

**Allegory of Justice: an Emperor settles a dispute over money**  
**Southern Netherlands, Antwerp**  
**c. 1530-40**

*22.5 cm diameter; clear cylinder glass with silver stain and vitreous paint. Completely intact condition, with only minor rubbing in places.*

*Provenance*

George Wigley, Monastery Stained Glass, Towcester;  
 Klaus Tiedemann collection, inv. 27, acquired from the above in 2000

*Published*

Klaus Tiedemann, *Gemälde aus Glas und Licht: Kabinettscheiben der Renaissance*, Privately printed, Heidelberg, 2006, p. 90.

Klaus Tiedemann, *Gemalt auf Glas & Licht: Kabinettscheiben von Gotik bis Barock / Painted on glass & light: Stained glass panels from the Gothic to Baroque Period*, Dettelsbach, 2009, pp. 134-5.

Matthias Desmet and Vanessa Paumen, 'Translucent exempla' in *The Art of Law: Three Centuries of Justice Depicted*, Exh. Cat., Bruges, Groeningemuseum, 2016, pp. 71-77, p. 72, fig. 30, and cat 63.

*Exhibited*

*Légendes Dorées: Rondels des anciens Pays-Bas du XVe au XVIIIe siècle*, Romont, Vitromusée (Musée Suisse du Vitrail et des Arts du Verre), 8 June-23 November 2008

*Gemalt auf Glas & Licht – Kabinettscheiben von Gotik bis Barock*, Iphofen, Knauf-Museum, 29 March-2 August 2009

*Gemalt auf Glas & Licht: Kabinettscheiben von Gotik bis Barock*, Heidelberg, Museum für Sakrale Kunst und Liturgie, 16 July-16 October 2011

*Goldene Geschichten auf Glas: Kabinettscheiben von Gotik bis Barock*, Linnich, Deutsches Glasmalerei-Museum, 16 March-4 August 2013

*The Art of Law: Three Centuries of Justice Depicted*, Exh. Cat., Bruges, Groeningemuseum, 27 October 2016-5 February 2017, cat. 63

The protagonist of this completely intact and fabulously well-preserved sixteenth-century roundel is the archaicizing figure of an Emperor, identifiable by his rich garments, golden staff and the laurel wreath encircling his head. In the larger of the two scenes he stands at the head of a square table set on a marbled floor, around which three men appear to be arguing over the division of a cache of gold coins. Visible through an opening let in to the wall behind them is a second, much smaller scene, showing what is presumably the same Emperor enthroned on a raised dais and listening with head in hand to the lament of two men standing before him.

Although the precise identity of the imagery depicted on this intriguing roundel is tantalizingly out of reach, it has been suggested in recent scholarship that the smaller of the two scenes is a form of *thronus iustitiae*, with the Emperor placing his hand by his right ear being analogous to the pose apparently adopted by Alexander the Great when he was listening to the arguments put forth by those who came to petition him for help.<sup>1</sup> It may also paraphrase Biblical accounts of judicial virtues, such

<sup>1</sup> Matthias Desmet and Vanessa Paumen, 'Translucent exempla' in *The Art of Law: Three Centuries of Justice Depicted*, Exh. Cat., Bruges, Groeningemuseum, 2016, pp. 71-77, p. 72.

as those exemplified in the Book of Exodus (23:1-3, 7-9). At any rate, the Emperor's involvement in the dispute over money clearly taking place in the foreground scene suggests that our roundel offers an *exemplum iustitiae*, an allegory of law and justice tailored towards financial honesty, and that it functioned as a reminder to its owner or owners of the responsibilities that come with high office. Such allegories were immensely popular themes among late-medieval artists working across the southern Low Countries, many of whom were commissioned to produce large tableaux of famous historic judgments against corrupt governors that, it was hoped, would help hold to account the fraudulent behaviour of those in high places. For instance, the Brussels painter Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1400-1464) was commissioned to produce a set of four now-destroyed panel paintings to decorate the walls of a court room in the Brussels town hall (completed by 1441), representing the *Justice of Trajan and Herkinbald*.<sup>2</sup> Just before his death, the Leuven-based painter Dieric Bouts (c. 1415-1475) likewise produced a pair of panel paintings for the Aldermen's Chamber of Leuven City Hall, with scenes of the Justice of Emperor Otto III<sup>3</sup>, while in 1498 Gerard David (c. 1460-1523), working on a pair of panel paintings for the town hall in Bruges, depicted the flayed body of the fraudulent Persian judge Sisamnes, whose skin was draped over his throne of office as a warning to its future incumbents.<sup>4</sup>

A number of grisaille roundels incorporating allegories of fair justice survive, including a *Judgment of Cambyses* by the Antwerp glass-painter Dirk Vellert (c. 1480-1547) now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (fig. 1), although the composition used for our roundel appears to be unique. Of course, our roundel shows a peaceful dispute in which the Emperor is employing logic and pragmatism, rather than the gruesome demise of a criminal governor. But its aim would have been the same, and like the Vellert roundel and the famous painted tableaux described above, it would have fitted perfectly into the decorative scheme of a civic hall, courtroom, or tax collector's office (given its depiction of money) at the centre of a bustling town.

Both the stylistic and technical details of our roundel point to Antwerp as its place of production. The strong, rectilinear elements of the architectural setting and the Mannerist motifs of the figures' costumes are characteristic features of roundels produced in that city in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, and are paralleled closely by contemporary developments in panel paintings produced in the same centre.<sup>5</sup> Just like Vellert's *Judgment of Cambyses* roundel, our painter clearly delighted in the ability of silver stain to evoke marbled or figured stone, another feature typical of Antwerp roundels produced at this date.

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<sup>2</sup> Lorne Campbell and Jan Van der Stock, *Rogier van der Weyden 1400-1464: Master of Passions*, Exh. Cat., Leuven, Museum M, 2009, pp. 263-5.

<sup>3</sup> Hugo van der Velden, 'Cambyses reconsidered: Gerard David's *exemplum iustitiae* for Bruges town hall' in *Simiolus*, 23 no. 1 (1995), pp. 40-62.

<sup>4</sup> Raf Verstegen, 'The Judgment of Cambyses: A Rich Iconographical Topic with Multiple Sources and a Long Tradition' in *The Art of Law: Artistic Representations and Iconography of Law and Justice in Context, from the Middle Ages to the First World War* (Ius Gentium: Comparative Perspectives on Law and Justice, no. 66), 2018, pp. 125-147.

<sup>5</sup> Peter van den Brink et. al., *ExtravangAnt! : A Forgotten Chapter of Antwerp Painting 1500-1530*, Exh. Cat., Antwerp and Maastricht, 2005.



Fig. 1  
Dirk Vellert (c. 1480-1547)  
*The Judgment of Cambyses*  
1542  
30 cm; clear glass with silver stain and vitreous paint  
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. BK-14517