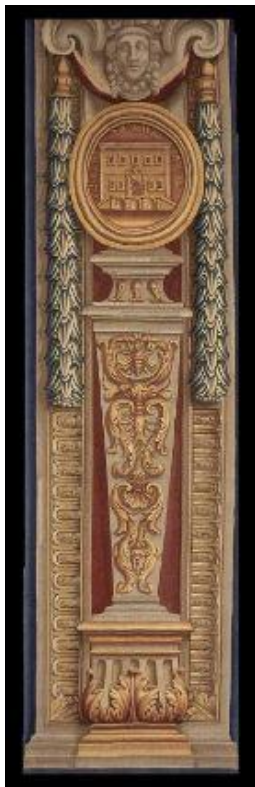


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**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, REACHES AGREEMENT FOR THE PURCHASE
OF FOUR 17TH-CENTURY TAPESTRIES MADE FOR THE BARBERINI PALACE IN ROME**

MFA Research Leads to Discovery of Artworks' Provenance



*Tapestry: The Palazzo
dell'Annona, 1663-1679*

BOSTON, MA (March 25, 2011)—Provenance research conducted by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), has resulted in new discoveries about the history of ownership of four 17th-century tapestries in the MFA's collection. The Museum's research revealed that the tapestries—given to the MFA in the 1950s by Eugene Garbáty, a German Jewish art collector and refugee—had been included in a forced sale in 1935 of the stock of the art dealership Margraf and Co. in Berlin, a firm run by Jakob and Rosa Oppenheimer. The MFA contacted the Oppenheimer heirs in 2010 to inform them of the discovery and to begin settlement discussions, which concluded recently.

“In the course of provenance research on our collection, we learned that these tapestries were part of the Oppenheimer family's heritage,” said Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the MFA. “We were pleased to inform the heirs of this discovery, and to work with them on a resolution, which now gives the tapestries a permanent home at the Museum.”

The four tapestries (each measuring approximately 222 x 48 inches) were part of a larger series that depicted the life and achievements of Pope Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini, 1568–1644). The entire series, begun in 1663 and finished in 1679 (though largely complete in 1676), was commissioned after the Pope's death by his nephew, Cardinal Francesco Barberini. The tapestries hung in the Barberini Palace in Rome

until the end of the 19th century, when the series was disassembled and sold. Originally, there were 34 tapestries made out of colorful wool and silk. Among them were 10 large narrative panels, of which nine are now in the Vatican Museum in Rome, and one is in the Musées Royaux d'Art et Histoire in Brussels. The series also included 10 horizontal border panels, called *friezes*, and 14 vertical border panels, known as *pilasters*.

By 1928, eight of the pilasters from the series, including the four at the MFA, were owned by Margraf in Berlin. In 1933, the Oppenheimers, who were Jewish, fled Germany to avoid Nazi persecution and relocated to France. In their absence, they were forced out of their management roles at Margraf and were forbidden from performing any legal transactions for the company. As a well-known Jewish business, Margraf was dissolved by the Nazi regime, its gallery stock sold off quickly and at low prices in a series of auctions held in Berlin in 1935. The eight Barberini tapestries were included in the Margraf liquidation sale held at the auction house Paul Graupe on April 26–27, 1935. Before the auction, the tapestries were estimated at 3500 RM (Reichsmarks were the currency in Germany from 1924 until 1948), but sold for only 530 RM to an unknown buyer. Discovery of this information by Victoria Reed, the MFA's Monica S. Sadler Curator for Provenance, helped to determine that the tapestries were included in this forced Nazi-era sale, from which the Oppenheimers were unable to realize the proceeds. The Museum then contacted their heirs. Jakob and Rosa Oppenheimer lost their lives before the end of World War II—Jakob in France in 1941, and Rosa at Auschwitz in 1943. After the war, the business shares in Margraf were legally transferred to their heirs, but almost none of the gallery's artwork was recovered.

Eugene Garbáty (1880–1966) purchased six of the eight tapestries from an unknown dealer shortly after they sold at auction in 1935. He was told that they had come from a castle in Austria, and was unaware that they had belonged to Margraf or been in a forced sale. Garbáty himself was a victim of Nazi persecution; the family company of which he was part owner, Garbáty Zigarettenfabrik (Garbáty Cigarette Factory), was Aryanized in 1938 and he was forced to flee Germany later that year. He succeeded in bringing four of the tapestries with him when he immigrated to the United States in 1939, later giving them to the MFA between 1950 and 1952. The tapestries have been on view at the MFA in the 1950s, then again in the 1990s. The Museum plans to hang them in the Koch Gallery in the future.

The MFA has been a leader within the museum community in provenance research and in sharing it on its website, mfa.org. In 2010, research led to the return of the embroidered panel, the *Entombment of Saint Vigilius* (around 1390–1391), to the Museo Diocesano Tridentino (Diocesan Museum of Trent, Italy), from which it disappeared during World War II. The MFA purchased the embroidery in 1946 from an Italian art dealer in New York without knowledge of its subject matter or provenance.

**PANEL INFORMATION FOR THE FOUR TAPESTRIES FROM THE SERIES
*THE LIFE OF POPE URBAN VIII (1663–1679)***

The series, *The Life of Pope Urban VIII*, was made up of many separately woven panels, including:

- 10 large narrative panels, of which nine are in the Vatican Museum in Rome, and one is in the Musées Royaux d'Art et Histoire in Brussels
- 10 horizontal border panels, called *friezes*, that went below the narrative tapestries
- 14 vertical border panels, known as *pilasters*, which flanked either side of the narrative tapestries. Many of these vertical panels are today in unknown locations. Eight were sold in the Margraf auction in 1935, including the four that are at the MFA

While each lateral panel illustrates a specific theme in the medallion, they all include images of a pedestal with conventionalized foliated ornament and the Barberini bee woven with yellow, as well as a red swag with pendants of laurel leaves, a mask, and a large jar of flowers.

The Parents of Maffeo Barberini

This tapestry bears a double portrait of Antonio Barberini and his wife Camilla Barbadora, the parents of Maffeo Barberini, late Pope Urban VIII. The design consists of a medallion woven with several shades of yellow, bearing profile portraits of a man and a woman surround by the words ANTONIVS BARBERINVS ET CAMMILLA BARBADORA PARENTES (“Antonio Barberini and Camilla Barbadora, parents”).

The Protonotary

This tapestry illustrates a medallion woven with several shades of yellow showing the interior of a library where a man in a long gown writes in a book. Around the edge are the words PROTONOT AP CONCILIATI ECCLESIAE REG REGALIVMQ SPONSAL TAB CONFICIT (“The apostolic protonotary completes the documents of the betrothal of the King who, with his princes, has been reconciled to the Church”).

The Church of Santa Bibiana

This tapestry illustrates the facade of the church of Sta. Bibiana in Rome in a medallion, surmounted by a pediment bearing a cross, the papal tiara, keys, and shield with the Barberini arms. Around the building are the words AEDE S BIBIANAE RESTITVTA ET ORNATA (“The church of Saint Bibiana rebuilt and embellished”).

The Palazzo dell’Annona

This tapestry represents the facade of the Palazzo dell'Annona in Rome within a medallion woven with several shades of yellow and orange, on which is a building with the papal tiara, keys, and a shield bearing the Barberini arms over the door. Around the building are the words VBERIORI ANNONAE COMMODO (“I provide for a richer harvest”).

Provenance Research at the MFA

In 1998, the Museum began the systematic review of the provenance of its collection, with the goal of identifying objects that may have been improperly sold or traded during the Nazi era and World War II (1933–1945). In 2000, the MFA launched on its website information and images pertaining to several works of art whose Nazi-era provenance was unclear, with the intention of identifying objects that may have been lost between 1933 and 1945 and never returned to their rightful owners. Also that year, the Museum created a full-time provenance research position, which is now held by Victoria Reed, the Monica S. Sadler Curator for Provenance. In 2007, the MFA initiated “Art with a Past: Provenance Research at the MFA,” a Museum-wide initiative to create label text for specific objects in the galleries addressing a wide range of provenance topics. Works of art from nearly every department are included. The Museum updates the website regularly with new provenance research discoveries. Currently, information about more than 350,000 objects is available at: www.mfa.org/collections.

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