

August 22, 2005

Mr. Jay Kislak
Chair, Cultural Property Advisory Committee
U.S. Department of State
301 4th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20547

Dear Mr. Kislak,

As President of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), I am writing to express my strong support and the support of the AIA for the renewal of the bilateral agreement between the United States and the Republic of Italy that imposes import restrictions on designated categories of antiquities of the Pre-Classical, Classical and Imperial Roman periods of Italy. The AIA was founded in 1879 and chartered by an Act of Congress in 1906 and is now the oldest and largest non-profit organization in the U.S. devoted to archaeology. Our over 8,000 members include not only professional archaeologists but also students and members of the general public. This latter category makes up a large majority of our membership and many of our programs and publications are devoted to educating the public about archaeology and cultural heritage and fostering an appreciation for the role of archaeology in understanding the human past. We are especially in favor of extending the bilateral agreement between the U.S. and Italy, because it provides in an enlightened way for making Italian archaeological materials available to the American public for their education and enjoyment, while at the same time offering these materials U.S. protection. As such, it is a model agreement and should be extended.

In the rest of this letter I would like to focus on some of the positive results of this agreement while leaving to others to comment in detail about the continuation of widespread looting of Italian archaeological sites and the very real need for a renewal of U.S. protection for Italian antiquities.

The original agreement or MOU between the U.S. and Italy was entered into in January 2001. Within that agreement were provisions for legal cultural exchange, including long-term loans of archaeological materials for research, conservation and public exhibition, and a framework for scholarly and scientific cooperation between the countries. This provision ensures American public and scholarly access to Italian archaeological materials in a way that does not endanger the integrity of the archaeological heritage. To

my knowledge, this is the first such agreement under the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act to mandate such broad exchange programs for the benefit of the American public as well as for scholars and students of Italian archaeology.

The Italians have moved promptly to implement these provisions. In autumn 2002 a delegation of Italian archaeologists and museum officials visited the U.S. under the U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Voluntary Visitors Program to meet with their American counterparts at several venues in the U.S. and to discuss with them in a series of Roundtables the implementation of these exchanges, including ideas for long-term loan exhibitions, the process for requesting loans, and other types of joint projects that would fall under the agreement.

In June 2003 the Italian Government sponsored a seminar at the Italian Embassy in Washington D.C. which I attended in my capacity as AIA President, along with a number of other American archaeologists and museum curators and directors. The purpose of the seminar was to present the ideas for long-term loan exhibits and other sorts of cooperative projects and to discuss their implementation. There was an almost palpable sense of excitement and enthusiasm about the opportunities for mutual cooperation among the Americans and the Italians who attended the event. At that time, some 22 exhibitions of Italian archaeological materials were already organized or in process of organization and were being offered to American institutions. The subjects of these exhibitions range from the well known and popular (e.g. Pompeii; Etruscan gold work), to less well-known regional cultures such as ancient Liguria (Italy's northwest coast), or the Japigian culture of Iron Age Apulia. For the most part the exhibitions consist of materials from storage in Italian institutions that are not often seen or put on exhibition in Italy. In addition, excavated materials that have gone unstudied and unpublished for lack of personnel will now be made available to American researchers for study, publication and ultimately exhibition.

A good example of one such joint project is that undertaken in the Sangro Valley of southern Italy by the Superintendency of Abruzzo, Oberlin College, Oxford University and the U.S. Forest Service. As Dr. Susan Kane of Oberlin College, one of the co-directors of this project, describes it, "This project involves survey, excavation, and preparation of an archaeological park as well as development of an integrated plan for sustainable development using cultural heritage and environmental resources to attract cultural tourism. Exchange of personnel, technical assistance, and research have already taken place."

These scholarly and artifactual exchanges are the best possible use to which these materials can be put, since they allow scholars to do scientific and art historical study on these artifacts and provide new opportunities for the general public to see and appreciate scientifically excavated artifacts whose known contexts enhance the stories they have to tell. Far more than the "rescue" of undocumented or illicitly excavated artifacts by some

private collectors for their private enjoyment, the original U.S.-Italy bilateral agreement and its renewal will allow a great many Americans to become better acquainted with the rich archaeological heritage of Italy.

At present, many of the proposed projects and exhibitions have not yet come to fruition. This is in part because the numbers of personnel involved and the complexity of the planning process for projects such as these often require a long time between conception and implementation. However, a number of U.S. institutions are now moving to take advantage of the opportunities afforded. For example, a traveling exhibit from the site of Pompeii will be coming to U.S. institutions beginning this fall. And the University of Virginia has recently filed a request for the extended loan of artifacts for an exhibition on the results of U.S. excavations at Morgantina in Sicily. Extending the bilateral agreement for another five years would allow many more U.S. universities and museums to organize similar projects and make them available to the public in different regions of the country.

There can be no doubt that the 2001 US-Italy MOU has been effective and beneficial, both in the protection of Italian archaeological sites, where there is some evidence for decreased activity by looters, and in the creation of a legal framework for cooperation between the U.S. and Italy that has so much potential for public benefit. There is also no doubt that to realize the full potential of the agreement it must be renewed. Despite positive inroads by Italian authorities such as the Carabinieri, looting and pillaging of archaeological sites does continue and Italian antiquities continue to appear on the U.S. market, as web-based sales and auction catalogues make clear.

Italy's cultural patrimony is still under siege, to the detriment of all of us who care about the human past as revealed through the archaeological record. At the same time, to realize the full potential of the creative exchange program formulated under the 2001 MOU, more time is needed. The renewal of the US-Italy bilateral agreement is necessary to achieve both ends—the continued protection of Italian patrimony through curtailing the U.S. market in undocumented Italian antiquities and an extension of time to achieve more exhibitions and research projects.

On behalf of the AIA's 8,000 members I urge you to recommend the renewal of the US-Italy bilateral agreement.

Sincerely,

Jane C. Waldbaum
President, Archaeological Institute of America