

# New York collector Shelby White returns antiquities to Italy

White's restitution of the illegally excavated objects is a first for the US

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Shelby White, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum, returned nine Greek and Etruscan objects to Italy last month. Italy had argued that the objects had been illicitly excavated and exported to the US. A tenth item, a fifth-century BC Attic red-figured calyx-krater, signed by Euphronios, will be returned in 2010.

Italy has recently reclaimed objects from the Metropolitan Museum, the Getty, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston and other US institutions—and is in discussion with museums in Europe and Asia—but Ms White's restitution is Italy's first agreement with a US private collector.

The museum accords call for loans of comparable objects from Italy, but Ms White will receive nothing in return. She and her husband Leon Levy, a Manhattan financier who died in 2003, collected classical, near eastern and central Asian antiquities, most without known provenance.

“Our collection was purchased at public auction and from dealers we believed to be reputable,” she said in a statement. The artefacts she returned have been traced to Giacomo Medici, the Italian dealer convicted in Rome in 2004 of trafficking in looted antiquities.

But Maurizio Fiorilli, a lawyer for the Italian Ministry, told The Art Newspaper that no evidence links the couple with clandestine digs or

smugglers, and “neither has there emerged knowledge on the part of the Levi-White couple of the illicit origin of the objects acquired”.

Ms White was under no legal obligation to relinquish the objects, and Italy’s culture minister, Francesco Rutelli, called her concession “a generous and open-minded gesture”. Italy has agreed not to pursue around 200 objects catalogued for a 1990 exhibition of her collection at the Metropolitan, but reserves the right to claim other items should evidence emerge of their illicit status.

Ms White has said her collection will be donated to public institutions, and she lent some two dozen objects for the 2007 inauguration of the Metropolitan’s new Greek and Roman galleries to which she also donated \$20m.

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