How Theseus was Insured and Odysseus Saved from Ruin

MYTHOLOGY IN THE INSURANCE CHAMBER AND THE BANKRUPTCY CHAMBER

by Eric Jan Sluijter

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; 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. This distinctly propagandist poem rings with unfailing praise 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 cavetats to Vondel’s overblown exaltation 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
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, integrity, justice and incorruptibility on to the governors of the republica amstelodamensis. 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, 81-158). 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. Perhaps one of them could only recall 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. 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.
THE BANKRUPTCY CHAMBER

Odysseus's reception by Naucisca, on the other hand, was a very apt choice for the Bankruptcy Chamber. Fig. 3) 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. 7 Lastman had made grateful use of them and many people must have been familiar with the painting he made in 1649 (Fig. 3), among them Thomas de Keyser, who painted the overmantel for the Bankruptcy Chamber.8 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.9 He may well not have had an example in the form of a book illustration or print,10 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 Deck Volckertsz Coornhert's translation, and had reproduced many of the details in it. The location described by Homer and the occupations of Naucisca and her handmaids 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 Naucisca'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 Naucisca (supported, although she does not know it, by Athena) stands calmly and courageously, while Odysseus kneels at some distance from her.11

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

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 Naucisca's steadfastness and the other girl's 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 van Sandrart as an overmantel for the reception room in the house of the powerful burgomaster Joan Houckershoop (Fig. 4), who a decade later was probably also involved in the decoration and furnishing of the Town Hall.12 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)

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.13 Here we see how, despite the miserable state he is in, Odysseus kneels gracefully before Naucisca as he addresses her beseechingly. Naucisca, standing in an elegant contrapposto, takes clothes from a basket held by a handmaid so that he can cover his nakedness, while another young woman offers a bowl of fruit. This takes place after Naucisca has commanded her friends to stay calm and give this stranded man clothes and food. Sandrart chose to present not the reception of a frightened stranger, but the image of civilized people offering one another help and hospitality—after all, Naucisca 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.14 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-

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8 For Lastman's works and all the paintings derived from them see Stell 2007, pps. 201, 211, 196–197, 195–196. On Lastman's first version of this subject dates from 1649 and is now in the Hermitage, St Petersburg Museum in Bramkamp.
9 Tromp 1924, p. 125.
10 Coorhert/Vwevers 191b (ed. 1891, pps. 201, 211, 196–197). For the two versions of this subject dates from 1649 and is now in the Hermitage, St Petersburg Museum in Bramkamp.
11 Tromp 1924, p. 125.
12 Stell 2007, p. 196.
14 For the history, organization and function see the Archives of the Commissioners of the Bankruptcy Chamber: https://damrarchief.amsterdam.nl/archives/archiefBank/sOverzicht/302134.html.
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.  

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 perished.’

Like Lastman, De Keyser chose to place us in the position of the unfortunate, destitute shipwreck survivor looking at the steadfast Nausicaa, who makes a gesture of welcome. At the same time the maidservant beside her isalready 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 Nausicaa 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.

Nausicaa 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 known as Pygmalion.

THE INSURANCE CHAMBER

The subject chosen for the Insurance Chamber was the story of the hero Theseus, who returns to Athens 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 lovely 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—not other book, aside from the Bible, was published so often in translations with illustrations. 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 1641). 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...
profiling 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 Medejas and Atlanta, 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.11 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. Strijker’s painting is about gratitude for the beneficent insurance against imperiling hazard; it was this that was the function of the work and the reason why this unusual scene was chosen.12

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.13 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 (Strijker) 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

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11. Died does not describe the event. In the Metamorphosis or Hercules, Ludolf Bakhuizen Green suggests that Strijker was inspired by a passage in Homer’s Iliad and Aesop of Aesop (Bakhuizen Green 1948, p. 140); the same may be true for Strijker’s view of the Naxos and the gleaning Ariadne. The latter is the subject of a painting by van der Goes (1483). The idea is taken from Homer’s Iliad, book 11, lines 110-111: “As he gazed on the maiden’s beauty held him at his feet.” (trans. A. E., p. 75). Strijker’s and his

12. This emerges from the title page of the tragedy, such as the 1656 edition of Van Ys’s tragick play of Ajax and

13. The order of the commission was 1675 (Gerrit van der Veer 1675, p. 15). The difference between the payments for the decorations in the Council Chamber by Flinck and Van Bronckhorst, for instance, is significant: Flinck was paid 2300 guilders, Van Bronckhorst 1100 guilders. Strijker would have been paid about 600 guilders. Given the difference in reputation, De Keyser would undoubtedly have been paid more than Strijker.
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." Where the commissions to painters for the Town Hall decorations are concerned, the relationship in Strijker’s case would have been with Jacob van Campen, the Town Hall architect, and Thomas de Keyser, brother. Willem Hendrikz 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.

As a result of a misunderstanding of the signature, Willem Strijker acquired the nickname Braesemeyr, which authors continue to repeat to this day. Several of them interpreted this supposed nickname as a ‘Bentzaan’—dating from the time Strijker was in Rome (around 1655) and probably belonged to the ‘Bentzaehels’ (‘Birds of a Feather’), a group of Dutch artists there.163 What it actually reads is ‘Willem Braeseman’/Alias. Strijker. F. 1657.” 164 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.165 The Braeseman, 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.166 It is clear that Strijker and Van Campen shared networks,167 and although we now know of no other work by Strijker, Van Campen owned several of his paintings.168 Strijker 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 Nicolas van Hert Stockade and the successful Govaert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol, with whom he shared life drawing sessions with a nude female model.169 He was with Willem de Keyser in Rome in the sixteen-forties.170 As a minor painter, Strijker 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;171 he probably did the same for the Town Hall. Famous artists sometimes made a fuss about this, as Jordaan did in Huis ten Bosch, but the position was different for lesser lights. It would appear highly plausible that the composition of the Theologie and Aridane, which unmistakably betrays familiarity with a work in Rubens’s Medici cycle, was designed by Van Campen and executed by Strijker.172

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 sixteenth-sixties and in the sixteenth-seventies. 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.173 For this commission, unquestionably obtained through his brother, who had worked closely with Van Campen, he set

163 Rkb 2003, chapter 3. ‘De economie van dienst en verdienst.’ See also Kromhout, 1997, chapter 3. ‘Verdienst.’
164 The commissions were probably initiated in 1652 (Blockx 1820, xix and xxiv; Van de Weter, 1931, volume 4, p. 145).
166 This misunderstanding comes from Van Oek 1794, p. 150, who calls him ‘Braesemeyr’, and this has been repeated ever since (in Bedaux 1990 in ‘Hogerzaten’/in Recurns 1951, p. 18) Braaseneyr.
167 The name occurs as that of a prominent family in Amsterdam as early as the fifteenth century. Dubois van Heel 2008, p. 44. The name is usually spelled Braaseneyr.
168 Dubois van Heel 2008, pp. 55-56, 92. 168-168. After the liberation in 1578, members of the family moved from Amsterdam to Haarlem. Willem Strijker’s maternal grandmother was the sister of Jacob Zoetof, the well-known painter of this chapter in Haarlem, from whom Willem and his brothers inherited the Regulaebook. Information about the Braeseman family is based primarily on archives carried out by Gert Vink in Amsterdam and Haarlem for a working group paper in 1992. For Van Campen’s family see Mib. Bot. Famille.
169 Strijker was a friend of the landscape painter Steven van der Stok. Jacob van Campen was a witness at the wedding of a niece of his and Steven van der Stok. Van der Stok worked with Strijker and Van Hert Stockade, and also received commissions for decorations in the Amsterdam theatre, which Van Campen designed. The friendship between Van der Stok, Strijker, Rombout Verhulst and Gerard van de Vlijt emerges from a document dated 1663 (Bedaux 1990, p. 144).
170 In an estate of Willem van Campen (Bedaux 1990, 1992, 1994, pp. 119-120, Jacob’s second cousin, there were no fewer than four works by Willem Strijker. Marcus van Baak convincingly argued that Willem’s collection of paintings and architectural treatises came from Jacob’s holdings (‘Familie, vrienden en opdrachten’, in Amsterdam 1993, p. 33).
171 This emerges from a case document dated 1658, in which poing made was cited as proof of the model’s existence. Bedaux 1990, p. 152. and Studley 2008, pp. 332.
172 Recurns 1951, p. 157, note 28 above. What will also have helped is that his brother, Dick Couckh Strijker, was Secretary of Maritime Affairs in Amsterdam (Recurns 1951, p. 146).
174 As Recurns already pointed out (Recurns 1951, p. 157, note 28 above), the composition as a whole is based on Rubens’s painting of History 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 model of the woman standing in front of a palace while a young black man holds a parrot above her head—a young woman in Strijker’s painting—shows unmistakable similarities to Van Dyck’s portrait of China de Ruyter (1663), now in the National Gallery in Washington D.C. Van Campen may have had a drawing of it, but Strijker himself might also have seen the model 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.
176 Biography information 1994, 1995, 1996. Adams 1994, pp. 145-146, 148 and 149-150. He was referred to as a ‘vaarvollenmeester’, a dealer in bluestone, since 1645. Arken Maarten Adams suggested that this was Portland stone (Adams 1994, p. 148), a stone since it was which the De Keyser family traded, but it is more likely to have been antique or limestone (Lips lands), 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 Strijker 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.¹ In this scene Calypso takes pity on the stranded Odysseus.¹ The final choice of Nausicaa may have come from burgomaster Joan Huydecoper (1599-1661), who was closely involved in the iconic programme for the Town Hall. In early 1640 Huydecoper commissioned Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) to paint an Odysseus and Nausicaa 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 1619.² 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 Dyck thought that the figures were Ariadne and Bacchus.³ It was not until 1907 that Adriaan Willem Weissman restored the painting’s correct title.

Thomas de Keyser
1596 - Amsterdam - 1667

Odysseus and Nausicaa, 1657
Signed and dated below centre TDKysrer fecht 1657 (TDK in ligature)
Oil on canvas, 200 x 165 cm

Above the painting the escutcheons of the commissioners of the Bankruptcy Chamber in 1659: Nicolaes Pancras, Nicolaes van Leon, Dr. Pelgrum ten Groenhuys, Dr Joan van Hellemont, Nicolaes van Waveren.⁴ Below the painting the text 'Ne do navfragio setde in libris Vixi Vestae hic miserans Nausicae: ecce dabit / MCMXXI / S.I.X'⁵ (Translation: See how Nausicaa 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 Dyck 1758, pp. 156-37, no. 101
Wagenaar 1760-1768, VIII (1765), p. 66
Weissman 1907, p. 75
Luttrefeld 1949, p. 58
Van de Waal 1952, II, p. 218
Buchhinder-Green 1974, pp. 148-50, 369, fig. 146
Adams 1981, II, pp. 441-47, III, pp. 150-52, cat. no. 88 (with literature references)
Goossens 1996, pp. 39, 68, pl. XII
Sluijter 2005, pp. 240, 241, notes 11, 12, 286, note 90
Goossens 2010, pp. 144-45
Wlaardingenboek 2011, p. 148
Seillier 2011, pp. 231-35, fig. 265
Sluijter 2015, pp. 86-87, 284, fig. IIA-112

5 Van Dyck 1758, p. 137: 'Ik voor raen kan hier geen andere zien in vinden, als daar Thiseus, Ariadne te Naxis aan land gezet en verlaten hebbende, door Bacchus weder opgenomen, waar door den desolaten stand van Ariadne, door Bacchus hersteld wierd.' Undoubtedly Van Dyck’s interpretation followed from his discussion of Strickner’s painting Theseus Return the Ball of Thread to Ariadne in the Insurance Chamber.

6 Wagenaar 1750-1768, 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. 196, note 195.
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, 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 Crispin de Passe, for a *Metamorphoses* edition of 1602. 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). 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.

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**Willem Strijcker**
1606/07 - Amsterdam - 1665/67

**Theseus Returns the Ball of Thread to Ariadne**, 1657
Signed and dated lower left Willem 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 Sereciesz; Pieter van Loo. Below the painting the text *Thesea max Labyrinthus aditivm magno periela Filo iam servat en Ariadna svo / MCMXXIV i SXIX*. (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 Dyck 1758, p. 336, no. 290
Weissman 1907, p. 75
Luttervelt 1949, p. 58
Renczens 1951, pp. 16-22
Van de Waal 1951, I, p. 218
Buchbinder-Green 1971, pp. 146-148, 152, fig. 143
Sluijter 2000a, pp. 85, 262, note 194, 286, note 90
Goossens 1996, pp. 40-46, pl. XII
Goossens 2010, p. 145, figs. 117, 118
Vlaardingerbroek 2011, p. 148