

**Workshop of Veit Hirschvogel the Elder, after a design by Hans Süß von Kulmbach
Saint Vitus with the arms of the Imhof family**

Germany, Nuremberg

c. 1505-1510 (possibly 1504)

c. 25 x 23.5 cm; clear, blue and manganese glass with silver stain and vitreous enamel. Several short cracks running diagonally through the figure's midriff have been repaired with resin edge-bonding. Some further cracks through the border sections in places with lead repairs. A small section of the purple frame replaced at the lower right. Otherwise, in excellent condition, with only sporadic and minor abrasion in places.

Provenance

Collection of Charles van der Heyden, Rotterdam, until 1994, inv. no. 7;

Thence by family descent until 2020

Description and Iconography

This trilobed and jewel-like stained-glass window panel, which measures less than a foot in height and width, depicts the early Christian martyr Saint Vitus, standing in a landscape with a martyr's palm in his right hand and two of his traditional identifying attributes, a book and cockerel, in his left. He is accompanied by the coat of arms of the Imhof family (fig. 1), a wealthy patrician dynasty whose members helped rule the Free Imperial City of Nuremberg during its heyday, which lasted from the fifteenth century right into the seventeenth. Originally from Lauingen some 25 miles north-east of Ulm, the Imhof family began to focus their mercantile energies at their headquarters in Nuremberg towards the end of the fourteenth century, and amassed immense wealth from the spice trade (particularly saffron, competing in this trade with the Tuchers who also resided in the city). At the height of their success they had offices throughout Europe, including Antwerp, Prague, Venice and Bari. In 1505 three members of the family, accompanied by others from the Hirschvogel and Welser families, took part in the first trade trip of Upper German merchants to India. Their family's firm was for many years headed by the merchant and banker Hans V Imhof (1461-1522), although a number of its members provided important and discriminating patrons of art in their own city. Hans himself enjoyed the friendship of the sculptor Adam Kraft, the Protestant reformer Lazarus Spengler, the humanist and lawyer Willibald Pirckheimer, and that shining light of the German Renaissance Albrecht Dürer during his lifetime.

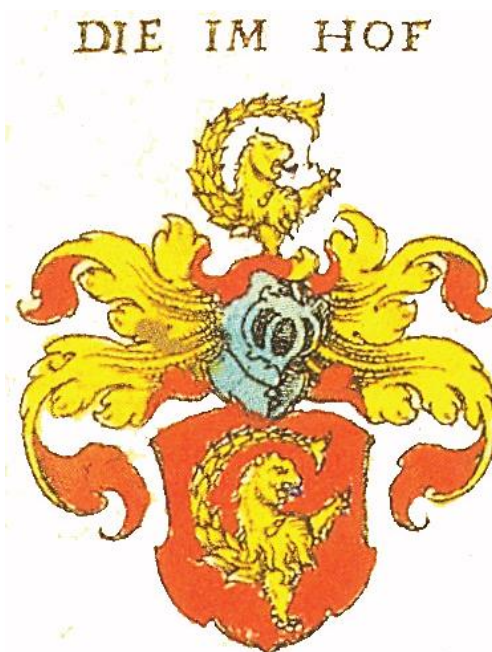


Fig. 1

The Imhof or 'Die Im Hof' Coat of Arms
Johann Ambrosius Siebmacher
Wappenbüchlein, 1596

One of the Imhof dynasty's male heirs Veit, whose name translates as Vitus in Latin, died in 1504 at the age of 31, and it is very possible that our panel - dominated as it is with an image of his name saint - was commissioned shortly after his death as part of a commemorative project paid for by the family. Other iterations of the Imhof coat of arms in stained glass are in the choir the Sankt Lorenz church in Nuremberg and on a window with a wild man from the Hirschvogel workshop in Museum Tucherschloss.



Fig. 2
Saint Vitus
Hartmann Schedel, *Die Schedelsche Weltchronik*
(the *Nuremberg Chronicle*)
1493

Saint Vitus was apparently converted to Christianity by his nurse at the age of 12, and was sacrificed for his faith as part of Emperor Diocletian's persecution of the Christians in AD 303. When the lions to whom he had been fed refused to devour him, he was instead thrown into a boiling cauldron of oil along with a cockerel (hence the inclusion of this bird among his attributes in some early depictions, including that in the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493, which may have been used in part as a source for the design of our window panel; fig. 2). The saint's cult spread across northern Europe during the course of the Middle Ages as a result of two particular events. First came the transferal of the saint's shinbone to Prague by King Wenceslas in the early 10th century, which instigated a period of fervent saint worship. This sacred relic was followed by the rest of the saint's remains when Charles IV acquired them from the church of San Marino in Pavia and translated them to the Cathedral in 1355, commissioning a silver reliquary to house them.¹

Attribution

Both the unusual trilobed shape of our panel and the design of its frame of knotted branches point firmly to the work of the Hirschvogel family of painter-glaziers active in Nuremberg during the last decades of the fifteenth century and the early part of the sixteenth.² The workshop was headed by Veit Hirschvogel the Elder (1461-1525), who oversaw several of Nuremberg's most important glazing schemes during his career. He collaborated with multiple painters, including Albrecht Dürer (with whom he created the famous trilobed window showing Death on Horseback now in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg; see fig. 3) and

¹ B. Drake Boehm and J. Fajt, *Prague: The Crown of Bohemia 1347-1437*, exh. cat., Prague Castle and New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005, pp. 150-151.

² This discussion is based in large part on research undertaken by Kees Berserik and Erik Bijzet, to whom we are extremely grateful.

Fig. 3
 Attributed to Veit Hirschvogel the Elder
Death on Horseback, after a design by Albrecht Dürer
 1502
 39.5 x 35.5 cm
 Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv.
 MM 155



Dürer's disciple and fellow Nuremberg city painter Hans Süß von Kulmbach. Kulmbach's characteristic spareness of design and his approach to the physiognomy of his figures are writ large on our panel, which can be compared closely to others attributed to his designs, including most compellingly a quatrefoil panel with a youthful Saint Lawrence, also in the Nuremberg museum (fig. 4).³ Kulmbach reused the unusual border

design of knotted branches that encircles our panel in a drawing of an angel holding a coat of arms, now in the Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden (fig. 5), which offers further firm evidence for his involvement here.



Fig. 4
 Workshop of Veit Hirschvogel the Elder
Saint Lawrence, after a design by Hans Süß von
 Kulmbach
 c. 1507
 45.7 x 40.6 cm
 Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, inv.
 MM 802

Veit Hirschvogel himself repeated the trefoil design framed by tied branches in two slightly larger windows; *Death on Horseback* as mentioned above, and *Sixtus Tucher in an open grave*, which he made in 1502 after designs by Dürer. Hirschvogel employed further naturalistic branch frames in his great series of large saints from c. 1516-1518 in the choir of the Frauenkirche in Nuremberg. Several of the saints also have comparably designed faces and haloes and the drapery of the figure of Saint

³ See also *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg 1300-1550*, exh. cat., 1986, cat. 159, p. 341.

Wolfgang has brocade decorations painted in black on a yellow background that lay over the folds of the clothes like stencils.⁴ An almost identical brocade pattern was also used to decorate the mantle of Saint Nicholas on a closely related window in the Pfarrkirche of Ingelfingen.⁵ Finally, the rather freely painted coat of arms with the Imhof family's lion-headed chimera, and its subtle feathered background corresponds to a number of small coats of arms from the Hirschvogel workshop and Nuremberg in general, including two windows with scenes from the life of Saint Benedict designed by Dürer and divided amongst the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston and the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.⁶

Fig. 5

Hans Süß von Kulmbach
Angel with a Coat of Arms
Germany, Nuremberg
c. 1507 or 1508
Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett,
inv. WK 101



⁴ H. Scholz, *Die mittelalterlichen Glasmalereien in Nürnberg. Sebalder Stadtseite*, Corpus vitrearum medii aevi, Deutschland Band X, 2, Berlin, 2013, p. 651, fig. 243.

⁵ H. Scholz, *Entwurf und Ausführung. Werkstattpraxis in der Nürnberger Glasmalerei der Dürerzeit*, Corpus vitrearum medii aevi, Deutschland Studien Band I, Berlin, 1991, p. 255, fig. 364.

⁶ Inv. nos. C6e13 and MM786; see Scholz, 2013, pp. 374-375, figs. 302-303.