the nickname Braesemary, which authors continue to repeat to this day. Several of them interpreted this supposed nickname as a 'Bentnaam'—dating from the time Strijcker was in Rome (around 1626) and probably belonged to the 'Bentveughels' ('Birds of a Feather'), a group of Netherlandish artists there.²⁶ What it actually reads is 'Willem Braeseman / Alias . strijcker . f. 1657'.²⁷ The artist used his mother's maiden name; she came from an old Amsterdam family and her name was much classier than his father's.²⁸ The Braseman family, who remained Catholic during the Reformation, like the Van Campen family, were members of the well-to-do Catholic elite of Haarlem, whose origins were in Amsterdam.²⁹ It is clear that Strijcker and Van Campen shared networks,³⁰ and although we now know of no other work by Strijcker, Van Campen

²⁴ Kok 2013, chapter 1 'De economie van dienst en wederdienst'. See also Kooijmans 1997, chapter 1 'Vriendschap'.
²⁵ The commissions were probably awarded in 1652 (Blankert 1982, pp. 42 and 44; Van de Waal 1952, volume 1, p. 216).

²⁶ Renckens 1952, p. 117. In Rome he called himself Willem Dircksz Braesman (Hoogewerff 1942, p. 23).

²⁷ This misreading goes back to Van Dyk 1758, p. 136, who calls him 'Braesemary', and this has been repeated ever since (in Bredius 1915-1922 as 'Braesemary', in Renckens 1952 as 'Braesemary').

²⁸ The name occurs as that of a prominent family in Amsterdam as early as the fifteenth century: Dudok van Heel 2008, p. 44. The name is usually spelled Braseman.

²⁹ Dudok van Heel 2008, pp. 57-58, p. 352. In 1538 and after the Alteration in 1578, members of the family moved from Amsterdam to Haarlem; Willem Strijcker's maternal grandmother was the sister of Jacobus Zaffius, the well-known provost of the chapter in Haarlem, from whom Willem and his brothers inherited the Reguliershof. Information about the Braseman family is based primarily on archive research carried out by Ietje Eijk in Amsterdam and Haarlem for a working group paper in 2010. For Van Campen's family see M.J. Bok, 'Familie, vrienden en opdrachtgevers', in Amsterdam 1995, pp. 27-52.

³⁰ Strijcker was a friend of the landscape painter Steven Jansz van Goor. Jacob van Campen was a witness at the wedding of a niece of his and Steven Jansz van Goor. Van Goor worked with Strijcker and Van Helt Stockade, and also received commissions for decorations in the Amsterdam theatre, which Van Campen designed. The friendship between Van Goor, Strijcker, Rombout Verhulst and Gerard van Zijl emerges from a document dated 1646: Bredius 1915-1922, IV, p. 1244.

owned several of his paintings.³¹ Strijcker was also well known to other artists in Van Campen's circle who were awarded commissions for the Town Hall, among them the sculptor Rombout Verhulst, the painter Nicolaes van Helt Stockade and the successful Govert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol, with whom he shared life drawing sessions with a nude female model.³² He was with Willem de Keyser in Rome in the sixteen-forties.³³

As a minor painter, Strijcker was not only cheap, he could also be relied upon to faithfully execute a composition by Van Campen. We know that Van Campen made accurate compositional sketches for the decorations in Huis ten Bosch and the painters were obliged to stick to them;³⁴ he probably did the same for the Town Hall. Famous artists sometimes made a fuss about this, as Jordaens did in Huis ten Bosch, but the position was different for lesser lights. It would appear highly plausible that the composition of the *Theseus and Ariadne*, which unmistakably betrays familiarity with a work in Rubens's Medici cycle, was designed by Van Campen and executed by Strijcker.³⁵

Thomas de Keyser, son of the renowned city architect and sculptor Hendrick de Keyser, was one of the most successful portrait painters in Amsterdam in the second half of the sixteen-twenties and in the sixteen-thirties.³⁶ By the time he made the work for the Bankruptcy Chamber, he had virtually given up painting; his dealings in bluestone were probably much more lucrative.³⁷ For this commission, unquestionably obtained through his brother, who had worked closely with Van Campen, he set

³¹ In the estate of Willem van Campen (Bredius 1915-1922, IV, pp. 119-20), Jacob's second cousin, there were no fewer than four works by Willem Strijcker. Marten Jan Bok convincingly argued that Willem's collection of paintings and architectural treatises came from Jacob's holdings ('Familie, vrienden en opdrachtgevers', in Amsterdam 1995, p. 52).

³² This emerges from a case document dated 1658, in which posing nude was cited as proof of the model's immorality. Bredius 1915-1922, IV, p. 1255 and Sluijter 2006, p. 323.

³³ Renckens 1952, p. 117; see note 28 above. What will also have helped is that his brother, Dirck Dircksz Strijcker, was Secretary of Maritime Affairs in Amsterdam (Renckens 1952, p. 116).

³⁴ See among others Q. Buvelot, 'Ontwerpen voor geschilderde decoratieprogramma's', in Amsterdam 1995, pp. 137-38 and Van Eikema Hommes/Kolfin 2013, pp. 48-58.

³⁵ As Renckens already pointed out (Renckens 1952, pp. 117-18) the composition as a whole is based on Rubens's painting of Henry IV Handing Over the Reign to Marie de' Medici in the Louvre. It is evident from some of the paintings in Huis ten Bosch that Van Campen must have been familiar with compositions in the Medici cycle, probably from drawn copies, since there were no prints of them at that time. The motif of the woman standing in front of a palace while a young black man holds a parasol above her head—a young woman in Strijcker's painting—shows unmistakable similarities to Van Dyck's portrait of Elena Grimaldi (1623), now in the National Gallery in Washington D.C. Van Campen may have had a drawing of it, but Strijcker himself might also have seen the motif in Genoa and copied it during his travels in Italy. Genoa was a favourite destination for artists, famous as it was for its palace architecture and collections.

³⁶ Adams 1985. On De Keyser's history paintings in this period see Sluijter 2015, pp. 272-84.

³⁷ Biography Weissman 1904, 79-82. Adams 1985, pp. 18-44, 71-94, 416-21 and 439-40. He was referred to as a 'blausteencooper', a dealer in bluestone, since 1640. Ann Jensen Adams suggested that this was Portland stone (Adams 1985, p. 418), a white stone in which the De Keyser family traded, but it is more likely to have been azurite or lazurite (lapis lazuli, from which the costly pigment ultramarine was made).

about painting a 'history'. It is likely that in this case, too, there was a design by Van Campen to work from.

Both De Keyser and Strijcker produced wholly satisfactory reflections of the ideals considered appropriate for the function of these rooms in the Town Hall.

Hidden Stories Revealed

Jasper Hillegers

based on an unexecuted earlier plan, unless he was mistaken.² In this scene Calypso takes pity on the stranded Odysseus.³ The final choice of Nausicaä may have come from burgomaster Joan Huydecoper (1599-1661), who was closely involved in the iconographic programme for the Town Hall. In early 1640 Huydecoper commissioned Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) to paint an *Odysseus and Nausicaä* for the mantelpiece in the reception room of his own house on Singel. De Keyser would have been aware of Sandrart's composition, but was mainly indebted to Pieter Lastman (1583-1633), who was the first to depict the subject in 1609, and again in 1619.⁴ Whereas the element of (unconditional) hospitality was key in the context of Huydecoper's reception room, the emphasis in the Bankruptcy Chamber would have been placed on the battered protagonist and the council's willingness to help.

In any event the subject of De Keyser's painting soon ceased to be recognized, as appeared in 1758, when Jan van Dyk thought that the figures were Ariadne and Bacchus.⁵ It was not until 1907 that Adriaan Willem Weissman restored the painting's correct title.

5 Van Dyk 1758, p. 137: 'ik voor myn kan hier geen andere zin in vinden, als daar Thēzeus, Ariadne te Naxis aan land gezet en verlaten hebbende, door Bachus wert opgenomen, waar door den desolaten stand van Ariadne, door Bachus hersteld wierd.' Undoubtedly Van Dyk's interpretation followed from his discussion of Strijcker's painting *Theseus Returns the Ball of Thread to Ariadne* in the Insurance Chamber.

6 Wagenaar 1760-1768, XIII (1768), p. 143, lists the commissioners of the Bankruptcy Chamber.

7 The text was placed there by burgomaster Jan Six in 1924. See Goossens 2010, p. 156, note 195.

Thomas de Keyser
1596 - Amsterdam - 1667

Odysseus and Nausicaä, 1657
Signed and dated below centre TDKeyser
fecit 1657 (TDK in ligature)
Oil on canvas, 200 x 167 cm

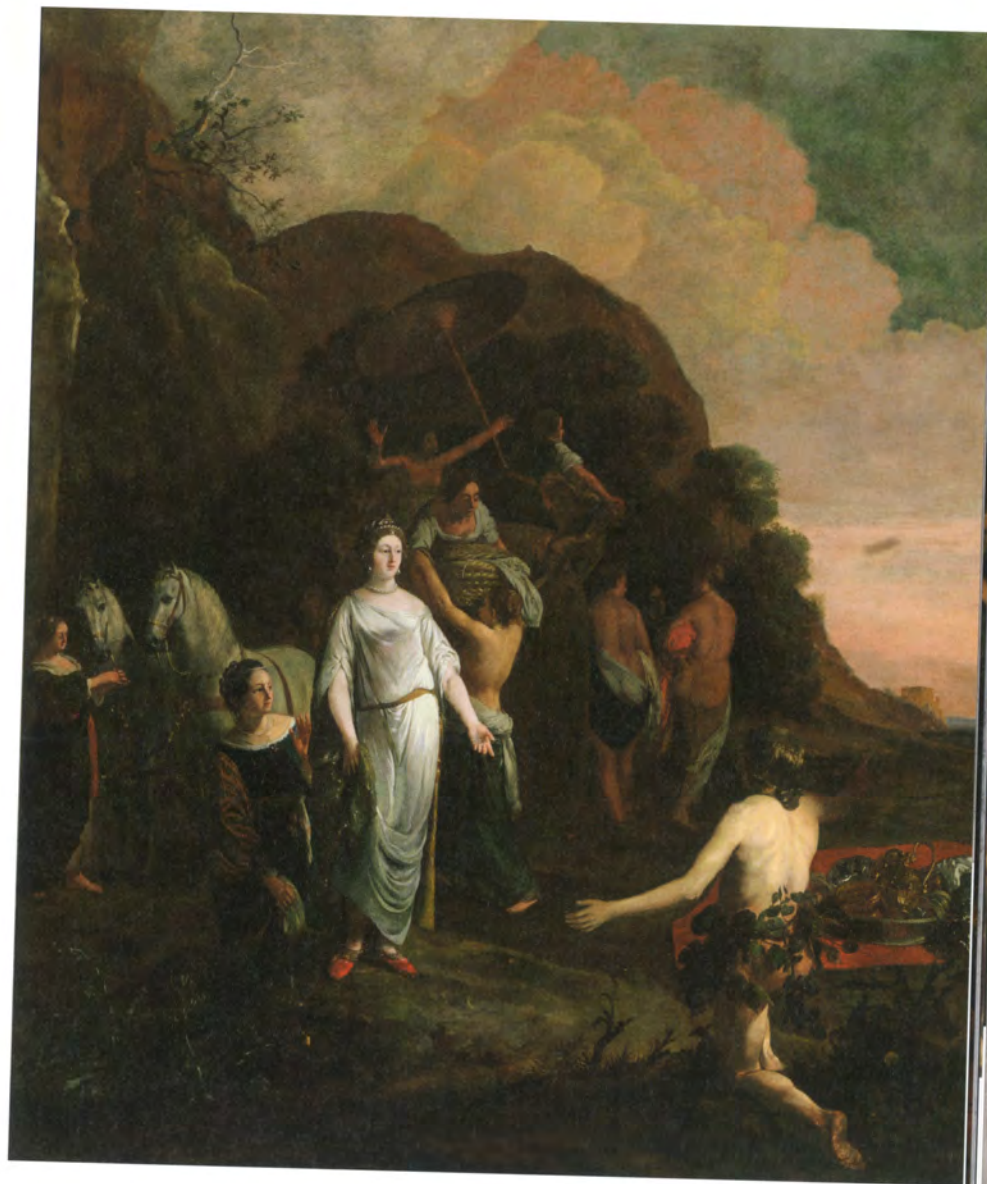
Above the painting the escutcheons of the commissioners of the Bankruptcy Chamber in 1655: Nicolaes Pancras, Nicolaes van Loon, Dr Pelgrom ten Grootenhuis, Dr Joan van Hellemond; Nicolaes van Waveren.⁶

Below the painting the text 'Nvdo navfragio delecto in litvs Vlixī Vestes hic miserans Navsicaa ecce dabit / MCMXXIV I SIX:?' (Translation: See how Nausicaä takes pity and will give clothes to the naked Odysseus, who was washed ashore from a shipwreck.)

Location
Bankruptcy Chamber

Selected bibliography

- Von Zesen 1664, p. 273
Van Dyk 1758, pp. 136-37, no. 101
Wagenaar 1760-1768, VII (1765), p. 66
Weissman 1907, p. 75
Bergman/Weissman 1914, pp. 141-42
Luttervelt 1949, p. 58
Van de Waal 1952, I, p. 218
Buchbinder-Green 1974, pp. 148-50, 367, fig. 146
Adams 1985, II, pp. 441-47, III, pp. 150-52, cat. no. 88 (with literature references)
Goossens 1996, pp. 39, 68, pl. XII
Sluijter 2000a, pp. 40, 221, notes 11, 12, 286, note 90
Goossens 2010, pp. 144-45
Vlaardingerbroek 2011, p. 148
Seifert 2011, pp. 234-35, fig. 265
Sluijter 2015, pp. 86-87, 284, fig. IIA-112



Ball of Thread

enliven the scene; the young woman on the extreme right and the little dog look straight at viewers, involving them in what is taking place.

It has been suggested that the subject was new and probably devised especially for the Town Hall programme,⁴ and we certainly know of no earlier paintings of the subject. However, the iconographically very similar moment when Theseus accepts the ball of thread had already been depicted in prints several times, for example by Crispijn de Passe, for a *Metamorphoses* edition of 1602.⁵ De Passe's engraving, which may have served Strijcker as his example, itself seems to derive from a print of the subject attributed to the Florentine printmaker Baccio Baldini (c. 1436-1487).⁶ This latter print moreover shows Theseus's club—which features so prominently in the foreground of Strijcker's painting—making it likely that Strijcker was also aware of it.

1650, p. 236, which harks back to earlier examples by Virgil Solis (1563) and Bernard Salomon (1557).

6 See p. 23, fig. 8.

7 Wagenaar 1760-1768, VII (1765), p. 60, lists the commissioners of the Insurance Chamber.

8 See p. 58 note 7. Six's caption leads us to suspect that he believed that the moment depicted was before and not after Theseus had braved the Labyrinth.

Willem Strijcker

1606/07 - Amsterdam - 1663/67

Theseus Returns the Ball of Thread to Ariadne, 1657

Signed and dated lower left Willem Braesseman / Alias . strijcker .f. 1657
Oil on canvas, 201 x 167 cm

Above the painting the escutcheons of the commissioners of the Insurance Chamber in 1655: Jacob van Neck; Jacob Servaes; Pieter van Loon.⁷

Below the painting the text "Thesea mox Labyrinthi aditvrum magna pericla Filo iam servat en Ariadna svo / MCMXXIV I SIX".⁸ (Translation: See how Ariadne with her thread already gives deliverance to Theseus, who will soon face great danger in the Labyrinth.)

Location

Insurance Chamber

Selected bibliography

Van Dyk 1758, p. 136, no. 100
Wagenaar 1760-1768, VII (1765), p. 66
Weissman 1907, p. 75
Bredius 1915-22, IV, p. 1254, ill.
Luttervelt 1949, p. 58
Renckens 1952, pp. 116-22
Van de Waal 1952, I, p. 218
Buchbinder-Green 1974, pp. 146-48, 367, fig. 143
Sluifster 2000a, pp. 85, 262, note 194, 286, note 90
Goossens 1996, pp. 40, 68, pl. XIII
Goossens 2010, p. 145, figs. 117, 118
Vlaardingerbroek 2011, p. 148

