A Case Study in Plunder and Restitution: Three Ancient Sculptures from the Lanckoroński Collection

Victoria S. Reed

Abstract

In this article I examine the methodology and resources used to trace the provenance of three ancient Greek and Roman sculptures in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA). They belonged to Karol Lanczkoroński (1848–1933) of Vienna, were looted during the Nazi era, and were returned to the Lanckoroński family following World War II. In discussing these sculptures, I consider the relative challenges of researching ancient works of art compared to Modern and Early Modern European paintings and sculptures, drawing on other case studies of Nazi-era looting from the collection of the MFA.
In recent years, the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) has issued separate guidelines for its member institutions to follow in order to mitigate two major risk factors in building a collection: the possibility of acquiring an archaeological object recently looted from the ground, and the possibility of acquiring or otherwise holding a work of art looted in Europe between 1933 and 1945. Perhaps for that reason, the fields of antiquities provenance research and Nazi-era provenance research are often considered separately. They are not, however, mutually exclusive, and research into the collecting history of antiquities can and should draw on the myriad resources that have been made available to facilitate provenance research in the years since the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets (1998). Works of ancient art were collected in prewar and World War II-era Europe; indeed, classical antiquities have been valued by Western collectors since the Renaissance.

In almost every way, researching the provenance of antiquities can be a true challenge, even with increased access to research resources. Unlike Modern and Early Modern European paintings, sculptures, and works of decorative art, which were created for private ownership and display, it is not usually possible to know precisely when the collecting history of an archaeological object began. A researcher can be certain that a Rembrandt painting will have been in circulation —somewhere—between the time it was made and the present. Assuming a privately held antiquity is authentic, however, the details of its excavation are almost always unknown, and for that reason it could have been in circulation for a week, 10 years, or 200 years. Researchers thus often find themselves looking for a paper trail that may not exist. Antiquities, like sculptures and decorative arts in general, are also more difficult to trace than paintings and drawings. A researcher can search for the proverbial Rembrandt in past auctions, inventories, and exhibition catalogs by artist’s name, by subject matter or descriptive term, and by materials and dimensions; while some of these criteria may vary over time (for example, as attributions change or subjects are reidentified), it is unlikely that all of them will. A researcher tracing even the most exceptionally documented antiquity, on the other hand, may find the same sculpture in different inventories with wildly divergent titles and subjects, no artist’s name, and materials and dimensions misdescribed or even changing over the years as restorations are added and removed. Without a distinctive subject, an inscription, or documentary evidence that it came


2 Scientifically excavated antiquities rarely if ever appear in the art trade. Given this fact, AAMD’s so-called 1970 rule, requiring a documented provenance for new acquisitions of archaeological materials outside their country of origin by the date of the 1970 UNESCO Convention, is intended to diminish the material incentive for recently looted items.

3 For example, the MFA’s Roman marble sculpture identified as Juno (accession no. 2011.75) can be securely traced to the collection of Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi (1595–1632) in Rome. While in the Ludovisi collection, it was inventoried variously as Giulia, an empress, Faustina, or with no identification, and only sometimes with measurements. See the object record at MFA Boston, https://collections.mfa.org/objects/552590 (accessed 9 December 2019).
from a known collection, tracing the provenance of an ancient work of art can feel all but impossible.

[3] It is therefore fortunate that three ancient sculptures at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA) can be documented to the famed collection of Karol Lanckoroński of Vienna. The sculptures were all looted from his descendants during the Nazi era and were returned to the family following World War II. The return of plundered objects (whether paintings, decorative arts, or antiquities) to their rightful owners was rarely if ever publicly documented, however, and tracing the history of the sculptures to the Lanckoroński family was possible only because of their appearance in postwar auctions held in the family’s name. Those public sales provided the information needed to begin to construct for them a more full and detailed 20th-century ownership history.

[4] The first sculpture to be accessioned, a Roman marble portrait bust or herm (about AD 110–130), was sold by dealer Herbert Cahn to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lipson in late 1967 for the MFA (Fig. 1). Cahn stated that it had come from the Lanckoroński collection (Lanckorońska for female family members), and earlier that year a sale of “Antiquities, the Property of the Countess Adelheid Lanckorońska” was held at Sotheby’s, London, and included an unillustrated “Roman Stone Bust of a Bearded Philosopher” measuring 19 inches tall. It seemed at the time possible, though not certain, to be identical to the MFA object. Several years later, Benjamin Rowland Jr. (1904–1972) bequeathed a Roman marble satyr (about AD 150–200) to the MFA that had likewise been sold from the Lanckorońska collection in 1967 (Fig. 2). Although not illustrated, it is described specifically enough in the catalog (“Roman marble nude Figure of a faun, with arms and lower part of legs missing, body slightly bending over, a tree stump behind”) to plausibly identify with the MFA sculpture, though at the time of acquisition this identification was made only tentatively. A Greek votive relief to Helios and Mên (about 340 BC) is the easiest to identify in the 1967 Lanckorońska sales because it is illustrated. It also has an inscription and a distinctive subject, showing on one side Helios in a quadriga and on the other Mên, the moon god of Asia Minor, with votive offerings (Fig. 3). It too was purchased by Herbert Cahn in 1967 and sold to the MFA in 1974. All three sculptures are included in the MFA catalog Sculpture in Stone: The Greek, Roman, and Etruscan Collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1976). The bust or herm was said to have been “in the European market before the Second World War”; the satyr was said to have come “[f]rom the Lanckoroński Collection, Vienna”; and the votive relief, the

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4 The difficulty in tracing the provenance of archaeological materials is a loophole that can be easily exploited by unscrupulous sellers, who may falsify provenance or otherwise provide unsubstantiated ownership histories.


7 Egyptian, Western Asiatic, Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Byzantine, and Viking Antiquities (1967), lot 21, sold to Cahn.
best-documented of the three, was traced to an exhibition in 1893, where it was lent by the “Count K. Lanckoroński Collection, Vienna”, the only information given in the MFA’s published provenance⁸.

Fig. 1. Portrait bust of a statesman or philosopher, Roman, Imperial Period, about AD 110–130. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Lipson, 67.1032 (photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

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⁸ Mary B. Comstock and Cornelius C. Vermeule, *Sculpture in Stone: The Greek, Roman and Etruscan Collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, Boston 1976, 74, cat. 118; 113-114, cat. 172; 53, cat. 78. Since the publication of *Sculpture in Stone*, new details about the sculptures’ early provenance have been uncovered. The satyr can be traced to the Villa Anicii on the Via Latina, Rome, in 1860; Karol Lanckoroński lent the relief of Helios and Mên to the K. K. Österreichische Museum für Kunst und Industrie, Vienna, as early as 1885. Full provenance information is at MFA Boston, [https://collections.mfa.org/search/objects/*/Lanckoronski](https://collections.mfa.org/search/objects/*/Lanckoronski) (accessed 9 December 2019).
Fig. 2. Young satyr, Roman, Imperial Period, about AD 150–200. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Benjamin Rowland Jr., 1974.127 (photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Fig. 3. Votive relief to Helios and Mên, Greek, Late Classical Period, about 340 BC. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Frederick Brown Fund, 1972.78 (photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)
Though the Lanckoroński name had been associated with these sculptures since 1967, for the herm and the satyr, this collecting history was confirmed only in the 2000s, when the MFA made strides in conducting provenance research, verifying anecdotal or otherwise unsubstantiated information, and publishing ownership history online. At this time, with the assistance of declassified documents from the National Archives and Records Administration, the MFA uncovered details of the looting and restitution of numerous European paintings, sculptures, and works of decorative art in the museum collection. Yet, even knowing that the Lanckoroński collection had been expropriated during the Nazi era, the MFA’s records remained comparatively incomplete when it came to the classical sculptures’ movements between 1933 and 1945. Nothing about their earlier history had been published in the 1967 Sotheby’s catalogs; this practice was not unusual in the years before 1998. For much of the twentieth century, provenance was considered confidential or privileged information; if and when details were publicly disclosed, it was usually to enhance a “prestigious” provenance or to attest to an object’s quality and authenticity. Works of art that had been plundered and subsequently restituted were often sold anonymously on the market, with few to no details of their earlier whereabouts, leading to intense efforts to reconstruct their wartime provenance after the Washington Conference.

Discovering details about the movements of the Lanckoroński collection between the 1930s and the immediate postwar period was possible thanks in large part to the research of Joanna Winiewicz-Wolska, who in 2014 published Karol Lanckoroński and His Viennese Collection. Though the Lanckoronski collection had been studied by earlier scholars, before 2014 no thorough examination of the objects’ wartime provenance was widely available. For objects coming from Austrian collections, such details can usually only be gleaned from documents held at the Bundesdenkmalamt, or Federal Monuments Office, in Vienna. The purpose of the present case study is not to go into the depth that Winiewicz-Wolska does. To be sure, nothing can replicate the experience of consulting primary sources in person, but for many American museums with limited resources, a trip to the archives of Vienna for provenance research is not

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For example, in 1980, the MFA purchased a pair of 16th-century Netherlandish altarpiece panels (attributed to the Master of Alkmaar, accession nos. 1980.356a-b and 1980.357a-b) shortly after they had been anonymously consigned to Sotheby Parke-Bernet, New York. Knowing only that they had been plundered from—and not immediately restituted to—the collection of David Goldmann of Vienna, it took months of research in 2004 to confirm that the panels had in fact been returned to the Goldmann family, who consigned them for sale in 1979.

Joanna Winiewicz-Wolska, Karol Lanckoroński and His Viennese Collection, 2 vols., Cracow 2014.

possible except in the most pressing of circumstances. Specialized secondary sources such as her book, and others, were therefore crucial aids in the research process.

[7] Count Karol Lanckoroński (1848–1933) built a vast collection of works of art from around the world, which grew to be among the largest in Vienna. He housed much of it at the Palais Lanckoroński at 18 Jacquingasse. Especially famed for its Italian Renaissance paintings, the collection opened to the public in 1902, and Count Lanckoroński published a guidebook the same year. After his death in 1933, the building at Jacquingasse and its contents were apparently inherited by his son Antoni (1893–1956), who along with his half-sister Adelajda (1900–1980) was living at the family’s property in Rozdól, Poland; a third sibling, Karolina (1898–2002), lived in Rome. Antoni Lanckoroński sought to export the art collection to Lwów (Lviv, in present-day Ukraine) but was ultimately unsuccessful. The Austrian export authorities initially granted permission to remove most of the collection, although several objects, including the distinctive Greek Helios and Mên relief, were designated nationally valuable under Austrian law and were blocked from export. When Antoni and Adelajda fled to Switzerland in 1939, the entire art collection was left behind and remained in Vienna.

[8] Poland fell to Nazi Germany in 1939, and art collections that were or could arguably be construed as Polish-owned were immediately sought by National Socialist officials, first as “enemy property”, and then, in 1940, legislation was passed specifically regarding the confiscation of property of citizens of the “former Polish state”. For example, part of the art collection of Polish-born Leon Lilienfeld and his wife, Antonie, also of Vienna, was blocked from export in 1938 and was likewise sought (though not successfully confiscated) as Polish property. In October 1939, Hermann Göring established the Haupttreuhandstelle-Ost, or Central Trust Office-East, in Berlin, and appointed Kajetan Mühlmann in charge of inventorying and looting Polish art collections.

12 Perhaps the most important secondary resource for research on Viennese collections is Sophie Lillie, Was einmal war: Handbuch der enteigneten Kunstsammlungen Wiens, Vienna 2003.

13 He inherited some works of art and purchased others. For general information on the Lanckoroński collection, see Ostrowski (1993), Miziolek (1995), and Winiewicz-Wolska (2014), vol. 2.

14 Karl Lanckoroński, Palais Lanckoroński, Jacquingasse 18, 2nd ed., Vienna 1903, see DOI: https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00004072.

15 Winiewicz-Wolska (2014), vol. 2, 350. Austria’s Export Prohibition Act of 1918 (Reichsgesetzblatt [RGBl.] 90/1918) first required export authorization for all works of art except those by artists who were either still living or had died within the previous 20 years. In 1923 Austria passed the Law for the Protection of Monuments (RGBl. 533/1923), which regulated the disposition of works of art considered historically, culturally, or artistically significant. For further discussion, see Lillie (2003), 14-15.

16 An English translation of the “Decree concerning the treatment of the property of citizens of the former Polish State” of September 17, 1940 (RGBl. 1940, I, 1270-1273) can be found in the compilation by Raphael Lemkin, Key Laws, Decrees, and Regulations Issued by the Axis in Europe, Washington, DC 1942, 6900-6910.


The Central Trust Office and Adolf Hitler’s own art advisers, working on behalf of the so-called Führermuseum project planned for Linz, competed for potentially Polish property in Vienna, such as the Lilienfeld and Lanckoroński collections. As early as December 1939, Hans Posse, head of the Führermuseum project, wrote to Hitler’s secretary, Martin Bormann, about the “Polish Lanckoroński collection”, which he had examined in Vienna and from which he hoped to make selections for Linz.¹⁹

[9] The Lanckoroński collection was confiscated by the Gestapo at the end of 1939 as enemy property, under the pretense that Karol Lanckoroński had fought against Germany during World War I.²⁰ Though some of the objects in the collection were temporarily moved, as a whole it remained in place at 18 Jacquingasse until 1943, and its administration was overseen by the Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz (at that time, the name for the Federal Monuments Office in Austria).²¹ Competition between Hitler and Mühlmann for the collection continued, and the Haupttreuhandstelle ordered an extensive inventory in 1942, which included over 3,500 objects.²² Winiewicz-Wolska transcribed portions of this list, the so-called Gesamtinventar, itemizing the family’s Mediterranean antiquities as well as objects from India, China, and Japan. With this list, it was possible to verify the Nazi-era location of two of the three MFA sculptures in Vienna. The portrait bust was probably the object described as “Hermenbüste auf modernen [sic] Schaft. Bildnis eines bärtigen Mannes. Pentelischer Marmor. Nasenspitze ergänzt, 4 Jh. v. Chr. (antike Kopie)” measuring 48 cm. The satyr was “Jugendlicher Satyr, schreitend, in vorgebeugter Haltung. Marmor. Es fehlen: beide Arme, die Beine knieabwärts. Antike Kopie auf hellenistischer Grundlage” measuring 96 cm.²³

[10] Unsurprisingly, since Hitler had right of first refusal, he successfully took the Lanckoroński collection for his own disposition. As with other works of art from Viennese collections that were plundered (or otherwise blocked from export), there were plans to evacuate the works of art from the city during World War II. The majority of the antiquities were taken to the Augustinerkeller below the Albertina in Vienna, where they probably remained until the end of


²¹Austria’s Federal Monuments Office was founded in 1850; beginning in 1934 it was replaced by the Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz im Bundesministerium für Unterricht; from 1940 until 1945, it was called the Institut für Denkmalpflege. The Bundesdenkmalamt was reestablished following World War II.


the war\textsuperscript{24}. By that time, the relief of Helios and Mên had already been moved from Vienna to Schloss Immendorf in Lower Austria\textsuperscript{25}. It appears on a list of objects (“Marmor Weihrelief: Helios u. Men”) dated 29 September 1943 that were taken from Immendorf to Schloss Thürnthal at Fels am Wagram, where, among other works of art, Gustav Klimt’s celebrated \textit{Beethoven Frieze} was also stored\textsuperscript{26}. Yet Winiewicz-Wolska reports that as of 1945, there were no antiquities at Thürnthal, so the relief must have been moved yet again\textsuperscript{27}. Until more research can be conducted, it is not possible to clarify more precisely the wartime movements of the MFA’s three sculptures. The paintings from the Lanckoroński collection were taken to the salt mines at Altaussee and from there were moved by Allied forces to the Munich Central Collecting Point for restitution after the war.

\[11\] The Lanckoroński collection was formally restored to the family in 1947\textsuperscript{28}. Further specifics regarding the dates and manner of restitution of the MFA sculptures to the family remain unknown, yet the same is true for many of the looted objects returned during the postwar period that are today in the MFA’s collection. The most widely available records of restitution, the object cards and shipment lists from the Allied collecting points (now accessible online), typically tell only part of the story—namely, whether and when an object was released to the government of the country from which it had been taken\textsuperscript{29}. Records of returns to individuals and families after that date are not usually publicly available. There are no object cards for the three Lanckoroński sculptures within the Munich Central Collecting Point records. Not every restituted object passed through a collecting point, and not every object that passed through a collecting point received a unique catalog card, so the absence of documentation within those records does not mean that an object was not returned. In the case of the three MFA antiquities, it is unlikely that they ever


\textsuperscript{25} A number of works of art were moved to Immendorf in the fall of 1939, although the MFA relief cannot be identified in the inventories published by Winiewicz-Wolska (2014), appendices 1 and 3.


\textsuperscript{27} Winiewicz-Wolska (2014), vol. 2, 376.

\textsuperscript{28} Winiewicz-Wolska (2014), vol. 2, 385.

\textsuperscript{29} Selected records from NARA, College Park, MD, are available free of charge on the database Fold3, \url{https://www.fold3.com} (search “Holocaust Collection”). The Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin has digitized the Munich Central Collecting Point cards from the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, Germany: Database for the “Central Collecting Point Munich”, \url{https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/ccp/dhm ccp.php} (accessed 9 December 2019).
passed through a collecting point; they probably remained in their wartime storage place, presumably the Augustinerkeller, until they were given back.30

[12] Following the war, Antoni Lanckoroński again sought to export the family’s art collection from Austria. As did other families who had fled during the Nazi era (for example, Alphonse and Clarice de Rothschild), Antoni found that successfully removing the art collection from the country was a hurdle. In the case of Clarice de Rothschild, in exchange for permission to export her art collection to the United States, she was required to donate some 250 works of art to the Austrian state for its museums.31 Otto Demus at the Federal Monuments Office likewise hoped to keep a portion of the Lanckoroński collection for Austria, including a group of antiquities. The relief of Helios and Mên was among the works of classical art initially selected for the Kunsthistorisches Museum and barred from export.32 Yet, despite its rarity, it was not among the works of art ultimately handed over in exchange for the export of the rest of the collection.33 Those were restituted to the Lanckoroński heirs only in 1999, shortly after Austria passed a national restitution law, which allowed Clarice de Rothschild’s family to receive the remainder of their collection as well.34

[13] The relief, the herm, and the satyr were exported, returned to Antoni, passed by descent to his half-sister Adelajda, and publicly auctioned by Sotheby’s in 1967. Additional details about their provenance are still to be uncovered. Even after consulting useful secondary sources, and often after consulting important primary sources, the process of provenance research is rarely complete. There is always more to learn, not just about the chain of ownership but about changes in the legal status, location, and transportation of objects. Provenance research may, however, be sufficient to assure a researcher that good, legal title was restored and conveyed. In the case of the three Lanckoroński sculptures, this determination was possible using sources readily available in Boston. Since the sculptures have been on display in the MFA’s permanent collection galleries and regularly garner scholarly interest, it is particularly gratifying to be able to tell their life stories more fully.


31 On the Rothschild collection, see Thomas Trenkler, Der Fall Rothschild: Chronik einer Enteignung, Vienna 1999; Felicitas Kunth, Die Rothschild’schen Gemäldesammlungen in Wien, Vienna 2006.


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About the Author
Victoria S. Reed is the Sadler Senior Curator for Provenance at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In this role she oversees provenance research and documentation and coordinates due diligence policies and practices for the curatorial division. Dr. Reed has been conducting provenance research since 2001 and has spoken and published widely on topics including art restitution, museum ethics, and the history of collecting.

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