

# Italy gets antiquities back from Boston Museum of Fine Arts

The museum bought in good faith, but was shown evidence that they had left Italy illicitly

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Thirteen Roman and Greek antiquities returned to Italy by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (MFA) were recently on display at the National Museum in Rome. The works, which include a life-sized marble statue of Emperor Hadrian's wife Sabina, 11 painted vases and a stone bas relief, were sent to Italy following an agreement signed by Italian culture minister Francesco Rutelli and MFA director Malcolm Rogers on 28 September.

The restitution follows agreements earlier this year between Italy and the Metropolitan Museum in New York (which has agreed to return 21 objects) and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which has yet to announce which works it will return.

Unlike the arrangement with the Metropolitan, under the terms of its agreement with Italy, the MFA will not receive loans of replacement objects. Instead, Italy will lend a single object, yet to be named, that will take the place of the statue of Sabina. Italy will also lend to forthcoming MFA shows on the art of Venice and Naples.

The agreement also "establishes a process by which the MFA and Italy will exchange information with respect to the museum's future acquisitions of Italian antiquities", and "envisages collaboration in the areas of scholarship, conservation, archaeological investigation and exhibition planning".

Mr Rogers says that the museum acquired the objects in good faith, but Italian authorities presented evidence that they had been taken out of Italy in contravention of a 1939 law that requires antiquities be turned over to the state. (The Italians have pursued dozens of other objects acquired by the museum, but failed to produce compelling evidence.) The museum acquired the pieces from dealers or by donation between 1971 and 1999. Many had passed through the hands of the US Paris-based dealer Robert Hecht, who is on trial in Rome along with the Getty's former antiquities curator Marion True on charges of trafficking in looted antiquities.

The statue of Hadrian's wife Sabina had been acquired from Zurich dealer Fritz Bürki through Mr Hecht in 1979.

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