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## “Handelar’s Black Choir” from Château to Mansion

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More than a century ago, many antique architectural elements were imported from Europe for the embellishment of Gilded Age homes in America. The transit and arrival of these elements was often shrouded in mystery. A highly significant set of Renaissance marquetry wall panels now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figures 1, 2, and see also Figures 7–11) has long been associated with the connoisseurship of the architect Stanford White (Figure 3), of the New York firm McKim, Mead & White, who acquired the paneling abroad for his remodeling of the residence of William Collins Whitney (Figure 4). Unraveling the intrigues and network of carefully cultivated dealers behind White’s transactions provides a window into art commerce at a time when the burgeoning transatlantic export of European art was becoming the subject of heated debate.

The inlaid walnut paneling (ca. 1547–48) from the high altar, or “choir,” of the chapel of the Château de la Bastie-d’Urfé in Saint-Étienne-le-Molard, near Lyon, has been described as the most extensive and accomplished set of marquetry wall panels in Renaissance France.<sup>1</sup> Incorporated by Stanford White into the interior of the W. C. Whitney residence at 871 Fifth Avenue in 1898, the paneling was removed and donated to the Metropolitan Museum in 1942 by the children of W. C. Whitney’s daughter-in-law, Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney (née Gertrude Vanderbilt, 1875–1942), in accordance with her wishes.<sup>2</sup> Viewing the paneling today, one is hard pressed to imagine the significance of its original ecclesiastical context, a comprehensive Renaissance ensemble rare in France for its decorative range of consistently high caliber.

The paneling commissioned by Claude d’Urfé (1501–1558), who was appointed the French ambassador to the Council of Trent in 1546, for the chapel of his Château de la Bastie in the Loire Valley (Figures 5, 6) was designed by the renowned Italian architect Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola, who began his career in Bologna and later moved to Rome.

Panels inlaid by marquetry artist Fra Damiano da Bergamo and his workshop, housed in the convent of San Domenico in Bologna, formed the approximately seven-foot-high wood wainscot surround of the choir. Pictorial panels depicting religious, architectural, and landscape scenes alternated with geometric-patterned inlaid panels in the upper decorative register (see Figures 7–9); the lower half of the wainscot featured panels carved with putti, cartouches, grotesques, and strapwork. The choir was high-vaulted, with a white, blue, and gold plaster coffered ceiling. At the choir’s terminus was a marble bas-relief altar surmounted by an intarsia altarpiece representing the Last Supper that is signed by Fra Damiano (Figure 10). The Veronese artist Francesco Orlandini signed the large panel depicting the Descent of the Holy Spirit that graced one wall of the chapel’s small oratory (Figure 11). Twelve stained glass windows in grisaille (ca. 1557) depicting angels with musical instruments illuminated mural paintings on Old Testament themes and a floor pavement of faience tiles by the Rouen workshop of Masséot Abaquesne (1526–1564).<sup>3</sup>

In White’s original 1898 design scheme for 871 Fifth Avenue, the salvaged paneling was intended for prominent display adorning the walls of the dining room. When he subsequently acquired an Italian Renaissance coffered ceiling for the room from the Florentine dealer Stefano Bardini (1836–1922),<sup>4</sup> however, White decided that it overwhelmed the delicacy of the inlaid wainscoting. He ultimately chose, by 1899, to rearrange the panels and use them instead for the less visible setting of the long corridor connecting the main stair hall and the Régence ballroom of the house (Figure 12). Only the largest of the inlaid panels from La Bastie, the *Last Supper* altarpiece (Figure 10), remained in the dining room, where it was encased in a pocket door. A notation in a letter from White to Whitney in 1898 indicates that the paneling was “being arranged by Allard.”<sup>5</sup> The Allard in question was White’s frequent collaborator, the Paris-based decorating firm of Jules Allard et ses Fils, which was active in America and had maintained a branch office in New York known as Allard & Sons since 1883.



1. Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola (Italian, 1507–1573), designer; Fra Damiano da Bergamo (Damiano di Antoniolo de Zambelli [Italian, ca. 1480–1549] and workshop, maker; Francesco Orlandini (Italian, active mid-16th century), maker of oratory panel with *The Descent of the Holy Spirit* (Figure 11). Chapel from the Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé, Saint-Étienne-le-Molard, France. Bologna, ca. 1547–48. Walnut and intarsia of various woods, h. of wainscot ca. 7 ft. (2.13 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the children of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, 1942 (42.57.4.1–.108)

Allard letterhead of the time advertises “antique wood-work,” for which the firm enjoyed considerable repute in New York.<sup>6</sup> This phrase invites speculation that the decorating house may have sold the La Bastie marquetry paneling to White as well as installed it for him. Indeed, Jules Allard (Figure 13) had played such a role in the recent acquisition and installation of a “Marie-Antoinette Room” for the Whitney in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt II, at Newport. The white-and-gold salon was composed of salvaged wall panels carved about 1778 by Gilles-Paul Cauvet (1731–1788) for the Hôtel Mégrét de Sérilly in Paris and constituted, essentially, the first French period-room

installation in America.<sup>7</sup> Letters from Allard’s office during the construction of the Whitney interiors provide ample support for a precedent that Allard also purchased the La Bastie paneling for White. On January 18, 1898, Jules Allard proposed from Paris: “I am very much afraid that our beautiful Louis XVI salon decoration with all its period furniture of which I have sent you details and photographs, may escape us. . . . If you think that you have a use for this salon and that you may be almost certain to place it, let me know and I will immediately go buy it at my own risk and peril—I will be truly sorry if it escapes me.”<sup>8</sup> The manager of Allard’s New York branch office, Henri L. Bouché (1856–1908), pursued



2. View of left wall of the chapel in Figure 1, showing the entrance into the oratory

the subject in a letter to White on February 11: “We think we may have a buyer for some of the rooms of the Louis XIII Hotel Lauzin [*sic*] of which you have the album of photos. The Louis XVI Room we would like also to show to the same party. . . . P.S. Don’t you think that our Tiepolo ceiling would look well in the central panel of Mr. Harry Payne Whitney’s Ball Room? Will you propose it yourself or shall we see him about it?”<sup>9</sup> These letters offer evidence of Allard’s initiative not simply as a conventional interior decorator but as an enterprising dealer in period architectural salvage, with an independent streak that matched Stanford White’s own. Despite Allard’s persistent promotion of the Louis XVI period

paneling, which the firm had so successfully championed for the earlier Vanderbilt houses by the architect Richard Morris Hunt (1827–1895), White remained steadfast in his search for less fashionably correct earlier period rooms. In this he was reacting against the prevailing vogue for Louis XV and Louis XVI style interiors—a fashion that had been resurrected at midcentury by Empress Eugénie and that remained, abroad, the trademark of French taste for close to a century.

Although no explicit reference to acquiring the chapel of La Bastie occurs in White’s office correspondence, there are frequent cryptic allusions by Allard & Sons between May and October 1898 to the importation of something they call



3. Stanford White (1853–1906), ca. 1892. Photograph: George Cox



4. William Collins Whitney (1841–1904)

“Handelar’s Black Choir.” It is certainly plausible that the “black choir” referred to the dark inlaid panels of the Château de La Bastie, blackened by three centuries of candle soot and dust. The phrase first emerges on May 18, 1898, in a letter from Bouché in New York that informs White of an urgent cable from the Paris house (“Can buy Choir Hendlar for \$20,000.—but for spot cash”) with an immediate reply requested.<sup>10</sup>

The rather curious surname of “Handelar,” which makes no prior or subsequent appearance, after the Whitney project, in the known lists of European suppliers dealing with Stanford White, is also intriguing for its alternate spellings in this correspondence—ranging from “Handelaer” to “Handelard,” “Handlar,” or “Hendlar.” Such frequent and patently cavalier variations in spelling, employed by parties presumably in the know, suggest that “Handelar” was someone whose name, transmitted verbally, was rarely seen in print—someone, in other words, using an alias. Notably, both *handelaar* (Dutch) and *Handler* (German) translate as “dealer.”

In the period, such anonymity on the part of dealers was hardly the norm. Why did the seller of the “black choir” use an alias, then? To understand the sensitivity of such transactions, it is necessary to recognize the prevailing mood among connoisseurs and dealers in late nineteenth-century France. In an 1889 essay, the Parisian art historian, curator, and critic Émile Molinier (1857–1906) decried the inability of the French art world to intervene in the sale of the collection of Baron Frédéric Spitzer (1815–1890)—then widely considered the best medieval and Renaissance private holdings in Europe—and preserve it in a national museum: “But what is the use of recriminations? What is done is done. The Spitzer collection will in large part leave France to enrich foreign museums, and the same objects that were so strongly denigrated in the rue de Villejust will become admirable the day they will be exhibited in vitrines in Berlin or London: a peculiar way of understanding patriotism which consists of voluntarily stripping ourselves in order to give our neighbors the arms to combat us.”<sup>11</sup> Molinier’s regrets were shared by the nation’s leading museum directors and art authorities, but the greater public regarded such concerns as misplaced and construed them as an impediment to commerce. Moreover, as the reference to “objects that were so strongly denigrated” in the Spitzer collection indicates, informed opinion was generally cautious about the state’s need to secure such art—removed from its original context, restored, and displayed as decorative assemblages by dealer-collectors in galleries built for this purpose. To a skeptical Parisian public such displays were reminiscent of Romanticism—pictorial and picturesque, rather than historically inspired, such as the composite arrangements of Alexandre Lenoir (1761–1839) in his *Musée des Monuments Français* and the eclectic Gothic and Renaissance decors set up by the

medievalist Alexandre du Sommerard (1779–1842) within his apartment at the Hôtel de Cluny. On the whole, then, popular sentiment was opposed to laws controlling the export of art. The transatlantic trade in art was viewed as a steady source of wealth and national pride: demand abroad for French antiques implied appreciation of the nation’s genius.<sup>12</sup> Cultural patriotism thus inspired most members of the French public to favor the free export of art, even as similar national pride evoked anti-export tirades on the part of the artistic administrative elite.

In this climate, it would seem likely that “Handelar” was not a professional dealer but an amateur, perhaps with a reputation to uphold as someone interested in preserving the patrimony of France for the French. Today the architect-decorator Émile Peyre (Figure 14) is remembered as such a personality. Little known as a collector before his death, Peyre bequeathed the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris a fortune of approximately one million francs and his collection, comprising paintings, tapestries, furnishings, and objets d’art spanning the thirteenth through the eighteenth century, which forms the nucleus of that museum’s medieval masterpieces.<sup>13</sup> The evidence of Stanford White’s office correspondence suggests that the elusive Handelar was none other than Peyre.<sup>14</sup>

Émile Peyre’s most notable professional work was the decoration of the grand staircase of the Hôtel Hirsch, a town house acquired and remodeled in 1873 by the financier and philanthropist Maurice, baron de Hirsch (1831–1896), at 2–4, rue de l’Élysée in Paris.<sup>15</sup> The grand staircase was much admired internationally; the Prince of Wales considered the marble Rococo ramp and its gilt-bronze railing the most marvelous he had seen.<sup>16</sup> Such attention may have brought Peyre’s work to the notice of Stanford White or Jules Allard, but they were more likely lured by rumors of Peyre’s medieval collections. In his town house on the avenue de Malakoff, near the Bois de Boulogne, Peyre surrounded himself with these objects and dealt commercially in them.

Peyre’s collecting seems to have benefited from some privileged tips from dealers. Thus, when the Verdolin family offered the interiors of their Château de la Bastie for sale through the Lyon antiques dealer Derriaz in February 1874, the lion’s share of the major lots found their way to Peyre. The château’s chapel, well known in the surrounding Forez region, was dismantled for the sale despite the protestations of a regional preservation association, the Société Archéologique et Historique de “la Diana” (founded in 1862). The ensemble of the Château de la Bastie had been overlooked by the regional Beaux-Arts monument inspectors, and restrictive safeguards were not in place to protect its architectural integrity; the chapel interiors were released to the trade despite last-minute offers of state preservation subsidies. Elements were dispersed separately by Derriaz.



The stained glass windows were acquired by Baron Adolphe de Rothschild for his Paris mansion (built in 1865) at 47, rue de Monceau. His cousin Gustave de Rothschild bought a sculpted door; Alfred Beurdeley, the cabinetmaker and dealer, acquired the altar's dais in enamel tile, which he presented to the Louvre; the Musée de Cluny in Paris purchased a section of the faience floor tiles; and Courtin de Neufbourg bought the coffered ceiling vault and the red porphyry basin of the holy-water font for his Château de Beauvoir.<sup>17</sup> For a relatively small sum, 29,000 francs, Émile Peyre acquired the chapel paneling from Derriaz on December 29, 1874, together with the wall paintings, the marble-relief altar, the marquetry altarpiece, the central portion of the tiled floor pavement, and the holy-water font's pedestal.<sup>18</sup>

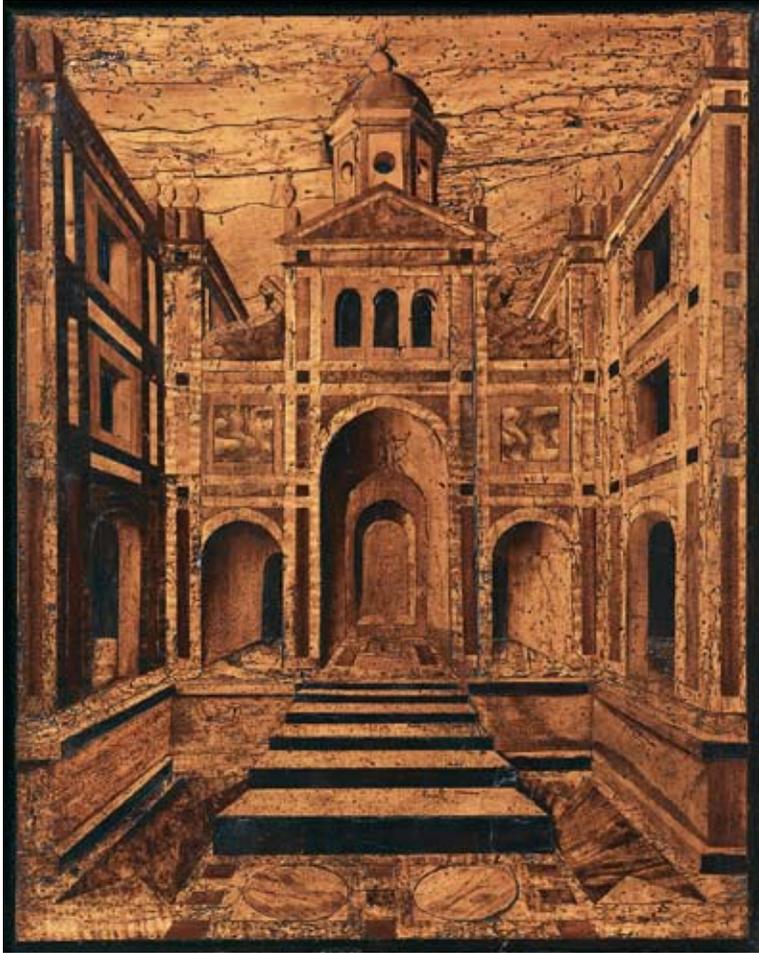
In 1880 Peyre voiced an interest in selling the ensemble to a concerned representative of the "Diana" preservation group from the Forez region surrounding La Bastie, insisting on "his desire to not retail this admirable decoration" but to sell it as an ensemble to the preservation-minded group and, if possible, "to re-establish it in its original setting," affirming that his profit margin "would be reasonable."<sup>19</sup> Within a few years the sale, return, and reinstallation of the interiors at La Bastie proved unattainable, and Peyre moved the elements to his home at 126, avenue de Malakoff, where he reunited them as part of his personal collection. The hall designed to accommodate these remnants (see Figure 15) was considered a faithful evocation of the chapel of La Bastie (with the exception of the coffered ceiling vault, which was replaced with a neutral-colored ceiling).<sup>20</sup>

To Arthur David de Saint-Georges, an Urfé family biographer who had expressed appreciation for the collection in 1896, Émile Peyre responded cautiously: "Above all, dear sir, if you publish an article on the de La Bastie chapel, speak very little of me. I detest anything that smacks of

advertisement, I would be therefore sorry that your work on the Forez region which you seem to know so well, may inspire on the part of the public an impression of me that would be too favorable and for which I believe to have no claim."<sup>21</sup> Peyre's wariness of publicity suggests that by 1896 the chapel's future as a private museum installation was in question, in which case he would have been motivated to sell and split the architectural elements into separate lots, despite his prior protestations.

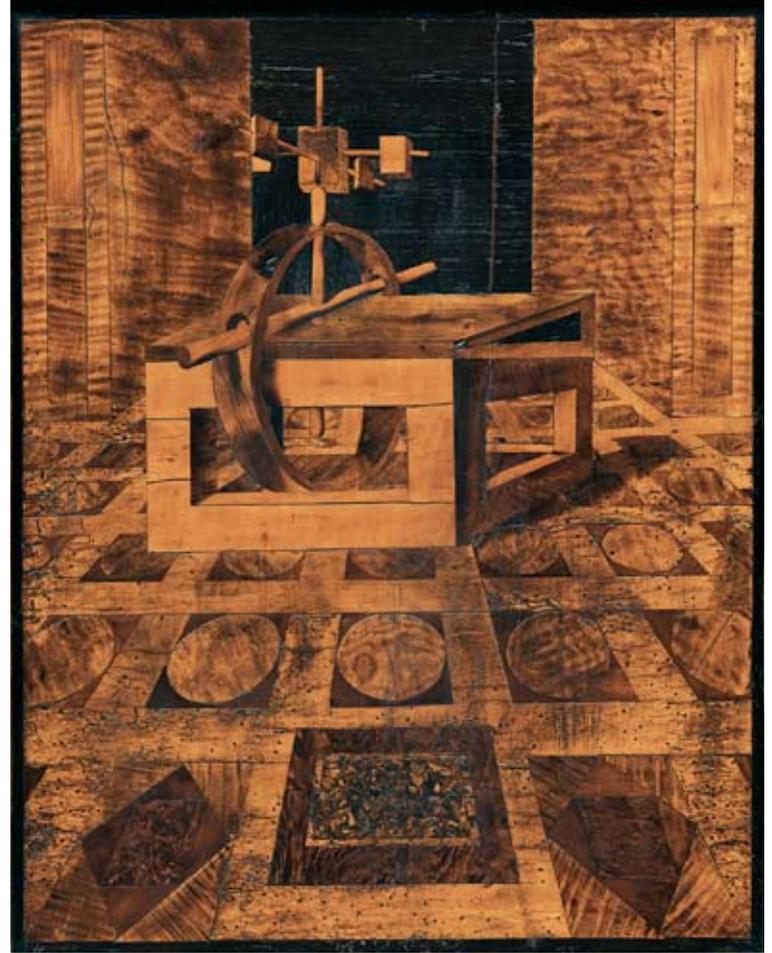
Tours of Peyre's residence were available to acknowledged art lovers and collectors. In addition to the chapel, one could inspect an important collection of carved wood panels of various periods, salvaged from demolished châteaux and abbeys, together with a gallery devoted to tapestries, marble sculpture, paintings, furniture, wrought-iron grillwork, and old locks. In sum, the profile was that of a comprehensive study collection that might furnish a practicing architect-decorator not only with aesthetic enjoyment but also, more practically, with enviable models to cast or replicate, and all for sale at the right price. In this respect, the Émile Peyre collection, with its diverse architectural fragments, was quite similar in arrangement and scope to that of contemporary dealer-collectors with "private museums." The trade in such architectural art, as opposed to the market for small-format masterpieces, was largely oriented toward export; the sizable scale of the art made it difficult to place in the gallery installations of existing European museums or stately homes. In Paris dealers in this field included Émile Gavet (1830–1904), Frédéric Spitzer, and Georges Hoentschel (1855–1915), a fellow donor to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. In Florence, Stefano Bardini, whose residence-cum-sales gallery was bequeathed to Florence as the Museo Bardini, was much in view. Hoentschel's collection was to be largely acquired in 1906 for the Metropolitan Museum by J. Pierpont Morgan. In a further twist of fate, Peyre obtained,

5, 6. Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé, Saint-Étienne-le-Molard, France. Photographs: copyright © france-voyage.com



7. Panel from the chapel of the Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé (Figures 1, 2). 21 x 16 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (53.3 x 42.2 cm)

8. Panel from the chapel of the Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé (Figures 1, 2). 20 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 16 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (53 x 41.6 cm)



toward the end of his life, a Spanish Renaissance *patio de honor* from the castle of Velez Blanco and bequeathed it in 1904 to an American client, George Blumenthal, who in turn left it, in 1941, to the Metropolitan Museum. There, reconstructed, it would be under the same roof as the La Bastie paneling; brought together, these two architectural ensembles preserved much of the installation from Peyre's private museum.<sup>22</sup>

Among the foreign visitors directed to tour Peyre's collection between 1896 and 1897 was Stanford White. He may have been to the avenue de Malakoff with Jules Allard or his son Georges, both of whom White visited several times in the late summer and fall of 1897. The New York architect appears to have been duly interested in key pieces, and the subject of a private sale was not only broached but seemingly resolved in an unsigned, handwritten letter to White dated Paris, September 7, 1897:

Agreeably to your proposition I accept your offer of six hundred thousand francs for the whole collection of objects that you agree to buy of me in their present condition, and which you will have taken away, all expenses and costs at your charge. As follows:

1<sup>st</sup> The woodwork only of the chapel de la Bastie, with the few faïence tiles that can still be useful.

2<sup>nd</sup> The four Beauvais tapestries, signed Distiage, representing scenes of the Iliad.

3<sup>rd</sup> The magnificent Italian Renaissance furniture.<sup>23</sup>

The contents of the inventory that follows indicate that the letter was likely written by or for Émile Peyre. It goes on to list individual lots comprising doors, wall panels, pilasters, crests, marble sculpture, cabinets, clocks, consoles, mirrors, and tapestries. An addendum, dated November 7, 1897, acknowledged partial payment, through the bank of Morgan, Harjes & Co., Paris, of 475,000 francs toward an account of 600,000 francs. What happened next is a matter of conjecture; it is likely that Peyre reconsidered his valuation of the chapel paneling for foreign export and asked for a higher settlement. He must have realized, as had Allard, that White was specifically in the market for Renaissance elements for the Whitney project and that the relative paucity of surviving, significant French interiors of this period (as compared to more numerous Italian examples) made the paneling all the more valuable. Apparently matters stalled, and we thus find White turning to Jules Allard by May 1898 to intercede

as his on-site agent; or it may have been Allard who was brokering the deal from the start. In any case the remainder of the story is revealed in an amazingly candid letter of June 1, 1898 (Figure 16), from Jules Allard to Henri Bouché in New York, who forwarded the communication to White's office, though it was surely not meant to survive:

You cannot imagine the ruses we had to use to buy at such a good rate the paneling from Handelarard. Those people had it in their head that all propositions made them were on behalf of Mr. White and they refused to budge from their high price.

So as soon as you charged us with going to see them we were careful not to show ourselves and we asked an architect friend of ours, known for his many projects in Paris, to go negotiate the paneling for use in a château he is building in the provinces. The strategy worked perfectly, the Handelards thinking of a French buyer abandoned their ridiculous pretensions and agreed to the reasonable price of 85,000 francs.

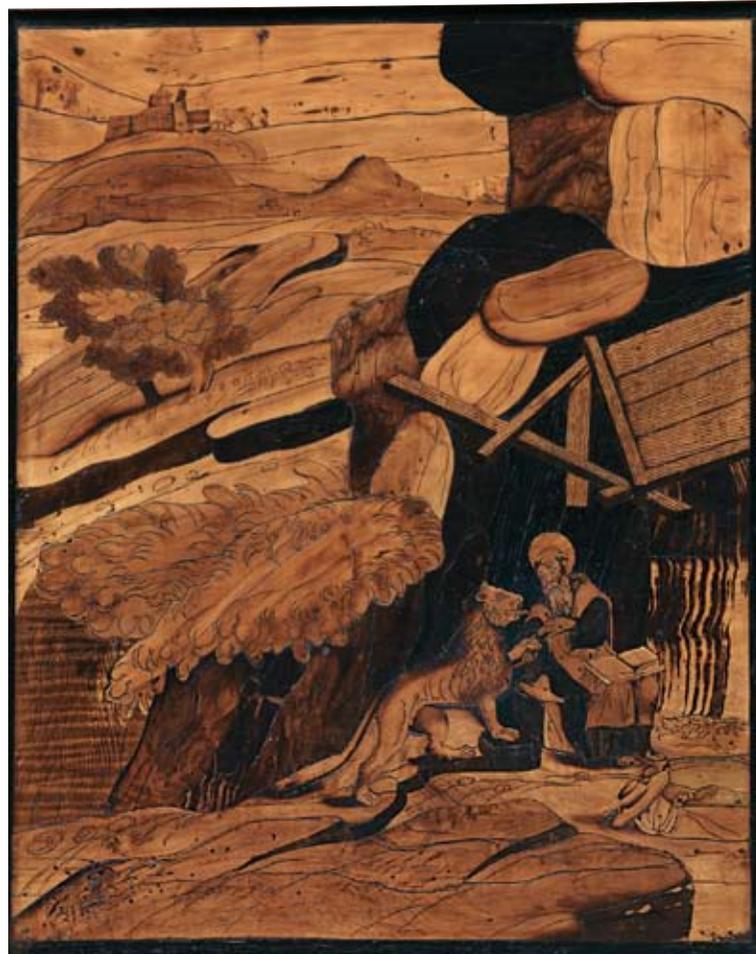
As soon as your cable in reply to ours was received, we gave the 85,000 to our friend the architect, who this very morning went with three carts to take the paneling down and pay for it.

The carts will take the paneling to the packers who will crate it and who will until the last moment think that the shipment is being made to the provinces. It will thus be unknown and will always remain unknown that we are the buyers and that the true recipient is Mr. White.

We therefore request that you go immediately to Mr. White on receipt of this letter to ask that he never say that he used us as an intermediary in this purchase as that would cause us major disagreements; the Handelards would go around crying to all the dealers that we made them lose money, that we cheated them in acting with such ruse etc. etc. and what's more, our friend the architect would reproach us for not having told him that it was for a buyer who had already made offers to the Handelards that we had him intercede. Mr. White will certainly understand that we can render all the more service if such remains unknown and the dealer prices we obtain for him would not be obtained if it were known that we buy for him.

We do not ask for a commission on this purchase, but we think that for our trouble, Mr. White will engage you for the reworking and installation of the paneling, and we will have indeed merited the consignment of this project.<sup>24</sup>

It is unknown why Allard refers to Peyre in the plural as "the Handelards"—unless there was a second, silent



partner. It is possible that Émile Peyre, given his relatively minor position in the realm of established European antique dealers, may have affiliated himself with a more prominent international player to capitalize on stock and to access business contacts. An ideal candidate might have been Stefano Bardini. The Florentine dealer's own inventory mirrored Peyre's focus on medieval and Renaissance architectural salvage, and the two men's paths may surely have crossed. Bardini also had a considerable history of buying for Stanford White. A reference in a September 10, 1898, letter from Bardini to White is suggestive of some collaboration with Peyre: "[T]he choir you bought from Mr. Handelaer, at Paris, was stopped when it reached Mondane, Franco-Italian frontier, and was sent back to Turin."<sup>25</sup> The date and Italian origin of the "choir" exclude it from being that of the Château de la Bastie, but the mention of "Handelaer" implies some form of acquaintance and a striking familiarity with the transit arrangements for goods ostensibly belonging to a business rival.

The friendly architect cited in Allard's letter was more than likely Gustave Lauzanne, who in 1898 was engaged in the building of a new Paris headquarters for Jules Allard et

9. Panel from the chapel of the Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé (Figures 1, 2). 20¾ x 16½ in. (52.7 x 41.9 cm)



10. Fra Damiano da Bergamo and workshop, maker. *The Last Supper*. Altar panel from the chapel of the Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé, Saint-Étienne-le-Molard (Figures, 1, 2). Signed and dated on the stairs at center bottom: "FRATER DAMIANUS CONVERSUS BERGOMAS OR DINIS PRAEDICATORUM FACTEBAT MDXLVIII." Walnut and intarsia of various woods, 60¾ x 40⅞ in. (154.3 x 103.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the children of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, 1942 (42.57.4.108)

ses Fils at 52, rue de Chateaudun. This veiled reference and Allard's request for Stanford White's silence about his role as intermediary may be evidence that the firm's American contacts were envied by colleagues in the Parisian trade. Several years earlier, the prominent French dealer Joseph Spiridon had written the architect Richard Morris Hunt that

"I know the Vanderbilts came to Paris, but as they are now in the hands of Mr. Allard, he no longer lets them go anywhere and I did not see them."<sup>26</sup> In any case, Allard's dual role as supplier and installer for White's numerous and complex domestic commissions incorporating period architectural salvage may have continued, at least for French artifacts, for years to come. As for Stanford White's discretion, it seemed assured. Bouché wrote White on June 21, 1898, to give a progress report: "We have just received an invoice for all the wood work which you bought from Handlar, and are doing the necessary formalities to pass these goods through the custom house. We will store them in our ware rooms, subject to your further directions."<sup>27</sup> By July 18, Allard & Sons sent an invoice for Paris and New York expenses related to the importation of the "Handelar Black Choir." The charges, totaling 2,607.85 francs, included taking down the woodwork in Paris, crating and handling to Allard's factory, packing in seven cases, freight to Dieppe, and bill of lading and shipment from Dieppe via Liverpool to Boston, together with taxes, fees, and insurance; these costs, added to the initial purchase price of 85,000 francs, brought the total due to 87,607.85 francs.<sup>28</sup>

The Rouen faience tiles from the chapel that had originally been offered to White in 1897 were apparently not part of the deal for the paneling and appear to have been subsequently purchased by Jules Allard directly from Peyre and then offered to White. In a letter of August 2, 1898, Henri Bouché wrote that he had received an invoice for "a lot of old tiles" belonging to Handelar's Black Choir and requested that White inform him where the tiles were to be sent.<sup>29</sup> The tiles arrived in five cases in October 1898 and were delivered to W. C. Whitney's residence.

Correspondence between White and Allard's offices in Paris and New York continued until the architect's death in 1906 with no further mention of Handelar and scant evidence of Émile Peyre.<sup>30</sup> The confidentiality did not extend to financial accounts with the client, however. On June 2, 1898, Stanford White wrote to William C. Whitney: "As I telephoned you, I have bought the old black chapel paneling for 85,000 francs (\$17,000.00) and the draft is on the way here against me."<sup>31</sup> A reckoning of accounts is attached, and on page three, among the suppliers listed, is "EMILE PEYRE." The first item noted under the heading of his name is an "Old carved and inlaid paneling, paneled wainscot Henri II chapel" priced curiously at \$49,500, a sum that is only partly explained by the addition of the architect's commission and restoration expenses. The Renaissance seats, *Iliad* tapestries, cabinets, console, and "sundry small fragments for models, etc.," originally offered as part of the 1897 deposit of 475,000 francs, follow in the listing. Totalling \$81,400, the pieces are summarily described, with the detailed exception of "2 Renaissance tapestries designed by Pilon for Grande de Poitiers" at \$8,400. Such a description



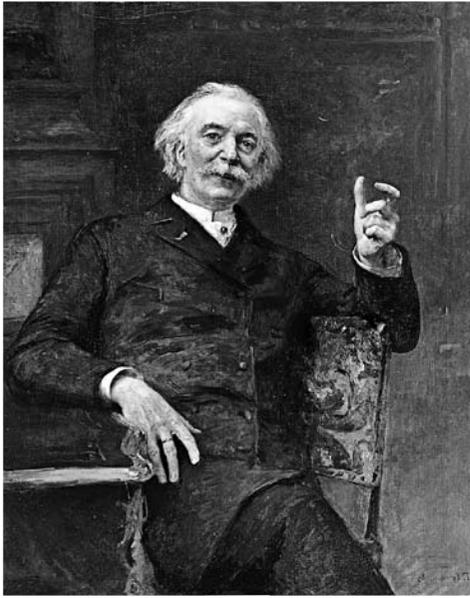
11. Francesco Orlandini. *The Descent of the Holy Spirit*. Oratory panel from the chapel of the Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé, Saint-Étienne-le-Molard (see Figures, 1, 2). Signed and dated lower right: "FRANCISCI ORLANDINI VERONENSIS OPUS 1547." Walnut and intarsia of various woods, 35¼ x 43¼ in. (89.5 x 109.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the children of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, 1942 (42.57.4.35)

12. Main stair hall of the William C. Whitney residence, 871 Fifth Avenue, New York, ca. 1900. Designed by Stanford White, 1897; executed 1898. The paneling from the Château de la Bastie chapel may be seen along the wall of the corridor at the left, behind the chimneypiece. Photograph: Museum of the City of New York (90.44.1.195)

does not match the original lots proposed and must have been the result of some subsequent review of further Renaissance acquisitions from the avenue de Malakoff town house. In a document that may be a final reckoning of purchases for Whitney, updated through January 25, 1899, Émile Peyre's name appears again on page three and key objects are better described.<sup>32</sup> The first item is the familiar "Old carved paneling, Henry II paneled wainscoting from La Chapelle de Betie [*sic*]. Now in the long hall connecting main hall and ballroom." Listed last are "2 Long Renaissance tapestries, designed by Germaine [*sic*] Pilon for Diane de Poitiers. Hung in the well of the stairs." These tapestries, mentioned twice as being from Peyre's collection, are undoubtedly *The Drowning of Britomartis* and *The Blasphemy of Niobe*, both probably designed by Jean Cousin the Elder for Diane de Poitiers, the legendary mistress of Henri II, for her Château d'Anet and woven about 1547–59. Like the Henri II-era paneling from La Bastie, the tapestries were presented to the Metropolitan by the Whitney family in 1942 (MMA 42.57.1–2).

Stanford White's purposeful quest to secure what he considered appropriate French Renaissance art and architecture for the W. C. Whitney commission illustrates the architect's





13. Fernand Cormon (French, 1854–1924). *Portrait of Jules Allard (1832–1907)*, 1889. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport, Rhode Island



14. Alfred Lenoir (French, 1850–1920). *Émile Peyre (1824–1904)*, 1907. Bronze, h. 48 in. (122 cm). Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris (29533). Photograph: Jean Tholance

broad knowledge and painterly eye for imaginative assemblages in designing his period rooms. These interiors quickly became models to emulate for the residences of refined clients of the late nineteenth century and were emblematic of the tastemaking role enjoyed by prominent architects of the

15. Hall emulating the La Bastie chapel in Émile Peyre's Paris residence, where the rearranged marquetry paneling hung between 1882 and 1898, prior to its sale to Jules Allard. This photograph was taken in 1904 to document the Peyre bequest to the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. The large wall paintings, also from the La Bastie chapel, were not included in the sale to Allard and were part of the bequest; they have since been reinstalled in their original context at the Château de la Bastie-d'Urfé. Photograph courtesy of Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris (fonds Émile Peyre, no. 19)



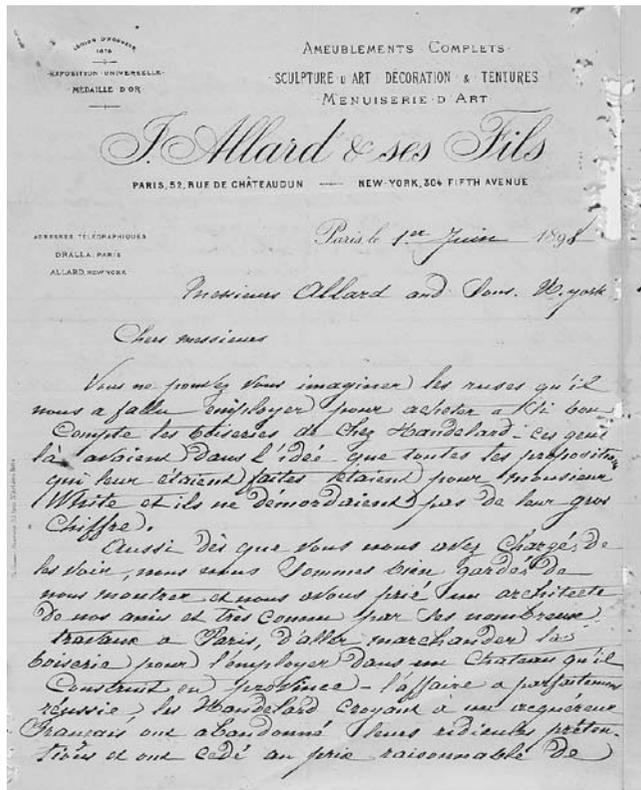
age. For his part, Émile Peyre had probably acquired the chapel of La Bastie with the initial intention of profitably selling the recycled period paneling for insertion in an important architectural project. Growing concern within the French museum community over the export of relatively intact period ensembles, particularly one as rare as the La Bastie paneling, might have encouraged him to look first inside France for a buyer; failing that, he chose to deal abroad discreetly, using an alias. It is possible that Peyre was particularly sensitive to the issue because he had at some stage harbored the idea of including the chapel in his bequest to the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs and perhaps said something publicly to that effect, inviting further scrutiny.

All of these behind-the-scenes dealings encouraged White's association with Allard & Sons to take a conspiratorial turn. The firm's sleight-of-hand intervention may have been ethically flexible, but Allard's interests lay in ensuring a steady supply of architectural material in need of restoration, enhancement, and decorative installation,<sup>33</sup> and their commercial instinct was in the spirit of the day. International decorating houses such as Allard & Sons not only historically acted as art dealers but often made their first foray into the American market under such guise.<sup>34</sup> The economic potential of such practical service, although it quickly became secondary to furnishing artistic interiors, was never out of mind for these firms.

Although Peyre, as a dealer, has been acknowledged as the source for the La Bastie paneling and other decorative arts in the W. C. Whitney residence, the evolution of the exchange and his use of the Handelard alias are enlightening. Such covert maneuvering suggests how Continental dealers jockeyed for the developing and potentially lucrative American market while paying lip service to a nascent concern about the fate of dislocated and often domestically neglected artistic works. The participation of now-anonymous intermediaries between European dealers and American clients may have been a standard tactic designed to facilitate profitable transfers to North American collections while harming no one's reputation.

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16. Letter from Jules Allard to Henri Bouché at Allard & Sons, New York, June 1, 1898, instructing him to alert Stanford White to Allard's actions in Paris to procure "Handelard's Black Choir" (see note 24). Stanford White Papers, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York (SW 13.1(A))

Museum of Art; Janet Parks of the Drawings and Archives Department of the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University; Chantal Bouchon and Odile Nouvel at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; and Samuel G. White of Platt Byard Dovell White, architects.

## NOTES

Translations from French are by the author unless otherwise stated.

1. Wardropper 2004, pp. 24, 26; Craven 2005, p. 100.
2. The house had been originally built in 1880 after designs by William Schicknel for Robert L. Stuart and was acquired by W. C. Whitney in 1896. White directed the elaborate redecorating for Whitney, leaving the original brownstone facade virtually untouched. Following the sale of its contents, the house was demolished in November 1942. See McKim, Mead & White 1973, pp. 65–66.
3. David de Saint-Georges 1896, p. 69.
4. Stanford White, New York, to W. C. Whitney, January 25, 1899, Stanford White Papers, SW 28.4.
5. *Ibid.*, June 2, 1898, SW 28.5.
6. Allard & Sons, New York, to McKim, Mead & White, July 1, 1898, Stanford White Papers, SW 13.2 (A).
7. Pons 1995, p. 364. The room, designated a "Ladies Reception Room," was installed, under the supervision of the architect Richard Morris Hunt (1827–1895), by 1895 in the Vanderbilts' neo-Renaissance villa The Breakers.

8. Allard to White, January 18, 1898, Stanford White Papers, SW 13.2 (A). It appears that White did not buy the room; the salon in question may be a Louis XVI paneled room stripped of paint and added as a library to the interiors of the Louis XIII Hôtel de Lauzun (1657) on the Île St.-Louis by its mid-nineteenth-century owner, Baron Frédéric-Jérôme Pichon (1812–1896). Several interiors introduced by Pichon were put on the market by his grandson following the baron's death. It may be that that this salon, after a circuitous route, eventually came to America. Jules Allard et ses Fils did supply, through White, period elements of Louis XIV paneling from the château of Phoebus d'Albert, baron de Foix, near Bordeaux, that were greatly augmented with modern oak and parcel-gilt panels from the Allard studios, for the décor of W. C. Whitney's ballroom. The paneling of this reception room was removed in 1942 by French & Co., acquired by the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (never installed), and deaccessioned; it is now in a private Maryland collection.
9. Bouché to White, February 11, 1898, Stanford White Papers, SW 13.2 (A). White did, in this case, subsequently buy the Tiepolo, and it may be the work he sold not to Harry Payne Whitney but to his estranged uncle, Colonel Oliver Hazard Payne. This circa 1750 oil-on-canvas ceiling painting representing *The Glorification of the Barbaro Family* was given in 1923 to the Metropolitan Museum (MMA 23.128).
10. *Ibid.*, May 18, 1898, SW 13.2 (A).
11. Molinier 1889, p. 105. The Spitzer collection was indeed widely dispersed at public auction in 1893, with many elements making their way to American and British collections.
12. "France Considers Art Export Law," *New York Times*, July 7, 1912, p. C10.
13. Beauchesne 1905, pp. 420–21. Peyre's bequest to the nation was ironically almost dispersed at auction by the French state in 1905; it was deemed by the fiscal authorities that the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, beneficiary of the gift, was a private association and thus subject to inheritance taxes on the bequest totaling 275,000 francs; a public outcry prevented a potential auction to realize the sum. See *Le bulletin de l'art ancien et moderne*, no. 266 (June 24, 1905), p. 193.
14. Craven (2005, p. 100; 2008, pp. 282–83) mentions that White obtained the paneling through Peyre, but does not elaborate.
15. The mansion (1861) was originally built as an eventual retirement villa for Empress Eugénie by the architect Lefuel and extensively remodeled for Baron Hirsch by his architect Chatenay, working with Peyre. The property is today an annex of the adjoining presidential residence, the Palais de l'Élysée.
16. "Une ancienne demeure de l'impératrice," *L'illustration* (Paris), no. 3278 (December 23, 1905), p. 426.
17. David de Saint-Georges 1896, pp. 69–70.
18. These elements were moved to Peyre's shop at 25, rue Saint-Georges.
19. "Épaves de la Bâtie," *Bulletin de la Diana* (Montbrison, France) 1 (1876–81), May–August 1880, pp. 250–51.
20. "Un portrait de Claude d'Urfé," *Bulletin de la Diana* (Montbrison, France) 3 (1885–86), July–October 1886, p. 346.
21. David de Saint-Georges 1896, p. 71.
22. Taylor 1941.
23. Stanford White Papers, SW 28.5.
24. Stanford White Papers, SW 13.1(A): "Vous ne pouvez vous imaginer les ruses qu'il nous a fallu employer pour acheter à si bon compte les boiseries de chez Handelard. Ces gens là avaient dans l'idée que toutes les propositions qui leur étaient faites étaient pour Monsieur White et ils ne démordaient pas de leur gros chiffre. /

Aussi dès que vous nous avez chargés de les voir, nous nous sommes bien gardés de nous montrer et nous avons prié un architecte de nos amis et très connu pour ses nombreux travaux à Paris, d'aller marchander la boiserie pour l'employer dans un château qu'il construit en province. L'affaire a parfaitement réussie, les Handelard croyant à un acquéreur français ont abandonné leurs ridicules prétentions et ont cédé au prix raisonnable de 85,000 francs. / Dès que votre dépêche en réponse à la nôtre nous est parvenue, nous avons remis les 85,000 à notre ami l'architecte, qui a été ce matin même avec trois chariots, enlever les boiseries et les payer. / Les chariots porteront ces boiseries chez l'emballeur qui va les emballer et qui jusqu'au dernier moment croira que l'expédition doit être faite pour la province. On ignore ainsi et on ignorera toujours que c'est nous les acheteurs et que le vrai destinataire est Monsieur White. / Nous vous prions donc et très instamment d'aller trouver Monsieur White au reçu de cette lettre pour le prier de ne jamais dire qu'il s'est servi de notre entremise dans cet achat car cela nous causerait de grands désagréments; les Handelard iraient crier chez les marchands que nous leur avons fait perdre de l'argent, que nous les avons trompés en agissant avec ruse etc. etc. et en outre, notre ami l'architecte nous reprocherait de lui avoir laissé ignorer que c'était pour un acheteur ayant déjà fait des propositions aux Handelard que nous l'avons fait marcher. Monsieur White comprendra certainement que nous pouvons lui rendre d'autant plus de services qu'ils seront ignorés et que les prix marchands que nous obtenons ne seraient pas obtenus si l'on savait que nous achetons pour lui. / Nous ne demandons pas de commission sur cet achat, mais nous pensons que pour notre dérangement, Monsieur White vous chargera de la refecton et pose de la boiserie, et nous aurons bien mérité d'être chargés de ce travail. / Pour nous rembourser de cet achat et aux termes de votre dépêche, nous tirons sur Monsieur White, 160 5eme avenue, New York, notre traite à vue de \$17,000. et nous vous prions de l'aviser ce que nous faisons d'autre part. / La boiserie partira de Liverpool pour Boston le 11 juin, à votre adresse. / J. Allard et ses fils."

25. Bardini, Florence, to White, Florence, September 10, 1898, Stanford White Papers, SW 13.1.
26. Spiridon to Hunt, Paris, April 16, 1895, Biltmore Company Archives, Asheville, North Carolina, 1.1/1.5 box 71, folder 15.
27. Bouché to White, June 21, 1898, Stanford White Papers, SW 13.1 (A).
28. *Ibid.*, July 18, 1898.
29. *Ibid.*, August 2, 1898.
30. A reference to Peyre by the Paris painting restorers Chapuis & Cie. cites his opinion that four Italian paintings, probably from the Paris collection, should be extended by 30 to 40 centimeters; see Chapuis & Cie, Paris, to Stanford White, July 11, 1898, *ibid.*, SW 13.1.
31. *Ibid.*, SW 28.5.
32. White, New York, to Whitney, January 25, 1899, *ibid.*, SW 28.4.
33. When it came to installing the imported architectural elements, Allard's collaboration with White was not always smooth. The architect had a design vision that often clashed with the production and execution methods of a French decorating house. Allard maintained workshop practices, rooted in eighteenth-century tradition, that were both admirably suited and adverse to White's schemes. Stanford White was a conservationist, in matters of finish and texture, ahead of his time; to him patina was a valuable part

of antiquarianism. On November 6, 1898, White wrote a scathing letter to Allard & Sons (SW 21.175) concerning the firm's work on the interiors of his private residence. He felt Allard's New York painters had compromised the patina of an old Venetian ceiling by using blow pipes for surface cleaning followed by wax and polish; he regretted that the same thing had occurred to the "old Henry II" paneling then going up in Whitney's residence "although it had been done very successfully" by the Paris house. "This woodwork had the most beautiful soft bloom I have ever seen in my life, and there was not the slightest necessity for shellacing it or waxing it, as they have done." Stanford White evidently preferred the Renaissance paneling of the Château de la Bastie in its blackened, late nineteenth-century state, with the patina, or "bloom," that explains his reference to the panels as "Handelard's Black Choir."

34. Jules Allard's decades of association with the Vanderbilt family began in 1881 largely as a purveyor of tapestries, through the intermediary of Samuel P. Avery, to William H. Vanderbilt.

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