

The Ancienne Indes Tapestries: An Illustrated Provenance

The provenance of our tapestries is nothing short of illustrious. Their first owner was King Louis XIV, seen here in his iconic portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud, now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris.



The original set of eight tapestries were woven from cartoons that had been gifted to the King by Johan Maurits, Prince of Nassau-Siegen, and former Dutch Governor of Brazil. He is shown below in a portrait by Jan de Baen, in the collection of the Mauritshuis, his former home, now a museum, in The Hague.



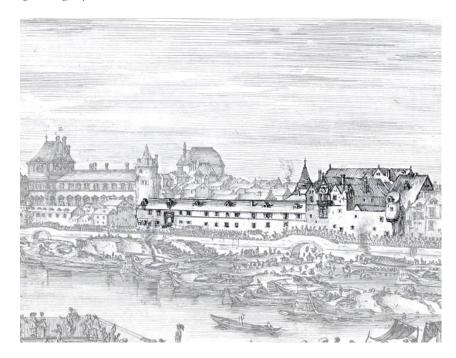


The tapestries were woven at the Royal Manufacture of Gobelins in Paris, established by Louis XIV in 1662 to produce tapestries, furniture, rugs, paintings, and precious silver and gold objects for the king's palaces and as royal gifts. The "Anciennes Indes" tapestries were first woven there in 1687–88.

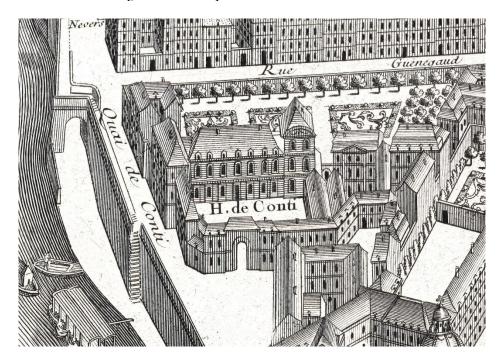
A painting at the Chateau de Versailles by Simon Renard de Saint-André illustrates the King, standing on a platform at the right, visiting Gobelins and inspecting the various works produced there.



In 1689 our tapestries were delivered to the Garde-Meuble de la Couronne, the entity responsible for the care, storage, and arrangement of French royal possessions. The Garde-Meuble was first housed in the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon, along the Seine, seen here in a 1646 engraving by Stefano Della Bella, with the Louvre visible at left:



It remained there until 1758, at which time its holdings were moved to the Hôtel de Conti, seen below in Turgot's 1739 map of Paris.



Ten years later the Garde-Meuble moved to the Hôtel d'Evreux on the Rue du Faubourg St-Honoré. That property had been acquired by King Louis XV in 1753 for his mistress Madame de Pompadour, who lived there until her death in 1764. The Hôtel is now the Élysée Palace, since 1848 the official residence of the President of France.



A permanent home for the Garde-Meuble was eventually found in the newly-constructed Hôtel de la Marine on the Place de la Concorde, seen below, to which our tapestries were moved in 1772.



The French Revolution brought about the transfer of the Royal Collections to the new Republic, and in 1793 the National Assembly decreed that the Louvre should become a public museum to display the King's masterpieces, including our tapestries. We do not know exactly where they were exhibited within the Louvre, seen below in a 1763 view in the Getty Museum by Nicolas-Jean-Baptiste Raguenet.



Many of the most celebrated paintings and sculptures were placed in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre, depicted at just this time (1794–1796) by Hubert Robert. Artists, students, and casual visitors can be seen viewing and studying the works on display.



In 1796 the Louvre closed for reorganization and at some point in the years following at least four of the tapestries from the set, including our two, passed into private ownership. They may have been sold in the belief they were duplicates of others remaining in the now-former French Royal Collection. However, it is unlikely that it was known then that they were from the first set woven, the *editio princeps*, while remaining examples were produced later. In fact the one still in the Mobilier National, housed in the former Gobelins Manufacture where it was made, comes from the second edition.





The four tapestries reappeared in the nineteenth century in the collection of the Belgian-born Charles-Henri Braquenié (1815–1897), who with his brother Alexandre, had established the most celebrated tapestry establishment in nineteenth century France, Bracquenié Frères. Charles-Henri Braquenié was a designer, manufacturer, seller, and collector of tapestries.





Both the headquarters of his firm and his residence were located in the former Hôtel Colbert de Torcy at 16 rue Vivienne in the 2nd Arrondissement of Paris. This handsome seventeenth-century palace was built in 1640 by the architect Pierre Le Muet for Jacques Tubeuf and was later owned by the French statesman Charles Colbert, Marquis de Croissy. The building (seen below) is now the world headquarters of the design and fashion house Céline.



After the death of Braquenié in 1897, his collection, including the four "Anciennes Indes" tapestries, was sold at an auction in Paris at the Hôtel Drouot. Our two tapestries were lots 3 and 4 in the sale, bringing the extraordinary prices of 7700 francs for each.







Braquenié's four tapestries were purchased by an unidentified private collector, only to emerge in the twentieth century in the collection of the flamboyant art collector and interior designer Carlos ("Charlie") de Beistegui (1895–1970). Beistegui was celebrated for his lavish residences, which included a penthouse in Paris designed by Le Corbusier and the Château de Groussay, west of Versailles. In 1948 he acquired the Palazzo Labia in Venice, the great baroque palace known for its frescoes by Giambattista Tiepolo. Beistegui undertook a major renovation of the palazzo and made a series of important acquisitions for its interior –among which were the four tapestries from the *Anciennes Indes* series.



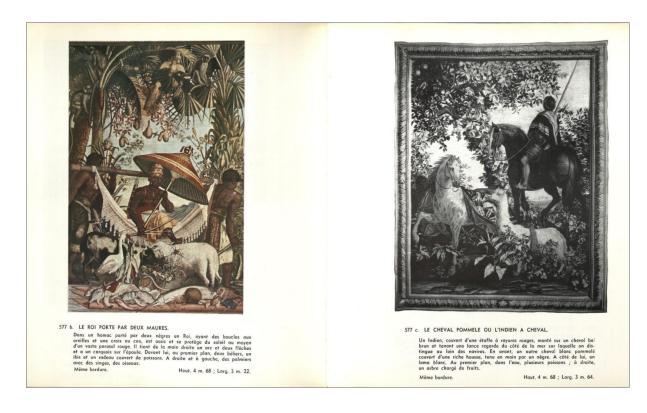
On September 5, 1951, Beistegui held a masked costume ball in the palazzo, ostensibly to celebrate the completion of his restoration work. Titled "Le Bal orientale," it was one of the most famous social events of its time and came to be known as the "party of the century." A photograph from the event shows Beistegui in costume, perched atop sixteen-inch stilts, standing between two of the tapestries.



In 1964 Beistegui sold Palazzo Labia and put its contents up for auction. The four tapestries were included — our two as lots 577 b and c in the sale.







They then passed to a private collection from whom they were acquired by the industrialist and composer Alberto Bruni Tedeschi (1915–1996). He installed them in the Castello of Castagneto Po, near Turin, the house that he shared with his wife, the pianist Marisa Borini, and their two children —the author, actress, and movie director Valentina Bruni Tedeschi, and her sister Carla Bruni —actress, model, and later First Lady of France.







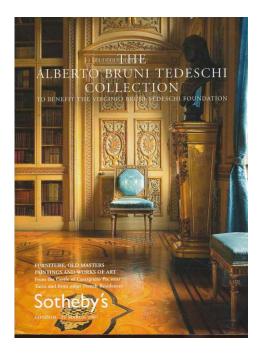


The Castello was the subject of Valentina's semi-autobiographical 2013 film, A Castle in Italy (Un château en Italie). A photograph shows two of the tapestries hanging above the stairwell in the Castello.





In 2007 the contents of the house were sold in a spectacular auction held by Sotheby's in London – the catalogue cover and an illustration with a detail of one of the tapestries below.





There the four tapestries were offered as separate lots, with our two being purchased by the collector and rare book dealer W. Graham Arader III. He brought them to New York City, where they have hung in his Manhattan townhouse for the past fifteen years.



