

Enrich: Ancient Greek Culture (6-2.1/2.2)

Directions: Read the article below and complete the activity that follows.

Bon-Muller, Eti, and Eric A. Powell. "A Tangled Journey Home." *Archaeology Magazine Archive*, Sept.-Oct. 2007.

A Tangled Journey Home

Priceless artifacts return to Italy and Greece, but their histories remain lost.



On August 1, 2007, the Getty reached an agreement with Italy over a number of objects in the museum's collection that are strongly suspected of being **looted** (stolen). The Getty has pledged to **repatriate** (send back home) 40 artifacts, including the statue of a cult goddess and the sculpture of two griffins attacking a doe, illustrated below. (The much-debated bronze statue of a victorious youth, also below, is still the subject of negotiations.) The following text has been updated from its originally published version to reflect recent developments. In this [Q&A](#), archaeologist David Gill gives his perspective on the fate of classical **antiquities** (relics, antiques) in North American collections and the future of the twenty-first century museum.

Continue to visit archive.archaeology.org for updates on this story, as well as the ongoing antiquities trafficking trials in Rome of Robert Hecht and former Getty curator Marion True.

Antiquities dealers Robert Hecht and Giacomo Medici should have tidied up their desks. Raids by the Italian police in 1995 and 2000 yielded a mountain of evidence--from photos of Greek and Roman artifacts still in the ground to Hecht's handwritten memoir--that showed exactly how the two had been **trafficking** (trading) **looted antiquities** through the international art market for decades ("[Raiding the Tomb Raiders](#)," July/August 2006). Their clients included, among others, three **preeminent** (famous) American cultural institutions: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu.

Italy and Greece were simultaneously outraged and delighted with the news. Their long-standing suspicions were confirmed: artifacts recently acquired by major museums had been **looted** from their soil. And they jumped at the opportunity to get them back. Years of negotiations in the style of a Greek tragedy finally paid off and have resulted in some delicately worded agreements providing for long-term loans. The following pages showcase a handful of the artifacts that have been (or are slated to be) **repatriated** (sent



home) from the Met, the MFA, and the Getty, as well as pieces that the Getty only recently agreed to return. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Princeton University Art Museum, and Toledo Museum of Art, among others, have also received official requests to return artifacts.

The recent wave of **repatriations** has led museums to scale back, if not **cease** (stop), purchasing artifacts with questionable backgrounds, or ownership histories. This change in practice is welcome, but as David Gill, an archaeologist at the University of Swansea points out, "There is sadly little to celebrate over the return of these **antiquities** (relics/artifacts). [They] represent destroyed archaeological contexts, scientific knowledge lost forever; and even the best scholarship cannot retrieve this information." While the return of these objects may represent a victory of sorts over the illegal **antiquities** market, Gill insists that "energetic calls for the **repatriation** of **antiquities**, however justified, would be better spent in calling for the protection of archaeological sites."

Metropolitan Museum of Art

New York, New York

Although the Met maintains that it acquired the artifacts in good faith, the museum has already transferred title of 21 objects to Italy's Ministry of Culture. So far, the Met has sent back four terracotta vessels and is planning to return the other objects over the next few years. As part of the 2006 agreement, the Ministry is allowing the Met to display the remaining pieces for a while longer to **coincide** (go along) with the opening of the museum's new Greek and Roman galleries. The museum also announced that, in return, the Ministry will provide the Met with future loans of up to four years each, per Italian law. Language in the agreement **stipulates** (demands) that the loans be "works of art of equivalent beauty and importance."



(Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Museum of Fine Arts

Boston, Massachusetts

In 2005, Italian authorities submitted to the MFA a **dossier** (file) of 42 artifacts in the museum's collection, 16 of which were linked with Robert Hecht. The dealer is thought to have sold or given the MFA more than 1,000 objects during his career (all of which are suspected of being **looted**). A year later, the MFA transferred **title** (record of ownership) of 13 of the **antiquities** to Italy, which **dispersed** (distributed) them to regional museums after a special exhibition in Rome. Unlike the Met, the MFA sent all 13 artifacts back right away. The Italian Ministry of Culture has pledged to develop future partnerships with the museum, including the loan of significant objects to the MFA. The first of those pieces, a spectacular marble statue of Eirene, goddess of peace, is now on display in Boston.



(Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

J. Paul Getty Museum

Malibu, California

A relatively young institution, the Getty has **amassed** (collected) an extensive collection in the past few decades by aggressively buying ancient art, a practice that left it with many objects of **dubious** (uncertain) **provenance** (source or origin).

In 2005 the Italian government challenged the Getty on 52 objects in its collection, while Greek authorities renewed their campaign to **repatriate** four Getty **acquisitions** (purchases). The museum reached an agreement with Greece and returned the four objects last spring.

Negotiations between the Getty and Italy, however, have been more complicated. Last November, the Getty agreed to **repatriate** 26 of the 52 **antiquities**, but the museum refused to recognize Italy's claim to the bronze statue of a victorious youth (see below). The **stalemate** (standoff) led to a breakdown in the negotiations--until recently.

On August 1, 2007, the Getty agreed to transfer to Italy 40 objects, which includes the 26 on which they had already agreed. They are in the process of working out a schedule for the return of the artifacts over next several months (with the exception of the statue of a cult goddess, below, which will remain on view at the Getty until 2010).



(Courtesy J. Paul Getty Museum)

ACTIVITY

It is year 2015, and you are assigned to select five items to leave in a museum to be displayed in year 2025. State what items from this era you would select and why you chose these items? Next, sketch the items to be displayed and list the information future viewers will learn about you and your era of time.

Example:

Item

#1 iphone5S	#2	#3	#4	#5
Ability to text, email, sent MMS, facetime, take picture, notes, etc...				