

[Short Report]

New Provenance of the 'Christ and the Virgin' Tapestry in Dumbarton Oaks

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Dumbarton Oaks is now an institution of Harvard University but it was formerly a property of the wealthy diplomat Robert Wood Bliss and his wife Mildred Barnes Bliss. The Museum and Library are especially known for Byzantine and Pre-Colombian Art.

Besides this main collection, the Blisses purchased art works for interior decoration and furniture for the music room. It is called the House Collection and includes various items spanning from the Middle Ages to impressionism. The music room reveals

more about the Blisses' tastes and connoisseurs as collectors than any other room.

In the music room a small-scale 'Christ and the Virgin' tapestry can be found hanging (Fig.1).

According to the website of Dumbarton Oaks, the auction history is as follows.

Frédéric Spitzer posthumous sale, Paris, 6/16/1883.

Purchased from the dealer Henry Daguerre, Paris, by Robert Woods Bliss, November 12, 1908.

There lies a question as to where the tapestry existed between Spitzer's sale in 1883 and the purchase by Robert Wood Bliss in 1908.

In Fig.2, a photo of an exhibition held from 20th May to 3rd July 1898 at the Royal Academy of Arts (*Königlichen Akademie der Künste*) in Berlin is shown. It was an Exhibition of Art of Mittelalter and Renaissance from the Private Collection in Berlin (*die Ausstellung von Kunstwerken des Mittelalters und der Renaissance aus Berliner Privatbesitz*).¹ There were two catalogues of this exhibition. The first was for inventory purposes only, and it was published in two printings.² The second catalogue was a numbered limited edition which was published in the following year.³ 40 copies were printed on Dutch handmade paper, and 360 copies were printed



Fig.1
'Christ and the Virgin' tapestry
Flemish, Late Gothic, late 15th century-early 16th century
96.52 cm x 96.52 cm (38 in. x 38 in.)
wool, silk and silver and gold thread on wool
HC.T.1908.01.(T)
©Dumbarton Oaks, House Collection, Washington, DC



Fig.2 View of James Simons Cabinet, from *Ausstellung von Kunstwerken des Mittelalters und der Renaissance aus Berliner Privatbesitz*, Berlin 1899

on intaglio printing paper. Contributors were Wilhelm Bode, Max J. Friedländer, Hugo von Thudi and others. In the caption of photo showing the 'Christ and the Virgin' tapestry 'Cabinet James Simon' (*Kabinet James Simon*) is written. In fact, while many of Simon's collection were exhibited, the tapestry above his Tondo by Raffaellino del Garbo (missing from 1945) was not from his collection, but from that of Oscar Hainauer (Fig.3).

Since Oscar Hainauer died in 1894, he probably bought it at the time of Spitzer's sale in 1883. Furthermore, as Wilhelm Bode, who at that time was the most influential person in the Berlin art world, was Hainauer's adviser and contributed to the catalogue of Spitzer, Hainauer could have acquired information from Bode.



Fig.3 Detail of Fig.2

A year before the exhibition in Berlin, Oscar Hainauer's widow Julie Hainauer had Wilhelm Bode make a catalogue of her husband's collection.⁴ This catalogue has only a few photo-illustrations, and unfortunately does not have a photo of the tapestry. However, all art works are numbered with a minimum description. The tapestry is listed under Section XIII, Textile and Tapestry (*Bildwirkereien und Teppich*) no.456, 'Half-figured Christ with globe and Maria praying in gothic architectonic frame. Refreshed by painting' ('*Halbfigur Christi mit der Weltkugel und der Maria betend, in gotischer Architekturumrahmung. Durch Malerei aufgefrischt*⁵')

Upon the request of Julie Hainauer, Bode created Oscar Hainauer's collection catalogue and planned the exhibition of a private collection. However, he also had an ulterior motive for doing so as he hoped that collectors would donate their collections to the new planned Renaissance Museum after their death (opened in 1904 as the Kaiser Friedrich Museum).

However, Julie sold the collection for the 'astronomical price of £250,000 (\$1.21 million)'⁶ in June 1906 to Joseph Duveen. This was considered a great Scandal. *The London Times* (also *The New York Times*) reported that 'Germany has lost another of her great art collections and England, and perhaps America will be richer.'⁷ It was a stepping stone to success for the Duveen Brothers. Moreover, it has also been said that she sold the collection in its entirety to the Duveen Brothers. However, Julie Hainauer had actually already sold part of the collection, at the least the tapestry, before 1906.

Since the tapestry was part of Oscar Hainauer's collection which was briefly in Berlin, the exhibition history and bibliography needs to be updated.

I appreciate Dr. Elizabeth Williams, curator of Dumbarton Oaks, for helping with my investigation.

NOTES

- 1 Sandra Kriebel, Renaissance-Ausstellungen aus Privatbesitz in Berlin und München um 1900, *Kunst text de*, 2015, pp. 3-11.
- 2 *Ausstellung von Kunstwerken des Mittelalters und der Renaissance aus Berliner Privatbesitz anstaltet von der Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft, 20.Mai bis 25 Juni 1898*, Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft (ed.) (Rev.ed.), Berlin, Büxenstein, 1898.
- 3 *Ausstellung von Kunstwerken des Mittelalters und der Renaissance aus Berliner Privatbesitz anstaltet von der Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft, 20.Mai bis 25 Juni 1898*, Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft (ed) Berlin, G. Grote, 1899.
- 4 Willhelm von Bode, *Die Sammlung von Oscar Hainauer*, Berlin, Büxenstein, 1897.
- 5 In my investigation I can't tell it means if some paint on the faded parts.
- 6 Charlotte, Vignon, *Duveen Brothers and the Market for Decorative Arts, 1880-1940*, New York, The Frick Collection, 2019, p. 230
- 7 Ibid.

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