

Cultural Heritage Center,  
SA-5, Fifth Floor  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20522-0505

Madame Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my support for the extension of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United States and the Republic of Italy that will be considered at the May 6 public meeting of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee. I am First Vice-President of the Archaeological Institute of America and a scholar of Roman art. As you will be receiving many letters of support from my colleagues at the AIA, which strenuously supports the protection of Italy's cultural heritage, my comments here offer a more personal perspective, one based on almost 40 years of experience as an art historian, writer, and lecturer.

Like many of the opponents of this memorandum, my appreciation of ancient objects is profoundly aesthetic—to me they are works of art and I value them for their beauty and craftsmanship as well as for their importance in the archaeological record. However, as a scholar who seeks ultimately to unravel the meaning of a work of art I must also re-create its history—who made it and when, where it came from, how it was used. The audiences for whom I write and lecture want this knowledge because it's the key/platform for understanding the past. I can teach them what it is aesthetically that makes a work great but it is its history and context that brings it alive for them.

This MOC now before you will help keep the object and its history together. Over the years my own work has highlighted the importance of context. One of my first articles explored the phenomenon of duplicated statues—that is, two different versions of the same statue type—placed together in Roman spaces. Such pendants turn out to be a rather important decorative motif in Roman interiors, but if it weren't for the works' known findspot—that is, the recovery of the work from a controlled excavation—we would never have been able to reconstruct the sculptural program of these interiors. More recently, I have been engaged in cataloguing a “Grand Tour” collection of ancient Roman sculpture made in the 18th century. In those days, archaeology was little more than treasure-hunting but through careful archival work—letters, bills of sale, export licenses—pioneering scholars such as Ilaria Bignamini and Clare Hornsby (*Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, Yale 2010) have vastly expanded our knowledge of the where pieces were found. Knowing whether the findspot was a tomb or a villa, in Rome itself or in an outlying area like Genzano, goes a long way towards helping us to understand these previously uncontextualized “orphans.”

Another major project, a book on the portraits of the empress Livia (Cambridge 1999) underscored how the contemporary art market threatens antiquities in Italy and elsewhere. Of the more than 100 portraits of Livia attested in modern times, one had been stolen from the Brussels Museum of Art in the 1970s (it has not been recovered); another was stolen from Tirana but recovered; a third was acquired by an American museum in the 1970s but is likely to have come from Italy (it had been recut as a Madonna!). And over the years I have asked my opinion regarding a number of portraits of Livia or her contemporaries that are on the art market; if the

extensive corpus of surviving portraits is any guide, many of art market works came originally from Italy.

As a Romanist, I strongly support the efforts of the Italian government to protect its cultural patrimony. Whether scholars or laymen, we all benefit when works of art are excavated in a professional manner that documents their findspot and context. “Treasure-hunting” of the type that enriched the collections of the 18th-century Grand Tourist has no place in 2010; thus I respectfully ask that the committee recommend extension of the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Italy.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Bartman  
First Vice-President, Archaeological Institute of America