HILARY WAYMENT

The Master of the Mass of Saint Gregory Roundel

A Dutch Glass-painter in Brabant during the 1520s

For our knowledge of the work of glass-painters from the northern Netherlands before 1530 we are obliged to rely, apart from the few fragments which survived the Beeldenstorm, on roundels and cabinet glass, now largely dispersed abroad, and on the surviving work of native craftsmen who sought their fortunes elsewhere. Arnold of Nijmegen, Dierick Vellert of Amsterdam, Gheleyn Hoon of 'Holland' are names that spring to mind. To these should be added the glaziers, no doubt from Leyden, who, probably during the early 1520s, painted the Crucifixion now in the east window of St Margaret's Church, Westminster, and perhaps also David Joris of Delft, whose window set up in 1522 in the church at Edam has long since disappeared, and whose glazing work is known from a few small pieces of cabinet glass, only one of which can be fully authenticated. This article seeks to add another name to the short roll of honour. It concerns a master-glazier who must have been a pupil of Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen and whose movements during the third decade of the sixteenth century can be followed, with some confidence, through the stylistic analysis of a group of medium-sized subject panels which appear to have been exported from the Continent during the Napoleonic Wars. He must have arrived in Brussels towards the end of the second decade of the century; c. 1521-2 he was probably in Mechlin, taking part in the production of a series of panels on the life of St Nicolas for the Charterhouse in Louvain. His contributions to the design of windows for St Jacques, Liège, no doubt prepared in Brussels, can be dated 1522-3. Soon after this he seems to have set up a workshop in Louvain itself; two panels for Louvain donors are dated 1525 and 1526. There is also a group of eight panels (and two or three fragments of panels) which bear the arms or merchant's marks of Amsterdam families. Two of these probably date from about 1522, and the rest from 1526 or the following years; some of them are autograph works of the master-glazier from Amsterdam, and some are workshop pieces.

In the Victoria and Albert Museum in London there is an outstanding roundel in paint and stain dating apparently from the end of the second decade of the sixteenth century and depicting the Mass of St Gregory (Fig. 1). The design is derived primarily from the painted panel attributed to Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen which was formerly in Amsterdam (Cassirer) and is now in a private collection in Zurich (Fig. 2); the connection is established by the stiffly folded screens which flank the altar in either case. The roundel seems also to embody reminiscences of the Mass of St Gregory which forms part of the Brussels altarpiece of the Death of the Virgin, from Van Orley's workshop (dated August...
The style of the roundel is, however, individual. The saint and his torch-bearing acolyte, who lean rather than bend forward towards the figure of Christ on the altar, have spare, intense faces with aquiline noses, delicately curved nostrils, and rather hollow cheeks. Their heads are perhaps slightly too small. The hands are a trifle conspicuous, though always functional; they may be limp, with fingers straightened, or open, with curved but separated fingers, and thumb projecting. The drapery tends to parallel, sometimes tubular folds. A noticeable feature within the calm spaciousness of the church is the capital formed of luxuriant foliage.

The same or similar characteristics are found in a number of smallish rectangular panels scattered throughout Britain and the United States. The smallest of these is, like the roundel, in paint and stain. It shows a Clerical Donor presented by St Anthony Abbot, and belongs to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts (Fig. 3). It has been attributed, significantly enough, to the entourage of Jan van Scorel, who joined Jacob Cornelisz' atelier c. 1512. Here the folds are at once flatter and more supple; in the case of the kneeling donor they fall backwards in a catenary curve in such a way that the borders of his cassock and surplice rest flat on the floor. Vegetal, rather fleshy volutes fill the two top corners.

A number of panels in the same style are in English churches or collections, and have more or less identical dimensions (c. 700 x 470 mm.); here potmetal is