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Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften  
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A FRAME FOR THE BARBERINI/OLDENBURG »RAPE OF EUROPA«  
MOSAIC

JENNIFER MONTAGU

In her fundamental article of 1986, Odile Wattel-de Croizant described her objective as to »remplacer dans son cadre, Palestrina, une mosaïque de »l'Enlèvement d'Europe« qui était devenue, dès le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle un objet de musée »sans racines«;<sup>1</sup> in her conclusion she claimed that »la Mosaïque ..., issue de la collection Barberini, a donc réintégré son cadre d'origine, les »Propylées-nymphée« des Arcioni à Palestrina, dont elle fut retirée en 1676, sans que l'on sache à l'époque la nature exacte du monument auquel elle appartenait«.<sup>2</sup> Indeed she has done this splendidly: Her demonstration of the original site of the mosaic, as also her dating of it between the 80s and the end of the 70s of the first century B.C., and her attribution of the execution to a Greco-Romano-Alexandrian group of mosaicists,<sup>3</sup> are absolutely convincing, and I should not wish to question them.

However, in replacing the mosaic in its original »frame« in Palestrina, she has, figuratively, removed it from its wooden frame (which is never illustrated, and scarcely mentioned),<sup>4</sup> and, in a wider sense, its place in the Barberini collection in the Seventeenth Century. Yet the frame is in itself a striking piece of Roman baroque furniture (fig. 1), and an examination of the mosaic's early years in the Barberini collection can throw light on some of the questions that surround this important work of ancient Roman art.<sup>5</sup>

Firstly, it can correct the date of discovery which, ever since Pietro Antonio Petrini's »Memorie prenestine« of 1795, has been believed to be 1676.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the mosaic must have been unearthed by at least the summer of the previous year. It was on 25 October 1675 that Pietro Spagna received his first payment of 15 scudi »a buon conto dell'opera che fà in risarcire un musaico trovato a Palestrina rappresentante l'Europa per n[ost]ro servizio«,<sup>7</sup> but this is not the first reference to what must be the »Europa« mosaic in the Barberini archives. In an account of his work from 15 February 1674 to 25 August 1675 (but with no internal dates) the sculptor Giuseppe Giorgetti charged 1:45 scudi »per avere fatto segare il Pezzo di Musaico che fu trovato a Palestrina long. p. mi 4 ½ e largo p. mi 4 ½ detto era commesso sopra il travertino«. He also bought a piece of slate (»lavagnia«) five palmi square, and two oncie thick to back the

*1 The Barberini/Oldenburg mosaic in its frame; Oldenburg, Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte*

mosaic, excavating it to a depth of one oncia, and setting the mosaic in with glue and metal pins (»perni«), and attaching a strip of copper around it »con molti perni«. <sup>8</sup> His last entry on this subject is the most interesting: »E piu speso in far portare dagli facchini il detto Musaico dalle 4 fontane in Borgo dal Sig.e Oratio per restaurarlo.«

This is the only reference to »signore Oratio«, who must be Orazio Manente, a well-known mosaicist, who had executed several mosaics for St. Peter's, where in 1675 he restored Giotto's »Navicella«; he had also restored the mosaics in the apse of SS. Cosma e Damiano for Francesco Barberini, and in 1673 »Orazio Manenti pittore« was paid 6 scudi »per havere accomodato una Madonna in piccolo di Musaico della n[ost]ra guardarobba per donare a persona nota a Noi«. <sup>9</sup> Certainly he is better known as a mosaicist than Pietro Spagna, <sup>10</sup> who is most often mentioned in these accounts as a painter, undertaking a number of minor works of his profession for Francesco Barberini between 1657 and 1677, including a cartoon for one of the »termini« for the tapestries of the »Life of Urban VIII«. <sup>11</sup> But he was also a mosaic-worker, who in 1679 executed the image of »Christ Commanding St. Peter to Walk on the Water« over the door at the end of the left portico of Piazza S. Pietro, on the design of *Ciro Ferri*. <sup>12</sup> It was, however, Pietro Spagna who alone was paid for the restoration, and the most likely explanation for the mosaic having been sent to Manenti's studio is that Spagna was making use of that space.

2 *Detail of the side of the frame*

On 13 March 1676 Pietro Spagna received another payment of 15 scudi recorded in exactly the same terms as the previous one, <sup>13</sup> and on 7 January 1677 he was paid »scudi dieci m.ta à compimento di s. 40 simili per saldo d'un conto di spese fatte in risarcire un mosaico trovato à Palestrina rappresentante l'Europa ...«. <sup>14</sup> On 15 January he received a further 60 scudi »per resto e saldo

della fattura in risarcire un Musaico per n[ost]ro servizio rappresentante l'Europa, trovato a Palestrina». <sup>15</sup> The reason for what might appear to be two final payments becomes clear when one looks at his account for the work. He claimed for the wheel and abrasive used to polish the stones (9 scudi), for »pietre diverse« (5 scudi), for a saw and the cutting of the stones (10 scudi), for the »tagliatura« and »arrotatura« of the stones (6 and 7 scudi respectively), and for various iron tools (3 scudi); finally, he lists his labour, »per fattura di un anno«, but leaves it blank. So the first final payment was, as stated, for his expenses, and the second for his labour; what is not clear is why they were not combined, but possibly it took a few days to agree on the value of his work.

Workmen submitting accounts never under-estimate the amount of work that they have done, and, although it was nine months since his first payment, so that Spagna's claim to have worked for a year is reasonable, one cannot know how hard or consistently he had laboured over this relief. The cost of materials might seem rather low for so long a labour, but such a restoration might well have involved more in thought, and in deciding how to fill in the missing areas, than in actually cutting and setting the stones. Yet even if his statement were something of an exaggeration, one must still accept that his restoration would have been quite extensive, and probably more so than most writers on the mosaic have assumed.

When one turns to the frame, there might seem to be fewer problems. The man selected to make it was Giovanni Maria Giorgetti, the father of the sculptor Giuseppe, and one of the leading wood-carvers of the period; he had worked for Bernini, <sup>16</sup> and leading Roman families such as the Chigi, and he was the main carver employed by Cardinal Francesco at this time. Just when he framed the »Europa« is not clear, for the payment of 29 January 1678 which includes this work covers the period from 17 July to the end of November 1677: he received 25 scudi (though he had claimed 45) »per un ornamento servito per il musaico trovato a Palestrina rappresentante l'Europa«. <sup>17</sup>

Giorgetti (unlike Pietro Spagna) submitted a full account of the work: <sup>18</sup>

»E piu a di 7 Agosto per haver fatto uno ornamento per la Pietra di musaico, prima aver fatto un telaro di travicello di costag: no [?] fattoci li suoi Battenti a mano per la pietra alto p.mi 10 ¼ largo p.mi 4 ¾ e sopra d: o telaro da piede aver fatto il suo piedestallo alto p.mi 4 ½ con pilastri Resaltati largi mezzo p: mo e per fianco pure mostra pilastro con la sua Cimasa fregio e Collarino Resaltato e un Collarino da piede sopra la traverssa e il soprad: o piedestallo aver fatto la sua Batone poi una cornice larga on: 7 con suo fregio

che fa battente alla pietra e sopra d:a Cornice haverci fatto il suo Cornicione e li fianchi averci fatto pure li pilastri scorniciati alti p:mi 4 ¼ sopra il piedestallo sino al cornicione e poi per lintaglio fatto il sud:o ornamento sopra il Cornicione con mensolone con fogliami e festoni traforati e fatto e intagliato li festoni nel fregio della Cornice della pietra e nel frecio fattoci due Rami di Lauero con tre Ape e due Rose e fatto due Cartelle per li fianchi intag:ti con fogli et festoni e intagliato due borchate di festoni alli Pillastrì in faccia e di sotto fra un pilastro e latro [sic.] fattoci un Rabescho di fogliame e da piede per Zampa quattro Cartelle intagliate come si vede alta tutta l'opera p:mi 11 e larga p:mi 6¼ fatto de ordine del Sig. Don Archangelo ---s.45«.

This is not easy to understand, with its technical terminology (many of the words having a number of possible meanings), and its lack of punctuation. Giorgetti first made the supporting structure in chestnut-wood, then on this he made the frame for the mosaic, and the support below with pilasters in relief, and pilasters on the sides and the mouldings above, and a stretcher below. Above this lower support he made the frame around the mosaic, with cornices above and below, and pilasters on the sides. He carved foliage on the frame itself, and on the frieze of the support he carved two branches of laurel with three bees and two roses (in fact, the roses are at the sides), and two cartouches with further festoons of foliage at the sides of the support (fig. 2). Between the pilasters of the support he carved a flourish of foliage, and for the feet he made four cartouches »as can be seen« – not surprisingly, he found it difficult to describe them.

From this description I have omitted one element that cannot be seen today: the ornaments with brackets (mensolone), with foliage and festoons carved free of the ground, that were apparently above the upper cornice. It might sound implausible, but, as will be shown, in the eighteenth century inventory the frame was described as having a pediment of twisted [foliage],<sup>19</sup> so it would seem that there was indeed some decorative feature at the top, which is missing today. Otherwise, there is no great difficulty in recognising all the work Giorgetti lists on the frame as it now exists.<sup>20</sup>

If this resolves the question of who made the frame, it does not help to answer the rather more interesting question of who designed it. It is unlikely that it would have been Giorgetti himself, but the decoration is insufficient, and the motifs too generic, to allow one to do more than note that *Ciro Ferri* was actively performing such services for Cardinal Francesco at this time.

There is no reason to assume that the mosaic was ever anywhere but in the Barberini palace »alle Quattro Fontane«, although there is no inventory of that palace at the time of Cardinal Francesco's death in 1679.<sup>21</sup> The mosaic was admired there by Nicodemus Tessin the younger in 1687,<sup>22</sup> and it is listed there in the 1704 inventory Cardinal Francesco's heir, Cardinal Carlo Barberini,<sup>23</sup> but not described. In the inventory of 1738, after the death of Cardinal Francesco Barberini junior, however, a full description is given:

»Un Musaico di pal. 4 per ogni lato raprese[ntante] il Ratto di Europa con diverse figure, e marine, opera antica con cornice attorno, a festoni, e dorata con frontespizio s[opr]a a tortiglione, e fogliami color di noce in parte dorata s[opr]a sgabelone à due piede con cartella intagliata, a fogliami, e festoni, con api, e dorata«, and valued at 100 scudi.<sup>24</sup>

To the best of my knowledge, only one person has paid any attention to this frame in recent years. The great expert on furniture, Alvar González-Palacios, in his introductory essay to Goffredo Lizzani's »Il mobile romano«<sup>25</sup> published a photograph of the piece (which he had not seen) from the Galleria Sangiorgi, which presumably had an interest in it between the time that it was sold by the Barberini family and its acquisition by the German state between 1942 and 1944. In his acute commentary he relates it to the work of Antonio Nave, or one of his colleagues, and compares it to the frame of Guido Reni's fresco of the »Sleeping Cupid« (fig. 3).<sup>26</sup> This comparison is certainly justified as regards the general structure of the frames (the Reni, painted in fresco, was also heavy enough to require a similar support),<sup>27</sup> though it points up the difference in style between the two. The frame of Reni's painting is undocumented, but it is reasonable to assume that it would have been made shortly after the fresco was painted in 1627 and passed to the Barberini family;<sup>28</sup> indeed, it appears first in Cardinal Francesco's inventory of 1626–31,

»Un ornamento in due pezzi alto p.mi 8 e largo p.mi 4, cioè quello di sotto intagliato con due mezze figure e di color di noci, e profilato d'oro con tre api alla parte di sopra tutto intagliato, e tutto dorato, et in mezzo vi e un puttino, che dorme dipinto a fresco dal S.r Guido Reni havuto dal s.r Bernardino Scala.«<sup>29</sup>

Here, although the description is a little easier to interpret, there would seem to have been subsequent changes, for there are no bees visible on the frame as it exists today.<sup>30</sup> For such a highly decorated piece, the frieze at the top of the



<sup>3</sup> *Guido Reni and an anonymous wood-carver: Sleeping putto, in its frame; Rome, Museo Nazionale d'Arte Antica*

support appears strangely empty,<sup>31</sup> and, even though the design is simpler than that of the »Europa« frame, one might have expected some ornamentation there; it is precisely on that element that Giorgetti incorporated the bees and laurel of the Barberini coat-of-arms. The 1738 inventory refers to both festoons of fruit and bees, and, although it describes the feet merely as »intagliati«, that suggests something a little more decorative than those to be seen today.<sup>32</sup>

There are few old pieces of furniture that exist in their original condition, and if the frame of Reni's fresco has suffered changes despite its relatively stable existence in the Barberini palace, it is all the more remarkable that that of the »Europa« mosaic appears to be substantially as described by Giorgetti in 1677, allowing us today to see the mosaic, if not as it was in Palestrina, pretty much as it was in the collection of Cardinal Francesco Barberini.

Ancient works of art tend to be viewed in two ways: by the archaeologists, who often resent – and sometimes even destroy – later restorations, and by those interested in the art of later periods, who appreciate the history of such pieces as manifested in those restorations, and/or frames.<sup>33</sup> The »Rape of Europa« presents just such a case. In 1994 Odile Wattel-de Croizant went further than in her article of 1986: instead of being since the Seventeenth Century an »objet de musée »sans racines« she described it as »un objet de musée peu significatif«.<sup>34</sup> In fact, it was not in a museum, but, until its sale little more than half a century ago, it was in a private collection, and hardly regarded as of little significance, even if the significance that such objects can have for their owners is varied and multifaceted. It is not my purpose here to trace its history, or to try to reconstruct the way in which successive members of the Barberini family may have appreciated it, but merely to indicate that, while it is important to study the mosaic as an example of ancient art, it is equally valid to try see it through the eyes of those who unearthed it in 1675, who appreciated its value as an antiquity, and were therefore all the more anxious to see it restored to its full beauty, and set off within a well designed and finely carved frame that both enhanced its aesthetic effect, and demonstrated the esteem in which they held it.

Today, when both antiquity and the seventeenth century are so foreign to us, it can be difficult to combine these two approaches. But the piece in the Oldenburg Landesmuseum – mosaic and frame – is now a single work of art of considerable artistic quality and outstanding importance, and we should at least attempt to see it as a whole.

## NOTES

- 1 Odile Wattel-de Croizant: *L'Emblemata de l'enlèvement d'Europe à Preneste* (Barberini-Oldenburg) ou l'histoire d'une mosaïque >oubliée< du Temple de la Fortune, in: *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité* 98 (1986–2), pp.491–564, at p.520. Of the various articles derived from her doctoral thesis, this is the fullest as regards the Barberini mosaic. That of 1994 (note 34) presents her findings most succinctly.
- 2 Wattel-de Croizant 1986 (note 1), p.563. She had also used the metaphor of a >cadre< (this time in quotation marks) on p.492.
- 3 This point is argued more fully in Odile Wattel-de Croizant: *Les mosaïques représentant le mythe d'Europe (I<sup>er</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> siècles). Évolution et interprétation des modèles grecs en milieu romain*, Paris 1999, pp.81–83.
- 4 The frame is included in one inventory description she quotes (Wattel-de Croizant 1986 (note 1), p.504), but Wattel-de Croizant's only comment on it is to say that it encroaches some 2 cm on the mosaic.
- 5 I shall be citing documents in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio Barberini (henceforth BAV, AB). The mosaic appears in the >Libro Mastro I< of Cardinal Francesco Barberini senior (BAV, AB, Computisteria 57, p.447), and also his >Giornale I< (to which I shall not be referring); I shall, however, make use of his >Mandati< (henceforth, unless otherwise stated, the volume 1675–78, BAV, AB, Computisteria 91), and his >Giustificazioni<.
- 6 Pierantonio Petrini: *Memorie prenestine disposte in forma di annali*, Rome 1795, p.258. Although the >Europa< is the first work mentioned under this date, Petrini continues with other mosaics found >daily< in Palestrina (and a general discussion of mosaic-making in the area, including the activity of the contemporary Cristofari father and son), and it is plausible to assume that not all of them were unearthed in 1676.
- 7 BAV, AB, Mandato no. 231, fol. 22.
- 8 BAV, AB, Giustificazioni no. 12432, fol. 91; see Jennifer Montagu: Antonio and Giuseppe Giorgetti. Sculptors to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, in: *Art Bulletin* 52 (1970), p.292; see also Alvar González-Palacios: *Il tempio del gusto. Le arti decorative in Italia fra Roma e il Regno delle Due Sicilie*, Milano 1985, p.59. On 26 October 1675 the >calderaro< Ventura Ricci was paid 6.60 scudi for >un cerchio di rame saldato in argento messo per fortezza ad un musaico trovato à Palestrina< (BAV, AB, Mandato no. 241; while this might suggest a circular mosaic, none such is known, and it should be understood as a band to go around the mosaic.
- 9 BAV, AB, Mandato no. 979, fol. 82.
- 10 I have not discovered whether he was related to Arcangelo Spagna, who was frequently paid for work in connection with Cardinal Francesco's antiquities or minor arts, though he does not appear to have held a specific position in the household. It is less likely that he would have been related to Carlo Spagna, the silversmith extensively employed by the Cardinal at that time. However, given Francesco Barberini's tendency to employ members of the same family (such as the Giorgetti, or the Romanelli), it is quite possible that he was related to one or the other.
- 11 BAV, AB, Mandato no. 1410, fol. 124.
- 12 According to Tod Marder the two mosaics at the ends of the Colonnade were made in 1667–68 (Tod Allan Marder: *Bernini's Scala Regia at the Vatican Palace*, Cambridge 1997, p.9); for the more precise date I am indebted to Michael Erwee: *The Churches of Rome* (yet unpublished). It is generally assumed that he is identical with the mosaicist Pietro Spagna

- who is documented as working in Venice; see: Documenti per la storia dell'Augusta Ducale Basilica di San Marco in Venezia dal nono secolo sino al fine del decimo ottavo, Venezia 1886, docs. 518 ff.: in 1680 he made his ›prova‹, and in 1683–85 he made a large mosaic over the main entrance, representing the ›Last Judgement‹ (now lost), on the cartoon of Antonio Zanchi (see also Pierre Saccardo: *Les mosaïques de Saint-Marc*, Venice 1896, pp. 85–6).
- 13 BAV, AB, Mandato no. 501, fol. 44v.
  - 14 BAV, AB, Mandato no. 1154, fol. 101.
  - 15 BAV, AB, Mandato no. 1174, fol. 102v.
  - 16 In view of Pietro Spagna's work as a mosaicist, it is an interesting coincidence that one of the works Giorgetti executed for Bernini was the large model for the Colonnade for St. Peter's (Rosella Carloni: Appendix Documentaria, in: *Le statue berniniane del Colonnato di San Pietro*, ed. by Valentino Martinelli, Roma 1987, pp. 270–271; see Montagu 1970 (note 8), pp. 278–9.
  - 17 BAV, AB, Mandato no. 2102, fol. 197v.
  - 18 BAV, AB, Giustificazioni no. 12448. It was the architect Angelo Torrone who reduced the price to 25 scudi, as recorded at the left margin.
  - 19 BAV, AB, Indice II, 2462, p. 36.
  - 20 I am grateful to Dr. Doris Weiler-Streichsbier of the Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Oldenburg for facilitating my visit, and Sven Adelaide for making the photographs, and to Ian Jones for his help with these.
  - 21 He did not use it to furnish his own apartment in the Cancelleria, for which an inventory does exist.
  - 22 Nicodemus Tessin the Younger: *Travel Notes 1673–77 and 1687–88*, ed. by Merit Laine and Börje Magnusson, Stockholm 2002, p. 304: [Palazzo Barberini, 6<sup>th</sup> room] ›... so sahe man dar auch die Europam sehr feine von mosaic gemacht, so unter den erden wahr gefunden ...‹.
  - 23 BAV, AB, Indice II, no. 2458, p. 316.
  - 24 BAV, AB, Indice II, 2462, p. 36.
  - 25 Alvar González-Palacios: *Avvio allo studio della mobilia romana*, in: Goffredo Lizzani, *Il mobile romano*, Görlich 1997 (pp. vii–xxxix), p. ix, fig. XXIII. See also his updated version of 1984 (González-Palacios 1985 (note 8)), where he is still relying on a photograph, but of better quality.
  - 26 See Urbano Barberini: *Il Bernini e un affresco di Guido Reni*, in: *Bollettino d'arte* 50 (1965), pp. 199–207. Barberini's belief that the frame was designed by Reni would seem hard to substantiate.
  - 27 See the comments of Urbano Barberini 1965 (note 26), p. 201. It is not clear how far he was describing the technique of treating a fresco detached from a wall – first removing the support down to the ›ariccio‹, and then replacing it with something lighter – and how far he is describing this painting, which was never actually on a wall.
  - 28 This is the date given by Stephen Pepper (Stephen Pepper: *Guido Reni. A complete catalogue of his works*, Oxford 1984, cat. 116); it is more plausible than that suggested by Urbano Barberini.
  - 29 Marilyn Aronberg Lavin: *Seventeenth-Century Barberini Documents and Inventories of Art*, New York 1975, p. 80 [ff. 39r–v]. In his inventory of 1749 it appears as ›Un Adornamento‹ (ibid., p. 241, no. 661); only in that 1672 does the painting take precedence, ›Un quadretto ... con cornice dorate‹ (ibid., p. 342, no. 153).
  - 30 I am grateful to Anna Lo Bianco for confirming this; the object is not currently on display.

- 31 The same applies to the front feet, which display the same aesthetic, and are quite different to those projecting at the sides. Giorgetti was to employ four scrolls, decorated with the Barberini laurel.
- 32 BAV, AB, indice II, 2462, p. 33. It was valued at 300 scudi, three times as much as the »Europa« mosaic.
- 33 Such art historians may, however, not attend to the literature on ancient mosaics. I had been led to believe that the »Europa«, which had apparently left Italy under mysterious circumstances, would be untraceable, and it was Arnold Nesselrath who kindly told me of its existence at Oldenburg. According to Odile Wattel-de Croizant, the Barberini had been given the right to break their Fidecommesso in 1934, and between 1941 and '44 the mosaic and its frame were acquired by the German state, and subsequently passed to the Landesmuseum at Oldenburg. See Wattel-de Croizant 1986–2 (note 1), p. 505.
- 34 Odile Wattel-de Croizant: L'enlèvement d'Europe. Une scène mosaïque pour »lithostratum« et »emblemata« (Préneste, Cannes Athènes), in: Fifth International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics, *Journal of Archeology, Supplementary Series*, no. 9, vol. 1 (1994), pp. 45–66; 49.

#### PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

Fig. 1–2: Sven Adelaide; Oldenburg, Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte – Fig. 3: Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Romano: Gabinetto Fotografico