

The Role of Antiquities between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

Diplomatic Gifting, Legal and Illegal Trades

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Abstract

This article analyzes the antiquities trade between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in the construction of the two regimes' diplomatic relationship before and during World War II. Both regimes made antiquities a medium of their political and ideological propaganda. During the delicate stages of their alliance in and after 1936, the Fascist regime, which considered itself the legitimate heir of the ancient Roman Empire, intensified the promotion of its role as a leading arbiter of cultural matters. A sense of Italian cultural superiority

underlay the antiquities gifted or authorized for export to fulfill the Nazi leaders' requests. Alongside this 'legitimate' trade, many other antiquities were illegally exported, sold, or stolen by art dealers, troops, and common citizens. Drawing on intense archival research conducted in Italian archives, the article presents different cases that shed light on the ways in which antiquities were manipulated for ideological and political purposes by the Fascist and Nazi regimes.

Fascist Italy and Romanità

[1] During the delicate stages of the relations between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, especially after the signing of the 1936 Rome-Berlin Axis, when the Nazi project of expansionism had become clear, culture was employed as a medium for expressing both the Fascist and Nazi regimes' ideological and political visions. Diplomatic gift giving by a political class is a frequent phenomenon and especially evident in totalitarian regimes that evoke their national pasts, whether fabricated or historical, to legitimize their hegemonic aspirations. In Fascist Italy, Mussolini, from his rise to power onward, strategically reinterpreted the Imperial Roman age, codifying it and conveying it to the public through studies, archaeological campaigns, press articles, conferences, and exhibits, including the "Mostra Augustea della Romanità" (1937) and the "5th Congress of the Institute of Roman Studies" (1938)¹. The architectural vestiges of ancient Rome that were brought to light or restored, such as the Imperial Fora and the Mausoleum of Augustus, were exhibited as tangible signs of a glorious past, and the Fascist political class asserted its connection to this ancient glory to reinterpret Roman history from the perspective of a new modernity.

[2] The Fascist cult of "Romanness" (*Romanità*) celebrated the glories of the Roman Empire, minimizing the impact on Rome of the Etruscan and Greek civilizations and extolling the superiority of Roman heritage over all other cultures. The Roman emperors' political and administrative ability to conquer was evoked by Italian intellectuals and politicians, while Mussolini was presented as the legitimate heir of that glorious past. Such propaganda shaped the myth, central to the Fascist vision, that Italy was the natural cultural leader in the fabric of modern Europe.

[3] Hitler's trip to Rome and Naples in May 1938, accompanied by the highest leaders of the Nazi party, was an important occasion for the Fascist elite in the context described above². This trip represented the perfect occasion to emphasize the ancient roots of Italian civilization and its superiority over German culture through an immediate and spectacular display of the vestiges of the Roman Empire³. In Rome, Hitler visited the most important monuments and antiquities, the exhibition "Mostra Augustea della Romanità", celebrating the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Augustus, which fell on 23 September 1937, and the Fascist Revolution exhibit ("Mostra della

¹ Enrico Silverio, "Il Convegno Augusteo del 1938 nel quadro del bimillenario della nascita di Augusto attraverso i documenti d'archivio e le pubblicazioni dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani", in: *Studi Romani* 62 (2014), nos. 1-4, 358-425.

² For Hitler's trip, see the documentary based on original film footage, *Il viaggio del Führer in Italia*, directed by Pietro Melograni, 2005, as well as the famous period drama film *Una giornata particolare* directed by Ettore Scola, 1977. On the gift of a South Italian Greek vase by the Fascists to Hitler on this occasion, see Irene Bald Romano, "Collecting Classical Antiquities among the Nazi Elite", *RIHA Journal* 0283, paras. 8-10, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2022.2.92736>.

³ Volker Losemann, *Nationalsozialismus und Antike: Studien zur Entwicklung des Faches Alte Geschichte 1933–1945*, Hamburg 1977; Mariella Cagnetta, *Antichisti e impero fascista*, Bari 1979; Beat Näf, ed., *Antike und Altertumswissenschaft in der Zeit von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus*, Mandelbachtal 2001; Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy*, Ithaca, NY 2012.

Rivoluzione Fascista”, first shown 1932–1934) that had been reopened on the occasion of the Augustan celebrations⁴.

[4] The aim of the majestic “Mostra Augustea della Romanità” was to display the imperial spirit of the ancestors in whose name Mussolini intended to assert the importance of the Rome-Berlin Axis. Indeed, the two regimes considered this axis the greatest political, military, and cultural alliance of Western civilization⁵. The ideals underlying this exhibit then also determined the exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, the latter underlining Fascism’s identification with “Romanness” and narrating the development of Fascism in the mirror of 20th-century Italian history⁶. This sort of Fascist ideological self-interpretation manipulated traces of Roman civilization to make them a powerful tool for promoting the regime’s diplomatic and imperialistic goals. Replicas of glorious testimonies of Imperial Rome were set up in the palaces where the meetings between the Italian and German delegations took place. For example, the Fascist government bought four modern copies of imperial busts on the Roman art market to embellish the rooms of the Quirinal Palace, the official residence of the king of Italy (today, of the president of the Italian Republic), for Hitler’s visit⁷. The group of imperial busts comprised a bust of the Pseudo Vitellius, its pendant Portrait of Nero, a bust of Caracalla, and one of Hadrian, all displayed in the Bronzino room⁸. A marble bust of Augustus, copied after the well-known full-scale statue of Augustus excavated from Livia’s villa at Prima Porta in 1863 and kept in the Vatican Museums, was commissioned to adorn the Augustus room⁹. This bust is thought to be the work of the Naples foundry Fonderia Artistica Gaetano Chiurazzi, whose catalog included the *Augustus of Prima Porta*

⁴ “Hitler e Mussolini visitano i monumenti imperiali”, in: *Corriere della Sera*, 8 May 1938; Ranuccio B. Bandinelli, *Diario di un borghese*, Rome 1996, 112-130; Archivio Centrale dello Stato, ed., *Partito Nazionale Fascista. Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, Rome 1990, 37-42 (= Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, *Strumenti*, 109); Antonella Russo, *Il fascismo in mostra*, Rome 1999; Alessandra Capanna, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, testo & immagine*, Turin 2004; Luciano Canfora, *Ideologie del classicismo*, Turin 1980.

⁵ Marco Rinaldi, “La Mostra Augustea della Romanità (1937–1938): architettura, scenografia e propaganda in alcuni progetti inediti di allestimento”, in: *Ricerche di Storia dell’Arte* 63 (1997), 74-91.

⁶ Renzo U. Montini, “Continuità imperiale di Roma: Dalla Mostra Augustea della Romanità alla Mostra della Rivoluzione”, in: *Costruire* 12 (1937), 42-47; Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Epic Demonstrations. Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution”, in: Richard J. Golsan, ed., *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, Hanover, N.H. / London 1992, 1-33.

⁷ Lucia Guerrini and Carlo Gasparri, *Il Palazzo del Quirinale: studi preliminari sulle collezioni di antichità*, Rome 1984, 23, 26-28.

⁸ Lucia Guerrini and Carlo Gasparri, *Il Palazzo del Quirinale: catalogo delle sculture*, Rome 1993, 211-213, no. 85, pl. LXI, provenance: Limiti (DP 102); 209-211, no. 84, pl. LXI, provenance: Limiti (DP 100); 223-225, no. 92, pl. LXII, unknown provenance (SM 5058); 222-223, no. 91, pl. LXII, provenance: Sestieri (DP 106/107).

⁹ Guerrini and Gasparri (1993), 195-197, no. 76, LIX, provenance: Della Seta (DP 59); Ranuccio B. Bandinelli and Mario Torelli, *L’arte dell’antichità classica: Etruria – Roma*, Turin 1986, no. 74; “Augusto di Prima Porta”, Vatican Museums MV.2290.0.0, <http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/it/collezioni/musei/braccio-nuovo/Augusto-di-Prima-Porta.html> (accessed 14 Sept. 2023).

in various formats¹⁰. These choices were in keeping with the imperialistic policies of the Fascist regime.

[5] This 1938 tour of Roman heritage strengthened Hitler's ideological conviction that the construction of a universal empire headed by the German Reich should be modeled on Imperial Rome. After the Italo-German cultural accord of 1938, which established new cultural exchanges and the creation of bilateral cultural institutions, Roman culture was soon promoted in Germany, and exhibits of it multiplied as the public became more interested in classical art and antiquities¹¹. The reclaiming of Roman models, albeit in a manipulated and distorted form, was presented to the German public through the use of the symbolism of ancient Rome, such as the Roman eagle repurposed on standards as well as in architecture, art, and in public events. During the Day of German Art (Tag der deutschen Kunst) organized in Munich from 1933 onward, the parade of the periods of German art represented an opportunity to stage an allegory of Greek and Roman art; in 1933, this included, for example, a reproduction of the Vatican Museums' colossal gilded bronze Hercules statue drawn in a chariot¹².

The Lancellotti Discobolus

[6] One of the most important events to assert and present to the international public this link between (a fabricated representation of) antiquity and the new National Socialist Germany was the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin¹³. This bond is effectively captured in Leni Riefenstahl's 1938 film *Olympia*, which documents the 11th modern Olympic Games¹⁴. In the prologue, Riefenstahl's camera lingers on the glorious body of a German athlete coming to life out of the marble contours of the Discobolus, Myron's Hellenic masterpiece of a discus thrower about to release the discus¹⁵. This framing of the film celebrates the Hellenic-Germanic coupling, in which the New German Man is presented as heir to the perfection of the classical world's aesthetic canon. The Discobolus not only represented an ideal of beauty; it also became the very iconic symbol of the "superior

¹⁰ Salvatore Chiurazzi, *Chiurazzi, società anonima: Fonderie, ceramica, marmoraria. Riproduzioni di opere classiche in bronzo e marmo*, sales cat., Naples 1929, no. 650; Heinz Kähler, *Die Augustusstatue von Primaporta*, Cologne 1959, 14-15, pl. XXXI.

¹¹ Natascia Barrale, "I germanisti e l'accordo culturale italo-tedesco: l'avvio di una ricerca", in: *Studi germanici* 12 (2017), 405-414; Laura Malvano, *Fascismo e politica dell'immagine*, Turin 1988, 151-156. See also Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), paras. 2-4, for a discussion of the appropriation of Greek antiquity in the ideology of National Socialism.

¹² Joshua Hagen, "Parades, Public Space, and Propaganda: The Nazi Culture Parades in Munich", in: *Geografiska Annaler* 90 (2008), no. 4, 349-367. For the *Hercules* in the Vatican Museums, MV.252.0.0, see: <https://catalogo.museivaticani.va/index.php/Detail/objects/MV.252.0.0> (accessed 14 Sept. 2023).

¹³ Anton Rippon, *Hitler's Olympics: The Story of the 1936 Nazi Games*, Barnsley 2006; Massimiliano Studer, *Olympia* [dialogo con Leonardo Quaresima], Milan 2014.

¹⁴ Graham McFee and Alan Tomlinson, "Riefenstahl's *Olympia*: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Shaping of the Aryan Athletic Body", in: *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 16 (1999), no. 2, 86-106; Susan Tegel, "Leni Riefenstahl: Art and Politics", in: *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23 (2006), no. 3, 185-200.

¹⁵ See also Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), paras. 11-16, for the history of the Roman copy of the Discobolus in relation to Riefenstahl's film.

race“ (*Herrenrasse*). In this vision, Greek statuary, through its Roman copies, became the archetype of the New German Man. The most complete Roman copy of Myron’s bronze masterpiece was the marble statue discovered in 1781 at a property of the Roman aristocratic Lancellotti family. During his visit to Rome in 1938, Hitler admired it on display for him at Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne¹⁶.

[7] The Lancellotti Discobolus remained inaccessible to the public until the early decades of the 20th century, when the Lancellotti family began negotiations to sell it, including with the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) in New York and the Staatliche Museen in Berlin via Carl Weickert¹⁷. Negotiations began even though the statue was protected by Law no. 364 of 20 June 1909 by virtue of its significant artistic and historical value¹⁸. The Discobolus’s protection decree, issued by the Ministry of Public Instruction on 29 October 1909, forbade its export without a specific authorization from the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts of the same ministry.

[8] In 1937, the Minister of National Education, Giuseppe Bottai, received a request for export, which he refused, cognizant of the cultural importance of the statue and the fact that selling it abroad would have represented an insurmountable loss to the country’s national heritage¹⁹. The Lancellottis’ lawyer, the deputy Pietro Ferretti, Duke of Castelferretto, pointing out the family’s financial difficulties (or inheritance disputes) and the fact that the Lancellotti Discobolus was not considered Myron’s best copy, asked Bottai to appoint a committee to evaluate the statue’s real value. Ferretti’s aim was for Bottai to preemptively purchase the statue pursuant to article 8 of Law 364/1909²⁰. In the face of the Lancellottis’ constant insistence, the Director General of

¹⁶ After its discovery, the Discobolus, restored by Giuseppe Angelini, was brought to Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne, and some decades later to Palazzo Lancellotti ai Coronari. Marcello Barbanera and Agneta Freccero, *Collezione di antichità di Palazzo Lancellotti ai Coronari. Archeologia, architettura, restauro*, Rome 2008.

¹⁷ Raimund Wünsche, *Glyptothek, Munich: Masterpieces of Greek and Roman Sculpture*, Munich 2007, 204-205; (US) National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter, NARA), Ardelia Hall Collection, Munich Central Collecting Point, 1945–1951, MI946, folder “Italy Claims—Miscellaneous”, letter by Allendorf to Heydenreich, 20 August 1948. In 1939, the Lancellottis sold to The Met the Renaissance studiolo of the Ducal Palace of Duke Federico da Montefeltro in Gubbio. Regarding The Met and the Lancellotti Discobolus, see Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), paras. 11-13. The Berlin museums had already purchased in 1930 a Luna marble sarcophagus depicting a Dionysian scene, excavated from the Lancellottis’ pozzolana quarry at Aguzzano on the northeastern outskirts of Rome in 1910. Ferruccio Pasqui, “Nuove scoperte nella città e nel suburbio”, in: *Notizie degli scavi di antichità* 10 (1910), 165-166; Friedrich Matz, *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Die dionysischen Sarkophage*, vol. 4.4, Berlin 1975, 474-475, no. 286, 304/2-4, 305/2-3, 309/2.

¹⁸ Law no. 364, 20 June 1909, published in *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia* (hereafter, GU), no. 150, 28 June 1909.

¹⁹ Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Fondo Antichità e Belle Arti, Div. III, 1929–1960 (hereafter, ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960), box 192, folder “Discobolo di Casa Lancellotti”, letter by Bottai to Ferretti, 22 March 1937.

²⁰ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n19, letter by Ferretti to Bottai, 30 April 1937.

Antiquities and Fine Arts, Carlo Anti, on behalf of Bottai, appointed a committee on 25 May 1937 to establish the actual importance of the statue in relation to other examples existing in Italy²¹. The committee was composed of Anti and two archaeologists, Biagio Pace, councillor of the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations (1939–1943), and Amedeo Maiuri, head of the Soprintendenza alle Antichità della Campania, director of the excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and director of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Naples (1924–1961), who had also worked on the “Mostra della Romanità”. They examined the statue at the beginning of June 1937 and compiled a report, sent to Bottai on 12 July, which focused on several aspects: the statue’s state of conservation, its fidelity to the original, and its historical and cultural value. The committee considered the statue “one of the best Roman statues preserved in Italian museums” and also “by far the best of Myron’s replicas known”²². On the basis of these findings, the committee confirmed the export ban²³. The Lancellottis made one last attempt, stressing the high export fee that would be paid into the state’s coffers if the sale and export were granted, around 1,300,000 *lire*. In violation of the state ban, the Lancellottis concluded a sale agreement with the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin on the condition that the German Reich would purchase the statue for the museum for five million *lire* if the Italian government would authorize its export by 1 June 1938²⁴.

[9] The German Reich’s involvement in this transaction was the consequence of Hitler’s direct interest in obtaining the statue. To break the deadlock, the German Embassy in Rome officially communicated Hitler’s intention to purchase the Lancellotti Discobolus to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Galeazzo Ciano (Mussolini’s son-in-law) and requested an export permit for it²⁵. This communication took place on 7 May 1938, during the last two days of Hitler’s visit to Rome, after he had admired the statue displayed in the Lancellotti palace. The German Embassy wanted to acquire the statue within three weeks of its request—that is, in time for the Day of German Art celebrations in Munich. Ciano accepted the request, but Bottai reasserted the importance of the statue for the country’s national heritage and asked Mussolini to purchase it in order to ensure that it remained part of the state collections²⁶. However, Bottai wrote to Mussolini in his own

²¹ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n19, letter by Anti to Bottai, 25 May 1937.

²² ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n19, report on the Lancellotti Discobolus, 12 July 1937, 2; Rodolfo Siviero, *Seconda mostra nazionale delle opere d’arte recuperate in Germania*, Florence 1950, no. 1. Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this article are mine.

²³ Siviero (1950), 5; ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n19, report on the Lancellotti Discobolus, 12 July 1937, 6.

²⁴ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 192, folder “Discobolo di Casa Lancellotti”, note by the German Embassy in Rome, 16 May 1938.

²⁵ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n24, letter by the German Embassy in Rome to Ciano, 7 May 1938.

²⁶ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n24, telegram by Ciano to Bottai, 18 May 1938. Such an operation had been carried out previously for Giorgione’s *The Tempest*; Prince Giuseppe Giovannelli sold the painting to the Italian state in 1932 after his grandfather had agreed to the state’s acquisition request in 1875 so as to prevent its being acquired by Wilhelm von Bode for the Berlin

hand that if, due to “superior reasons of another nature, you have a different opinion, I will carry out your orders”²⁷. Mussolini did not act to block the sale to Germany, and on 3 June, Bottai authorized the export office of the Soprintendenza Archeologica of Rome to release the Lancellotti Discobolus for export upon payment of the export tax, which was based on a value of five million *lire* (in the postwar documentation, the amount is indicated as four million *lire*)²⁸. It is worth noting that Bottai modified the authorization decree by replacing the initial phrase, “I accepted the export request upon higher orders”, with only “I accepted the export request”.

[10] After its arrival in Munich, the Lancellotti Discobolus was officially presented to the public and press by Hitler himself as a gift from the “Führer” to the German people²⁹. The official ceremony took place at the Glyptothek on 10 July 1938 during the “Great German Art Exhibition” that had begun a few days before, and it received massive media coverage (Fig. 1)³⁰. Hitler invited the public to admire the statue in order to imitate its perfection, the perfection necessary to form the New German Man³¹. The official position of the Fascist regime was that the statue had been granted to Germany due to the “personal interest shown by the Führer during his visit to Rome [...] and as evidence of the friendship that binds the two countries”, a tangible testimony of their political alliance³².

museums. Giorgione, *The Tempest*, 1502–1503, oil on canvas, 82 × 73 cm, Venice, Gallerie dell’Accademia, cat. 915; Adolfo Venturi [1856–1941], *Memorie autobiografiche* [original ed. Milan 1911], Turin 1991, 69; Nino Barbantini, “La quadreria Giovanelli”, in: *Emporium* 27, no. 159 (1908), 183-205; Achille Locatelli Milesi, “Cronache veneziane. *La Tempesta* di Giorgione”, in: *Emporium* 76, no. 452 (1932), 117-118.

²⁷ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n24, note by Bottai to Mussolini, undated.

²⁸ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n24, letter by Bottai to the export office of the Soprintendenza Archeologica of Rome, 3 June 1938. If we consider the selling price and the export tax paid by the German Reich, the Lancellotti Discobolus was, until then, one of the highest-priced antiquities.

²⁹ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n24, letter by Hitler to Bottai, 24 June 1938; “La statua del Lanciatore del Disco ceduta al Governo del Reich”, in: *Corriere della Sera*, 9 July 1938.

³⁰ “Der Diskuswerfer des Myron”, in: *Völkischer Beobachter*, 10 July 1938, <https://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Preview/355845.jpg> (accessed 14 Sept. 2023).

³¹ Johann Chapoutot, *Le nazisme et l’Antiquité*, 2nd ed., Paris 2012, 257.

³² ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 192, folder “Discobolo di Casa Lancellotti”, note by Bottai, 8 July 1938. The statue returned to Italy on 16 November 1948 (together with 17 other artworks exported between 1937 and 1943) and is now on display (inv. 126371) as a counterpart to the Discobolus of Castelporziano (inv. 56039) in the Museo Nazionale Romano di Palazzo Massimo alle Terme in Rome; see Carlo Gasparri and Rita Paris, eds., *Palazzo Massimo alle Terme. Le collezioni*, Milan 2013, 250-251, nos. 180, 181. For the repatriation of the statue to Italy, see Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), para. 16. On the Discobolus and other diplomatic gifting, see *Arte liberata. Capolavori salvati dalla guerra: 1937–1947*, eds. Luigi Gallo and Raffaella Morsetti, exh. cat., Rome 2022.



Fig. 1. Adolf Hitler in the Munich Glyptothek with the Lancellotti Discobolus, 10 July 1938 (photograph: Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Prints and Photographs Division, lot 2970)

[11] This “gift” was decisive in many ways. The granting of the export authorization notwithstanding, Italian laws designed to protect national cultural heritage were aimed at asserting Italian cultural superiority over its German ally just when Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nazi Germany, was pressing his Fascist counterpart, Ciano, to agree to the proposed military assistance pact. The Fascist regime considered this “gift” not an act of impoverishing Italy’s national heritage but a tangible sign of the credibility of the regime’s political-military project of hegemony. Mussolini was pleased with the German “historical inferiority complex” and took advantage of it to curb Nazi aspirations of European hegemony and powers with a clear cultural superiority.

Gifts from Fascist Italy and its colonies to Nazi Germany

[12] Fascist institutions and companies that had business relations with Nazi Germany also gifted objects echoing Italy’s Roman past and cultural heritage. The Fascist Federation of Mineral Lubricating Oils, for example, sent a modern bronze copy depicting an athlete to its counterpart *Fachgruppe Mineralöl* in 1939, while the Italian Fascist Public Service Broadcaster (Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche) sent a male marble head (valuated at 6,000 *lire* by the export office of the Roman Soprintendenza) to the director of the German Reich Broadcasting Corporation (Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft) in 1941³³.

[13] Since the war in Ethiopia, references to ancient Rome had been an integral part of Fascist-colonialist propaganda justifying the regime’s expansionist project toward the Mediterranean Sea, called *Mare Nostrum* (Our Sea). After establishing the Italian colonial possession AOI (Africa

³³ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 251, folder “La Federazione Nazionale Fascista Oli Minerali Lubrificanti richiede l’esportazione in Germania di una statuetta in bronzo rappresentante Atleta”, Rome export license no. 706, 6 June 1939, and box 258TER, folder “Roma. Ufficio esportazione”, Rome export license no. 8, 28 November 1941.

Oriente Italiana, i.e. Italian East Africa), the Fascist regime organized cultural and public events to promote the expansion project, using evocative language to kindle public enthusiasm for the modern state's conquest of ancient Roman holdings in Africa³⁴. The regime's propaganda deliberately evoked a comparison between past Roman victories and successful actions by Fascist Italy, conveying the idea that Italian colonialism was a matter of predestination. Archaeological finds from the numerous excavations supported by the Fascist government in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were widely celebrated by the regime's propaganda as a tangible sign of Italy's political hegemony over the Mediterranean. This use of the glorious Roman past was intended to restore a national pride and once again claim Italian cultural superiority.

[14] Mussolini gave a Roman bust of Emperor Diocletian to King Farouk I of Egypt as a wedding gift on the occasion of his marriage to Farida, celebrated in Cairo on 20 January 1938³⁵. No details are available that would make it possible to identify the bust (or where it is today), but it was purchased by the Prefecture of Venice on behalf of Mussolini. After the export office of the Venice Soprintendenza alle Gallerie issued the permit, the bust was shipped (free of export tax) to Cairo on the ship *Calitea*, operated by Lloyd Triestino, on 8 January 1938. The gift posited a link between, on the one side, Diocletian's victorious exploits in Egypt (AD 297–298) and the projects of reform and territorial organization that he had carried out and, on the other side, Mussolini's growing claims of hegemony in the Mediterranean.

[15] The request made to Ciano in early June 1938 by Count Cesare Maria De Vecchi di Val Cismon, the governor of the Italian Aegean Islands, to bring to Rhodes a series of bronze copies of statues of Roman emperors further attests to the way the regime's expansionist ambitions were clothed in the iconography of ancient Rome. As De Vecchi noted, the ancient rulers Julius Caesar and emperors Augustus, Diocletian, Tiberius, and Antoninus Pius were chosen for their role in the Aegean Islands, so the choice of these statues reflected the Fascist regime's aspirations to carry out a similar expansionist project³⁶. The statues were cast by the Neapolitan artistic foundries Laganà and Gaetano Chiurazzi, which had already made copies of Roman statues commissioned by Mussolini. Casts already existed for the statues of Julius Caesar and Augustus, the former modeled on the statue displayed today in Palazzo Senatorio in Rome and the latter on the Augustus of Prima Porta³⁷. The statue of Antoninus Pius, requiring a new cast, was modeled on the statue in the Museo Chiaramonti in the Vatican, while the Tiberius was modeled on a Vatican statue, with the portrait head after the one in the collection of the Astarita banking family displayed in their

³⁴ Antonino De Francesco, *The Antiquity of the Italian Nation: The Cultural Origins of a Political Myth in Modern Italy, 1796–1943*, Oxford 2013; Arthur J. Pomeroy, "Classical Antiquity, Cinema and Propaganda", in: Helen Roche and Kyriakos N. Demetriou, eds., *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, Leiden 2018, 264–285.

³⁵ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 255 (loose pages), letter by Ciano to Bottai, 7 January 1938.

³⁶ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 121, folder "Riproduzioni di statue degli imperatori romani richieste da S.E. il Governatore", letter by De Vecchi to Ciano, 2 June 1938.

³⁷ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n36, letter by the Soprintendenza alle Antichità of Rome to the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts, 22 November 1938.

villa in Capri³⁸ (Fig. 2). The statue of Diocletian, for which there was no model, was inspired by a statue of Emperor Constantine displayed in the atrium of the Lateran Basilica, with the head specifically modeled after bronze portrait medallions³⁹. To underline the intrinsic value of the gift, Ciano organized an official ceremony in Rhodes to show the statues to the public and press⁴⁰.



Fig. 2. Modern copy of statue of Tiberius, 1938–1939, bronze, H. 320 cm, cast by Fonderia Artistica Laganà, Naples. Current location unknown (photograph: ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929–1960, box 121, folder “Riproduzioni di statue degli imperatori romani richieste da S.E. il Governatore” © su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo n. prot. 123456-2021)

³⁸ Walther Amelung, *Die Skulpturen des Vatikanischen Museums*, vol. 1: *Braccio Nuovo, Galleria Lapidaria, Museo Chiaramonti, Giardino della Pigna*, Berlin 1903, 774, no. 682, pl. 83; Paolo Liverani, *Museo Chiaramonti*, Rome 1989, 19 (inv. 1252); Jeannette Papadopoulou, *Le sculture della collezione Astarita*, Naples 1984, 38-39, figs. 27-28. Today the Astarita collection is conserved in the National Archeological Museum of Naples.

³⁹ A similar approach was taken in 1943 when the Hungarian city of Szombathely, the ancient Savaria founded by Emperor Claudius in 43, asked Mussolini for a copy of a bust of Emperor Claudius to celebrate the 1900 years since its foundation (43–1943). The gift was immediately authorized, and the Ministry of National Education (at that time headed by Carlo Alberto Biggini) asked the Vatican Museums to make a copy of a Claudius statue. The Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts selected two statues (one displayed in the Museo Pio Clementino [inv. no. 243] and the other in the Lateran Museum [bust from the theater of Caere, modern Cerveteri, since 1963 displayed in the Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. no. 352]) due to the fact that the most important busts of Emperor Claudius conserved in public museums had been moved to anti-aircraft storages. A clay cast of the bust from the Lateran Museum was made by Luigi Mercatali in June 1943 (ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. II, 1940–1945, box 176, folder 3167, “Dono del Duce alla città di Szombathely, di un busto dell’Imperatore Claudio”).

⁴⁰ Mussolini decided not to attend the ceremony, having other political commitments. The statues were shipped from Naples on the ship *Egeo* on 10 April 1939.

[16] It was in this context that the decision was made to give to Hermann Göring the Venus of Leptis Magna, a Roman copy found in the Hadrianic bath complex at Leptis Magna, Libya, on 18 September 1924⁴¹. Mussolini clearly aimed to celebrate Italian colonial achievements and projected an image of Fascist imperial power in the moment when Italo Balbo, governor of Libya, was organizing the Italian offensive to conquer the Suez Canal. On 12 November 1938, the Soprintendente alle antichità in Libya, Giacomo Caputo, wrote to the excavations office of Leptis Magna that Balbo, on behalf of Mussolini, had ordered “a statue depicting a marble Venus of the Capitoline type found in the baths” to be donated to Göring as an ancient Roman souvenir⁴². A few days later (15 November), after the statue had been packed and transferred to Tripoli, Colonel Cagna and Major Vittembeschi of the Royal Italian Air Force, together with Caputo, flew to Berlin to present the statue to Göring:

*On the wings of a German plane from Tripoli to Berlin, the marble Venus of Leptis reaches you as a messenger of friendship and sympathy [...] It will not only be a happy bearer of graces in your Karinhall house, but also a witness to an ideal brotherhood, as in the past and more firmly in the future, it will tightly bind the Roman with the German civilizations [...]*⁴³.

Other channels for Italian antiquities to Nazi Germany:

Bypassing antiquities protection laws

[17] Despite Nazi Germany’s interest in Imperial Rome and Italy’s open export channels to Germany throughout the war, only a few antiquities were legally exported from Italy. After Italy entered the war, channels for buying and selling art were drastically reduced. After the declaration of war against the United States in December 1941, even the most important art market became inaccessible. Germany and Austria thus became the main art markets with which Italian art dealers did business. Italian paintings, terracottas, majolica, textiles, and furniture, mostly of limited value (so as not to justify an export ban or the state’s right to preemptive acquisition, a right rarely exercised even before the war due to a chronic lack of public funds) were generally

⁴¹ Renato Bertocchini, *Le terme di Lepcis (Leptis Magna)*, Bergamo 1929, 104, pl. 98; Paola Finocchi, *Le sculture delle terme adrianeae di Leptis Magna: dagli appunti di M. Floriani Squarciapino*, Rome 2012, 95-97, no. 48, pl. 52; Luisa Musso, ““Un nuovo e degno museo archeologico sta sorgendo a Sabratha...”: Dal Museo Archeologico di Tripoli ai musei di Leptis Magna e di Sabratha”, in: Luisa Musso and Laura Buccino, eds., *Il museo di Sabratha nei disegni di Diego Vincifori. Architettura e archeologia nella Libia degli anni Trenta*, Borgo San Lorenzo 2013, 18-33: 26-27, fig. 11; Luisa Morozzi and Rita Paris, eds., *L’opera da ritrovare. Repertorio del patrimonio artistico italiano disperso all’epoca della Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, Rome 1999, 26, no. 11. The Venus was displayed in the museum of Leptis Magna (DAI 84.3644). See also Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), paras. 18-20, for a discussion of this gift and its repatriation.

⁴² Musso (2013), 33 n102.

⁴³ “La Venere di Leptis offerta al Maresciallo Goering”, in: *Corriere della Sera*, 16 November 1938. The Venus returned to Italy on 22 July 1999, then to Libya in 2000, see James A. R. Nafziger and Ann M. Nicgorski, *Cultural Heritage Issues: The Legacy of Conquest, Colonization and Commerce*, Leiden 2009, 178-180. Today it is displayed in Tripoli at the Jamahiriya Museum.

approved for export by the export offices of antiquities and fine arts of the Soprintendenze during the war. Nevertheless, as we will see, only the Rome and Florence export offices reported exporting significant antiquities to Nazi Germany. The reasons seem to be twofold. The Italian art market was restricted both by the protection laws enacted in 1902 and 1909 to limit the exodus of artworks (especially to the United States) that had characterized the art market in the early decades of the 20th century, and by the 1923 series of decrees for the conservation of artistic heritage that culminated in the 1939 protection law⁴⁴. Furthermore, antiquities were mostly presented as gifts of support in diplomatic affairs—to foster political and military projects in the framework of the Italo-German alliance and to cement that relationship⁴⁵. Consequently, Italian foundries were commissioned to make many modern bronze and plaster copies of the antiquities displayed in Italian and Vatican museums for export to furnish the German Reich's showcase palaces⁴⁶.

[18] In the decade preceding Italy's entry into the war, although a number of art auctions were held to sell off collections belonging to impoverished aristocratic families or private collectors impacted by the 1929 financial crisis, very few antiquities collections ended up being transferred

⁴⁴ The 1939 protection law was the result of a complex political and cultural reformation of the national heritage system that had begun in the previous decades, when several provisions were enacted for a more efficient organization of the Ministry of Public Instruction and the management of the vast national heritage (E.g., Royal Decree-Law no. 2074 of 2 October 1919, GU no. 284 of 2 December 1919, instituted the Soprintendenze archivistiche e bibliografiche, and Royal Decree no. 1889 of 14 June 1923, GU no. 213 of 10 September 1923, ordered the compilation of a general catalog of monuments and works of historical, archaeological and artistic interest). The reformation of the national heritage system was crucial for the Fascist policy, and the enacted provisions show the ambitious program in which culture was put at the center (*politica della cultura*). In 1938 and 1939, the Fascist regime established a unique National Council of Education, Sciences and Arts (Royal Decree-Law 1673 of 21 September 1938, GU no. 253 of 7 November 1938) and reorganized the Soprintendenze alle antichità e all'arte (Law 823 of 22 May 1939, GU no. 143 of 20 June 1939). It also established the Central Institute for the Restoration and Conservation of Book Heritage (Istituto Centrale per la Patologia del Libro) and the Central Institute for Restoration (Istituto Centrale per il Restauro). Besides, the national archives were reorganized (Law 2006 of 22 December 1939, GU no. 13 of 17 January 1940), and the natural beauties were protected by a specific law (Law 1497 of 29 June 1939, GU 241 of 14 October 1939). See Giuseppe Bottai, *La politica delle arti. Scritti 1918–1943*, ed. Alessandro Masi, Rome 1992, 95-111; Sabino Cassese, "I beni culturali da Bottai a Spadolini", in: *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* 35 (1975), nos. 1-3, 124-128; Vincenzo Cazzato, ed., *Istituzioni e politiche culturali in Italia negli anni Trenta*, 2 vols., Rome 2001; Paolo Nicolini, "Politica culturale fascista e tutela (1922–1944)", in: Augusto Rossari and Roberto Togni, eds., *Verso una gestione dei beni culturali come servizio pubblico. Attività legislativa e dibattito culturale dallo stato unitario alle regioni (1860–1977)*, Milan 1978, 93-126; Sabino Cassese, *La formazione dello stato amministrativo*, Milan 1974.

⁴⁵ For the gift to Hitler of a South Italian Greek vase by Mussolini and the Fascist Party on the occasion of the former's first visit to Rome in May 1938, see Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), paras. 8-10.

⁴⁶ Chiurazzi's customer register (1927–1950) listed Hermann Göring among its clients. See Lucia Fucito, *Fonderia Artistica Chiurazzi: la forma dell'arte*, Naples 2001, 45-46. For bronze copies of ancient works of art in Göring's Carinhall see Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), para. 17, and Laura Puritani, "Göring's Collection of Antiquities at Carinhall", *RIHA Journal* 0285, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2022.2.92769>.

outside the country⁴⁷. In the 1940s, only a few pieces, including marbles, busts, bas-reliefs, columns, and sarcophagi selected from larger art collections, were auctioned (such as the Ottoboni collection)⁴⁸. One of the most significant antiquities auctions in this period was organized by the Casa di vendite Palazzo Simonetti S.A. in Rome in 1942 to put up for sale Greek and Roman pieces belonging to Ludwig Pollak, the prominent Czech archaeologist and connoisseur of Jewish origins working in Rome⁴⁹.

[19] Before the 1865 Italian Civil Code had come into effect, the legislative provision called *fedecommesso*, requiring testators to transmit their inheritances to their descendants whole and untouched, served to maintain intact important assets including art and antiquities collections⁵⁰. After the dissolution of the *fedecommesso* for the Barberini collection in 1934, the Minister of National Education appointed a committee to determine which art objects had such high artistic value that they should be made part of the state collection and which ones could pass to the Barberini-Corsini heirs. As a consequence, the heirs were able to dispose of the collection that passed to them and export it without paying the associated tax⁵¹. This opportunity was unique, and many American institutions and private collectors took advantage of it, as did Hitler's and

⁴⁷ In 1932, the Prince Rospigliosi and Simonetti collections were auctioned in Rome; they included important archeological artifacts (E. Sestieri and Casa di vendite Guido Tavazzi, *Catalogo della raccolta di quadri, sculture, arazzi, oggetti d'arte e ammobiliamento [...] di S.E. il principe don Gerolamo Rospigliosi [...] da lunedì 12 a sabato 24 dicembre 1932*, Rome 1932; Casa di vendite Guido Tavazzi, *Collezione Simonetti: quadri, mobili e oggetti d'arte [...] Roma [...] Vendita dal 25 aprile al 6 maggio 1932*, Rome 1932). In 1934, Etruscan objects and small Roman bronzes owned by the German geologist Immanuel Friedlaender and the archaeological collection (including sarcophagi, busts, friezes, and columns) of the Roman antiquarian and collector Augusto Jandolo were auctioned by the Casa di vendite Palazzo Simonetti in Rome (Casa di vendite Palazzo Simonetti, *Catalogo delle collezioni Dott. Immanuel Friedlaender ed altri [...] dal 5 al 17 marzo 1934*, Rome 1934; Casa di vendite Palazzo Simonetti, *Catalogo degli oggetti d'arte [...], raccolta di oggetti d'arte, marmi, oggetti di scavo e medioevali della collezione comm. Augusto Jandolo [...] 21 maggio 1934*, Rome 1934).

⁴⁸ Casa di vendite Palazzo Simonetti, *Catalogo della vendita all'asta [...] raccolte artistiche pertinenti al principe Ottoboni e di quanto arredo la villa Ottoboni [...], Vendita all'asta: 15–20 aprile 1941*, Rome 1941.

⁴⁹ Orietta Rossini, ed., *Ludwig Pollak: archeologo e mercante d'arte*, Rome 2018, 34–35; Casa di vendite Palazzo Simonetti, *Catalogo delle vendite all'asta per liquidazione totale negli studi terreni di via Margutta, 53-B (Palazzo Patrizi): marmi classici e decorativi, mobili [...] Vendita all'asta: da lunedì 11 maggio a giovedì 21 maggio 1942*, Rome 1942. For more on Pollak and the fate of his collections, see Irene Bald Romano's introduction to this special issue, "Antiquities in the Nazi Era: Contexts and Broader View", *RIHA Journal* 0282, paras. 14–15, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2022.2.92735>.

⁵⁰ Gottardo Pallastrelli, *“Con proibizione di alienare”. Il fedecommesso e la conservazione delle opere d'arte in Italia dal XVII al XIX secolo*, Rome 2015.

⁵¹ Royal Decree-Law no. 705, 26 April 1934, art. 3 (GU no. 107, 5 May 1934); Law no. 928, 4 June 1934 (GU no. 147, 23 June 1934).

Göring's art consultants⁵². E.g., the Barberini collection's Roman mosaic depicting *The Abduction of Europa* was presented to the Rome export office by the shipping company Ditta Tartaglia on behalf of the Galleria Sangiorgi and was sent to the attention of architect Hans Reger, responsible for the art depot in the Munich "Führerbau" and in close contact with Hitler's art advisers, at the Brown House (the headquarters of the NSDAP) in Munich on 26 June 1941⁵³. The art of mosaic, the Roman art par excellence, was frequently used to embellish the showcase palaces of the German Reich such as the Marble Hall of the Neue Reichskanzlei in Berlin, as well as the cruise ships of *Kraft durch Freude*, a state-operated leisure organization set up within the Deutsche Arbeitsfront to publicize the advantages of National Socialism to the people⁵⁴.

[20] The Barberini mosaic had been excavated in the 17th century in the ancient city of Praeneste, today Palestrina, near Rome. It was inserted into a carved frame created in 1675 and displayed at the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane, the Roman residence of the brothers Maffeo and Urbano Barberini, from 1687 onward⁵⁵. The mosaic remained there until 1934, when part of the

⁵² Maddalena D'Angelo, "La collezione Barberini: vendite e dispersioni negli Stati Uniti nel XX secolo", in: Lorenza Mochi Onori, Sebastian Schütze and Francesco Solinas, eds., *I Barberini e la cultura europea del Seicento*, Rome 2007, 641-658. The Baroque painting *Sacrifice of Diana* by Pietro da Cortona, presented by Prince Barberini himself to the Rome export office on 26 May 1941 (value declared 25,000 lire) was sent to Hans Reger at the Brown House in Munich, and the *Pygmalion and Galatea* by Angelo Bronzino (at that time attributed to Pontormo) was bought (15 March 1941) by Prince Philipp von Hessen on behalf of Hans Posse (Birgit Schwarz, *Hitlers Museum: Die Fotoalben Gemäldegalerie Linz: Dokumente zum "Führermuseum"*, Vienna 2004, 307, nos. X/6, X/19; Timothy Rood, "Xenophon and the Barberini: Pietro da Cortona's *Sacrifice to Diana*", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 76 (2013), 1-22: 21-22; ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 258, folder "Relazione delle opere d'arte ed oggetti artistici venduti o donati alla Germania da enti pubblici e da privati [1938-1944]", Ministry of Public Instruction's report, 1 Sept. 1946, no. 10/11). The values are based on those given by the 1934 ministerial committee that selected the artworks from the Barberini collection (ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 82, folder "Fedecommissi. Palazzo Barberini", notary act no. 243, list B, 30 March 1934, no. 39, 11; no. 15, 9). The Bronzino canvas is today conserved at the Uffizi museum (inventory of 1890, no. 9933) while the *Sacrifice of Diana* has been missing since the war. Von Hessen also bought other Barberini works, including the *Bust of Ippolito de' Medici* attributed to Baccio Bandinelli and a polychrome glazed majolica depicting a *Madonna with Child* by the della Robbia school, both sold on 12 June 1941 (Schwarz [2004], 139, no. XX/13; 330, fig. XX/15).

⁵³ The Barberini mosaic panel, 84 × 84 cm, is attributed to a Greco-Roman Alexandrian group of mosaicists and depicts the scene of the abduction of the Phoenician princess Europa, daughter of King Agenor, surrounded by five maids dancing among fluttering peplums. (Search by title "Raub der Europa" in: Angelika Enderlein, Monika Flacke and Hanns Christian Löhr, Database on the "Sonderauftrag Linz (Special Commission: Linz)", Berlin 2014, <https://www.dhm.de/datenbank/linzdb> [accessed 14 September 2023]). The mosaic was loaned by the Italian state to the Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte in Oldenburg in 1968 (Fabio Isman, "Il Ratto di Europa, il mosaico rapito: venduto a Hitler, ora è in Germania", in: *Il Messaggero*, 12 December 2012, https://www.ilmessaggero.it/cultura/mostre/ratto_europa_mosaico_rapito_hitler_germania-192645.html (accessed 14 September 2023).

⁵⁴ Albert Speer, *Die Neue Reichskanzlei*, Munich 1939; Johann Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans: How the Nazis Usurped Europe's Classical Past*, Oakland, CA 2016, 257.

⁵⁵ The mosaic was displayed at the ground floor, in the fourth room to the right of the Barberini palace's anteroom. Jennifer Montagu, "A Frame for the Barberini / Oldenburg Rape of Europa Mosaic", in: *Pegasus: Berliner Beiträge zum Nachleben der Antike* 8 (2006), 195-205.

Barberini palace was rented to the Club of the Italian Armed Forces (Circolo Ufficiali delle Forze Armate d'Italia). After 1934 and before it was exported to Germany, it was displayed at the Galleria Sangiorgi sales and auction house⁵⁶. Although the mosaic was presented to the Rome export office valued at 100,000 *lire*, it was purchased for 150,000 *lire*⁵⁷. After the authorization was signed by archeologist and officer Romolo Artioli of the Soprintendenza, the mosaic was exported tax-free by virtue of the revocation of the Barberini *fedecommesso*. This mosaic panel is among the few ancient works of art included in the photographic albums presented to Hitler illustrating the selection of great works for the Linz Museum or other museums in the Reich⁵⁸.

[21] Prince Philipp von Hessen, the husband of Mafalda of Savoy, daughter of the king of Italy, was engaged in acquiring art in Italy on behalf of Hitler and attempted to purchase another important mosaic in the summer of 1941, albeit this time not part of the pieces freed up by the rescinding of the Barberini *fedecommesso*. The piece in question was the circa 100 BC *Nile* mosaic from Praeneste, housed in the Colonna Barberini Palace in Palestrina, near Rome. In this case, Minister Bottai firmly opposed authorizing its exportation due to its especially high artistic value⁵⁹.

[22] Soon, this legal antiquities trade to Nazi Germany was surpassed by an illicit channel of trade fueled by political pressure exerted by Mussolini and by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Ministry of National Education to satisfy the requests of prominent German figures. Minister Bottai was exhorted to authorize the export offices of the Soprintendenze to issue licenses free of export tax and licenses for artworks protected under Law 1089/1939, which could only be exported with authorization by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts. In most cases, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed that the export tax be charged to its budget. Even though the payment of this tax was one of the procedures to legalize the export, in reality the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rarely paid it.

[23] These forced authorizations did not take into consideration the artistic and historical value of the objects but only their political and diplomatic significance. The protective function that the Ministry of National Education and its Soprintendenze were supposed to fulfil, was blocked in the face of political interests. Such maneuvering also took place before the war, when prominent figures asked Mussolini to intervene to facilitate the export of artworks, such as in the case of the masterpieces of the Soranzo Mocenigo collection that were exported to the United States in

⁵⁶ Alvar González-Palacios, "Avvio allo studio della mobilia romana", in: Goffredo Lizzani, ed., *Il mobile romano*, Novara/Milan 1997 (reprint of the original edition Milan 1970), ix, fig. XXIII.

⁵⁷ The mosaic was estimated at 3,000 *lire* in 1934 (ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 82, folder "Fedecommessi. Palazzo Barberini", notary act no. 243, list B, 30 March 1934, no. 76, 14).

⁵⁸ Schwarz (2004), 138, no. XX/1; 327, fig. XX/1. See also Romano, in this special issue (as in n2), paras. 22-23.

⁵⁹ Archive of the Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Rome, Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI), GABAILG, 1944-1945, box 172, folder "Esportazione opere d'arte in Germania (divieto)", letter by Bottai to Ciano and von Hessen, 12 August 1941. Today the mosaic is conserved in Palestrina at the Museo Archeologico Prenestino.

1937⁶⁰. Another such case took place in 1938, when a marble torso of a man, presented by the Roman antiquarian Giulio Simotti Rocchi to the Rome export office (declared value of 5,000 *lire*), was sent to Göring thanks to a specific ministerial authorization (no. 3826, 19 June 1938)⁶¹. Faced with an increasing number of export requests from prominent German figures for antiquities and artworks that were exempt from the export tax and did not fall under the protection of Law 1089/1939, Bottai sent a telegram to the Soprintendenze in September 1941 asking that they “[...] urgently send a list of valuable artworks exported to Germany [...] or [sold] to German buyers in the last two years including the artworks that have temporary export licenses. [...] transmit all the information about the German buyers’ activities with Italian art dealers and private [...]”⁶².

[24] A few days later, the Florence Soprintendenza alle Gallerie reported that, concerning antiquities, a marble statue representing Aphrodite had been registered for export by the shipping company Henry Humbert on 20 July 1939⁶³. Göring had purchased this Fréjus-type Aphrodite (second century) from the Florence antiquarian Luigi Bellini to enrich his collection at Carinhall⁶⁴ (Fig. 3). The statue was registered with a declared value of 15,000 *lire*, which was then increased to 20,000 *lire* by the officer and head of the Florence Soprintendenza alle Antichità, with

⁶⁰ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 244, folder “Contessa Teresa Soranzo Mocenigo”, letter by the Milan Soprintendenza alle Gallerie to Bottai, 22 February 1937, and letter by the Ministry of Finance to Bottai, 3 March 1937. The Countess Teresa Soranzo-Mocenigo requested the export of artworks displayed in her palace in Cremona to the United States in 1937 (Elia Santoro, *Le celebrazioni stradivariane a Cremona 1937–1949*, Cremona 1996, 48-50). The artworks were *The Risen Christ* by Bramantino, today conserved in Madrid at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza (inv. no. 61 [1937.1]); the *Portrait of a Lady (Clarice Pusterla?)* by Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, bought by Knoedler & Co. of New York and sold at Christie’s London (*Important Old Master Pictures*, 4 July 1997, no. 83) in 1997; a beginning of the 16th-century Bruxelles tapestry depicting *The Encounter of Jesus and Saint Veronica* (Arturo Pettorelli, “L’arazzo cinquecentesco di casa Mocenigo-Soranzo a Cremona”, in: *Cremona 4-5 (1937)*, 295-299, fig. 297. The Art Protection Law 364/1909 was applied to these artworks in 1928. Ciano and Mussolini intervened to ensure that the export request was accepted despite the objection of Bottai, who tried to increase the value. Bottai would have been willing to approve the export if the Bramantino had been given to the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan (ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 235, folder “Vendita Contessa Soranzo Mocenigo”, letter by Bottai to Ciano, 9 November 1937).

⁶¹ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 258BIS, folder “Opere esportate in Germania”, note of the Rome Soprintendenza alle Antichità, undated.

⁶² ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n61, telegram by Bottai to the Soprintendenze, 1 Sept. 1941.

⁶³ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n61, letter by the Florence Soprintendenza to Bottai, 4 Sept. 1941. The seller’s name is not reported on the export license (no. 5 of 10 July 1939).

⁶⁴ Göring had at least three large-scale Aphrodite/Venus statues in his collection. This Venus was listed as “Römische Frauenfigur”, see Laura Puritani, *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Dokumentation des Fremdbesitzes*, vol. 3: *Antikensammlung. Antiken aus Carinhall aus dem Eigentum der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Berlin 2017, 4-5, 22, fig. 3, 181, fig. on the left. After the war, the statue was in the custody of the Altes Museum in Berlin (SK 1948), and was returned to Italy in 1999, together with a torso (Sk 1986); see Irene Bald Romano, “Collecting Classical Antiquities among the Nazi Elite”, *RIHA Journal* 0283, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2022.2.92736>, notes 71 and 87.

archaeologist Enrico Paribeni carrying out the expert assessment and authorizing the export⁶⁵. Paribeni wrote that the statue had undergone several restorations and was only a distant copy of the Aphrodite of Fréjus, suggesting that it could be compared to one of the statues drawn by Johann Joachim Winckelmann in Villa Medici in Rome and reproduced by French archaeologist Salomon Reinach⁶⁶.

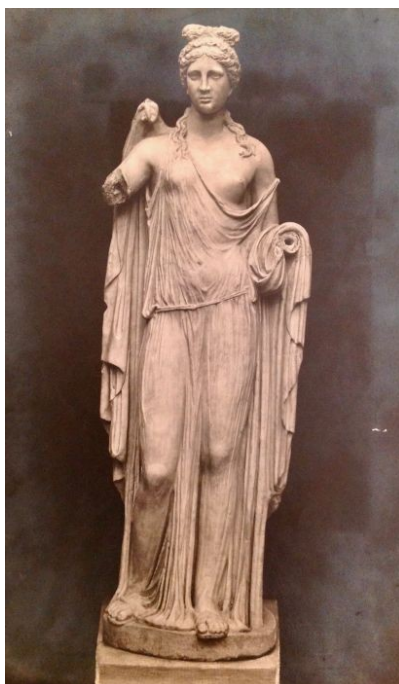


Fig. 3. Fréjus-type Aphrodite, second century, marble, from art dealer Luigi Bellini, Florence (photograph: NARA, ACC-Italy, RG 331, Headquarters MFA, box 1549, folder 302, "Export of Works of Art" © Courtesy National Archives, no. 4667)

Göring's interest in antiquities, above all classic statuary, is well described by Bellini, whose Florentine shop was visited by Göring on several occasions during the war:

Like a child, he [Göring] clapped his hands, jumped in front of the sculptures like a big bear in a cage behind the bars, and he touched, gently caressed them [...] I'm sure that if he could have plundered our museums, he would have taken firstly the Capitoline Venus, that of the Medici at the Uffizi, the Daidalsas Venus of the Vatican Museums, the

⁶⁵ Lucia Guerrini, "Ricerche stilistiche intorno a un motivo iconografico", in: *Annuario della Scuola archeologica di Atene e delle missioni italiane in Oriente*, nos. 37-38 (1959–1960), 409, no. 12; Luisa Morozzi and Rita Paris (1999), 26-27, no. 10; Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e le province di Pistoia e Prato, Florence, Ufficio esportazione oggetti di antichità e d'arte, box 1939, Florence export license no. 5, 20 July 1939. It seems that the statue and the export fee (1,600 lire) were paid by the German Embassy in Rome.

⁶⁶ Salomon Reinach, *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine*, 2 vols., 2nd ed., Paris 1908–1909, vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 331, fig. 8.

*ethereal flutist [woman playing the aulos] of the 'Ludovisi Throne', the Dioscuri of Monte Cavallo in Quirinale square, and many other nude statues [...]*⁶⁷.

[25] Beyond Florence, only the Roman Soprintendente alle Gallerie Aldo de Rinaldis reported the export of antiquities. In his reply to the Ministry of National Education, he added a number of important details. He explained the purchasing policy followed by German art buyers in Rome and showed that the Soprintendenza had full knowledge of negotiations, both ongoing and already concluded. De Rinaldis named Philipp von Hessen, Hitler's special ambassador to Italy, as the person most interested in antiquities deals. He was active in art deals between Italy and Germany involving antique books, etchings, miniatures, and 18th-century furniture. According to de Rinaldis, when von Hessen enlarged his field of activity to include antiquities, he was aided by Ludwig Curtius, the former director of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome (1928–1938) and a well-known classical archaeologist: "Curtius was no stranger to acquisitions in the field of numismatics, with the German side in Italy focusing primarily on coins excavated in Sicily and Magna Graecia"⁶⁸. However, de Rinaldis was not able to provide more information about such dealings, not only because it was out of his area of competence but also because, given the small size and portability of coins, the numismatic trade could easily make use of illegal channels to export them from the country.

[26] Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Rome export office, directed by the archaeologist Pietro Romanelli, received the largest number of requests for the export of antiquities to Germany between 1940 and 1943. Examining the documentation, it seems that the Roman art dealers were the most active in making antiquities deals during the war, just as they had been the most active in the preceding decades when prestigious collections, such as the Torlonia, Sciarra, and Stroganoff collections, were put on sale and archaeological artifacts flooded the art market. Despite Italy's restrictive measures on exports, the Roman art market flourished until the 1929 financial crisis (excluding the years of the Great War), thanks to purchases made by American collectors and museums⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ Luigi Bellini, *Nel mondo degli antiquari*, ed. Francesca Schirano, Florence 2015 [original ed. Florence 1947], 130, 134. The statues listed bear the following inventory numbers: Musei Capitolini, Rome, inv. MC0409; Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, inventory of 1914, no. 188; Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio-Clementino, Gabinetto delle Maschere 427; Museo Nazionale Romano – Palazzo Altemps, Rome, inv. 8570. The *Crouching Venus*, inv. 380998, of the Museo Nazionale Romano – Palazzo Altemps in Rome, which resembles the Vatican example mentioned by Bellini, was purchased by Göring from the Jandolo collection and exported from Rome in 1942; see Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Firenza Scalia, *L'opera ritrovata. Omaggio a Rodolfo Siviero*, exh. cat., Florence 1984, 65-66, no. 9; Matilde De Angelis d'Ossat and Alessandra Capodiferro, eds., *Palazzo Altemps. Le collezioni*, Milan 2011, 110.

⁶⁸ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 258, folder "Roma. Ufficio esportazione", letter by de Rinaldis to the Ministry of National Education, 5 Sept. 1941.

⁶⁹ Demetrio Tolesani, "La crisi del commercio antiquario", in: *L'Antiquario. Rivista d'arte* (May–June 1926), 114-119; Demetrio Tolesani, "La crisi antiquaria", in: *L'Antiquario. Rivista d'arte* (January 1928), 11-12. See also Romano, in this special issue (as in n49), paras. 47-57, for a discussion of the American market for antiquities.

[27] Despite the key role played by the Roman art market, Romanelli reported that only a few noteworthy antiquities, including the Lancellotti Discobolus and the Roman replica of the Praxitelean *bearded Dionysus* gifted by Mussolini to the Nietzsche Archive in Weimar in 1942, were exported during the war⁷⁰. Romanelli did make note of two important shipments of antiquities addressed to Hermann Göring in July 1942, but they were significant only by virtue of the large number of objects exported, not by virtue of their artistic value. On 27 June 1942, Bottai urged the Rome export office to verify 67 crates full of antiquities that Göring had purchased in Italy. Of those, 38 crates, containing 21 archaeological pieces, were deposited at the house of Armando Brasini, a successful architect in the Fascist era⁷¹. These pieces, submitted to the export office by the shipping company Otto & Rosoni, had a declared value of 70,100 *lire* (Table 1)⁷². The other 29 crates were deposited at the Galleria Sangiorgi; their contents had a declared value of 33,550 *lire* (Table 2)⁷³. All of the crates, filled with columns, capitals, busts, bas-reliefs, and various fragments, were inspected by the export office officials (Romanelli, Mario d’Orsi, and Ercole Maselli) on 1 July 1942, and they raised the declared value of the two groups of crates to 83,150 *lire* and 53,550 *lire* respectively. The office agreed to authorize their export due to the low value of the objects, and the export fees (6,652 *lire* and 4,284 *lire*) were charged to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁷⁴. Many other purchases of antiquities made by Göring’s agents in Rome were recorded by the Rome Soprintendenza. For example, in 1942, an important marble sarcophagus with lion reliefs coming from the Florio collection, auctioned in Rome in 1934 by Casa di vendite Ugo Jandolo, was purchased by Andreas Hofer for Göring⁷⁵.

⁷⁰ Adriano La Regina, “Götterwanderung 1928–1944”, in: *Convegno Internazionale sul Tema: Eredità contestata? Nuove prospettive per la tutela del patrimonio archeologico e del territorio*, Rome 1992, 107-116; Hubert Cancik, “Dioniso a Weimar. L’omaggio di Mussolini per il centenario dell’anniversario di Nietzsche”, in: *Quaderni di Storia* no. 23 (1986), 135-151. Today, the *Dionysus* is in the Museo Nazionale Romano – Palazzo Massimo alle Terme in Rome, inv. 108605, see Gasparri and Paris (2013), 264, no. 191.

⁷¹ As a member of the Fine Arts Council of the Minister of Public Instruction, Brasini took part (among his many other appointments) in the Urban Planning Committee of the City of Rome. About his activities, see Elisabetta Procida, *La sede storica dell’INAIL a Roma: il palazzo in via IV Novembre*, Milan 2009, 169-171.

⁷² Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Rome, Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Ex-Archivio Siviero (hereafter, MAE-S), box 3/590, Agreements with allies for the artworks looted by Germans, list I, undated.

⁷³ MAE-S, box 3/590, Agreements with allies for the artworks looted by Germans, list II, undated.

⁷⁴ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 258BIS, folder “Opere esportate in Germania”, telegram by Bottai to the Rome export office, 1 July 1942. The ministerial authorization was given on 27 June 1942. At the end of the fiscal year, Romanelli protested that the export fees were not yet paid.

⁷⁵ Casa di vendite Ugo Jandolo, *Catalogo degli oggetti provenienti dalle collezioni dei signori Ignazio e Vincenzo Florio di Palermo [...] Vendita: dal 19 marzo al 3 aprile 1934, [...]*, Rome 1934, no. 591, table II; Puritani (2017), 117, fig. 11, 138-139; Laura Puritani, “Görings römischer Löwensarkophag” (17 April 2020), on the blog “Provenienzforschung. Biographien der Objekte”, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, <https://blog.smb.museum/biografien-der-objekte-goerings-roemischer-loewensarkophag/> (accessed 14 Sept. 2023). On the Jandolos, see also Romano, in this special issue (as in n49), para. 57.

Archaeological item	Date (AD)	Valuation (Italian lire)
Small Roman marble relief	3rd century	7,000
Roman male marble bust	3rd–4th centuries	1,500
Roman marble bust	3rd–4th centuries	500
Roman female marble bust, restored	3rd–4th centuries	1,500
Roman female marble bust, restored	3rd–4th centuries	1,500
Roman black basalt head	2nd century	1,500
Two Roman herms, man and woman, with basements	2nd century	2,000
Roman stone cup	3rd–4th centuries	6,400
Eight Roman marble busts	3rd century	18,600
Small marble goddess resting, restored	3rd century	1,800
Roman male marble statue, restored	2nd century	1,600
Roman female marble statue, restored	3rd century	1,500
Roman female statue, restored	3rd century	1,000
Fragment of a Roman sarcophagus, restored	2nd–3rd centuries	5,700
Roman male marble bust	2nd–3rd centuries	3,000
Twelve limestone plates depicting "biblical scenes"	5th–6th centuries	6,000
Roman female marble bust	3rd–4th centuries	500
Two Roman marble columns*	3rd–4th centuries	3,000

* Included in the list of estimated values only.

Table 1. Antiquities acquired by Andreas Hofer on behalf of Hermann Göring from Armando Brasini and submitted by the shipping company Otto & Rosoni to the export office of the Rome Soprintendenza alle Gallerie for an export license, 1 July 1942 (data compiled from: MAE-S [as in n74])

Archaeological Item	Date	Valuation (Italian lire)
Fragment of a column on a marble pedestal	Late Roman period	8,200
Two small Roman marble columns with pedestals	Late Roman period	1,250
Fragment of a marble column on pedestal	Late Roman period	Not specified
Two small Roman marble columns restored with pedestals	3rd–4th centuries AD	500
Two Roman marble columns with pedestals and capitals	Late Roman period	1,300
Two small Roman marble columns restored with pedestals	Late Roman period	500
Two small Roman marble columns restored with pedestals and capitals	Late Roman period	2,100
Striated marble column	Late Roman period	3,000
Roman marble statue	3rd century AD	6,000
Fragment of a Roman marble relief	3rd–4th centuries AD	2,000
Two Roman marble columns with pedestals	Late Roman period	1,500
Small marble column with pedestal	Late Roman period	500
Two fragments of a marble column with marble pedestal	Late Roman period	500
Fragment of a Roman male statue restored	Late Roman period	1,500
Fragment of a marble column	Late Roman period	300

Table 2. Antiquities acquired by Andreas Hofer on behalf of Hermann Göring from the Galleria Sangiorgi and submitted by the shipping company Otto & Rosoni to the export office of the Rome Soprintendenza alle Gallerie for an export license, 1 July 1942 (data compiled from MAE-S [as in n75])

[28] Minister Bottai, who had received the Soprintendenti's replies to his telegram of September 1941 and was concerned about the increase in export requests, issued Circular no. 170 on 6 November 1941. This circular prohibited the alienation and export of artworks and antiquities protected by Law 1909/1939 for the entire duration of the war pursuant to Law no. 1041 of 6 July 1940 (GU no. 185, 8 August 1940)—that is, the legislation in keeping with war law designed to protect the country's national heritage from wartime offenses. Circular no. 170 was implemented with Royal Decree-Law no. 882 of 3 September 1941 (GU no. 208, 3 September 1941) forbidding the alienation and export of gold, silver, and precious objects, including artworks. Art objects not already covered under Law 1909/1939 had to be presented to the export offices, and the officials in turn had the option to apply the protection law in extremis. Bottai's ultimate goal was to curb

the exodus of Italian cultural heritage. This circular was only the first of many sent to the Soprintendenze between 1941 and 1942 requesting them to monitor the art trade⁷⁶. Despite these attempts, many artworks and antiquities ended up being illegally traded and exported. Most of them were secretly reported by the Supreme Military Command to the Ministries of the Interior, National Education, and Finance and to the Carabinieri military force, with the suggestion that a more effective set of measures be adopted to prevent the national cultural heritage from being illegally siphoned off⁷⁷. According to the Supreme Military Command, many artworks and antiquities were taken out of the country through German diplomatic convoys that had been exempted from customs inspection by the Italo-German trade agreements of 14 March 1942 (article 12). As a consequence, the Ministry of Finance's Directorate General of Customs issued Circular no. 296 on 2 December 1942 ("Illegal export of artworks by German soldiers") ordering Italian customs officials to exercise "discreet vigilance" over German convoys so as to prevent illegal art exportation.⁷⁸

[29] Despite these preventive actions, there were many reported cases of antiquities leaving Italy illegally. One curious example is the so-called Kouros Amelung. In December 1940, the Soprintendente alle Antichità di Roma II, Salvatore Aurigemma, informed Bottai that the ancient statue called Kouros Amelung had once again been put up for sale⁷⁹ (Fig. 4). This male marble statue, presumed to be from the first century BC and a Roman copy of a Greek original, was part of the archaeological collection of Walther Amelung, an art historian, archaeologist, and specialist in classical sculpture who had directed the German Archaeological Institute in Rome from 1922 to 1927⁸⁰. Given the supposed high artistic value of the Kouros Amelung, Bottai was driven to issue Circular no. 282 on 23 December 1940 urging the export offices to verify any requests for the export of ancient statuary and, if they did receive any such requests, to inform the ministry immediately. Bottai hoped to prevent the export of this particular statue because it had never come under the protection of Law 1089/1939 (or the previous Law 364/1909). The Kouros

⁷⁶ Bottai spoke on art exports at the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations, the lower house of the legislature of the Kingdom of Italy from 1939 to 1943, on 7 May 1942; ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 258, folder "Esportazione opere d'arte clandestina da parte di militari tedeschi", Circular no. 296, 2 Dec. 1942, and Strozzi and Scalia (1984), 23, 25.

⁷⁷ ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza (DGPS), Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati (AAGGRR), II Guerra Mondiale, AG5, box 139, folder 179, letter by the Supreme Military Command to the Ministries of Interior, Finance, and National Education and the Carabinieri, 20 November 1942.

⁷⁸ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 258, folder "Esportazione opere d'arte clandestina da parte di militari tedeschi", Circular no. 296, 2 Dec. 1942.

⁷⁹ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 256, folder "Affari Generali. Torso di statua arcaica di proprietà privata. Divieto d'esportazione", letter by Aurigemma to Bottai, 12 December 1940.

⁸⁰ Morozzi and Paris (1999), 24, no. 6; Ernst Langlotz, *Frühgriechische Bildhauerschulen*, Nürnberg 1927, 132, no. 79, fig. 79; Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, *Storicità dell'arte classica*, Florence 1943, 41-42, pl. XX, fig. 36, 317 n27. The second edition of Bandinelli's book ([1950], 265 n23) indicates that the Kouros Amelung is conserved at the Pergamonmuseum (Sk 1882). It remains in the Antikensammlung of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin today.

Amelung had no head, upper limbs, or lower limbs below the knee, making it small enough (only 72 cm in height) to be easily hidden from export offices' inspections, especially considering how busy the officials were during that period⁸¹. According to investigations conducted after the war, the statue was acquired by Carl Weickert directly from Alexander Amelung, son and heir of Walther Amelung, for the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin on 15 December 1942 for 20,000 *Reichsmark* and then illicitly exported via the German Embassy in Rome⁸². We now understand that this torso, still in the collection of the Berlin Antikensammlung, is probably a fake, a creation of the later 19th or early 20th century⁸³.

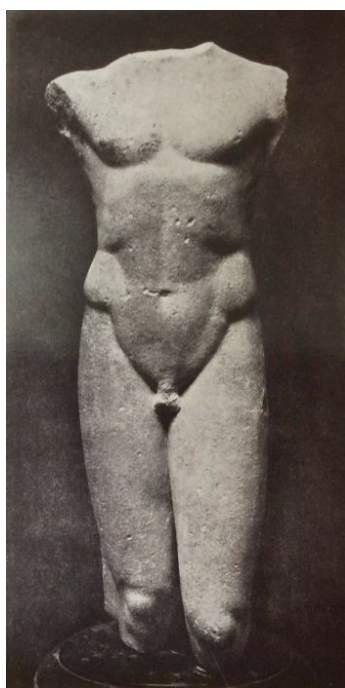


Fig. 4. So-called Kouros Amelung, probably a late 19th or early 20th century fake, marble, H. 72 cm. Ex collection Walther Amelung; since 1942 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. SK 1882 (photograph: ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929–1960, box 256, folder “Affari Generali. Torso di statua arcaica di proprietà privata. Divieto d’espportazione” © su concessione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo, n. prot. 123456-2021)

[30] Another probable fake, purchased by Weickert in Rome in July 1941 and illegally exported, was a Roman headless male torso in marble, considered similar to a late Hellenistic statue of

⁸¹ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 256, folder “Affari Generali. Torso di statua arcaica di proprietà privata. Divieto d’espportazione”, letter by Aurigemma to Bottai, 4 May 1945.

⁸² MAE-S, case 3/929BIS, report on the Kouros Amelung’s export.

⁸³ For an analysis of this torso and bibliography, see Sascha Kansteiner, “Torso einer kleinen männlichen Statue, sog. Torso Amelung”, data sheet of the Berlin Antikensammlung on the website of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/1062679?fl=20&q=2396&resultIndex=1> (accessed 28 Sept. 2022).

Hercules, according to Margarete Bieber⁸⁴ (Fig. 5). Carl Blümel, in a 1961 essay about the modern Roman copies conserved in the Berlin museums, deemed the torso a modern copy and provided some useful information about its provenance⁸⁵. He specified that Weickert had bought the torso from gentlemen “Lundberg and Tannenbaum”, the latter a sculptor, archaeologist, and art dealer, for “one million *lire* and one million Swedish crowns”, a sum Blümel judged to be extremely high even if it had been a Greek original. Citing unspecified reports, he continued by noting that it was sculpted by Gildo Pedrazzoni, a pupil of the famous forger Alceo Dossena (1878–1937), “and then baked by Armando Pacifici and finally treated by Tannenbaum”.—Exposure to heat combined with acid treatment were means to give an artificially ancient appearance.—The torso was stolen by the Red Army and taken to either Moscow or Leningrad. During the return transport from Russia to Germany, the buttocks of the statue, whose marble had become friable due to the treatment, shattered, and it became clear that the statue was probably a skilled fake⁸⁶.

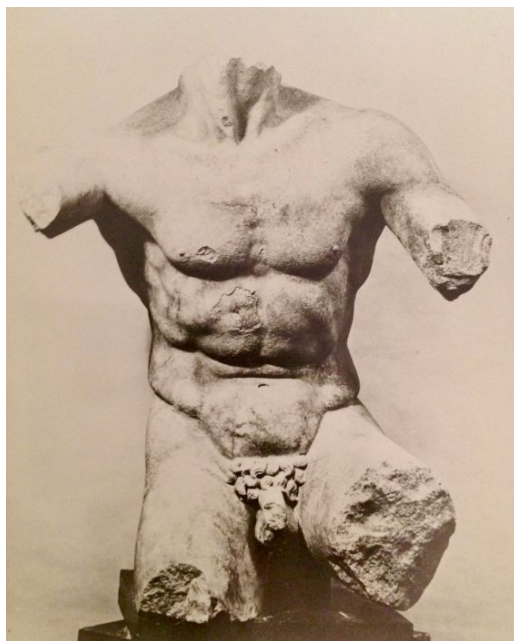


Fig. 5. Male torso, probably a fake by Gildo Pedrazzoni, first half of 20th century, marble. Since 1941 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. no. 1986; returned to Italy in 1999 (photograph provided by NARA, ACC-Italy, RG 331, Headquarters MFA, box 1549, folder 302, “Export of Works of Art” © Courtesy National Archives, no. 4663)

⁸⁴ Margarete Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, New York 1955, 122, fig. 485; Morozzi and Paris (1999), 26, no. 9. An undated note written by the Italian Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Recovery of Artworks and conserved at MAE-S indicates that the torso was probably excavated in Sorrento (province of Naples), studied by Pollak, restored by Simonetti, and sold to Sestieri for 100,000 lire. The note does not specify the source of this information.

⁸⁵ Carl Blümel, “Teure Fälschungen”, in: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, ed., *Forschungen und Berichte* 3-4 (1961), 13-17: 15-17, figs. 4-5.

⁸⁶ The torso was returned to Germany by Russia, and in 1999 Germany returned it to Italy; see Irene Bald Romano, “Collecting Classical Antiquities among the Nazi Elite”, *RIHA Journal* 0283, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2022.2.92736>, n. 87.

Dispossessed antiquities

[31] The illegal antiquities trade involved not only art dealers and experts but also occupying troops and common citizens. Local inhabitants took fragments of ancient monuments and statues, oil lamps, small bronzes, and coins that could easily be stowed among military equipment and sold to the troops (especially Allied soldiers) or exchanged for basic necessities⁸⁷. In some cases, the inhabitants gave soldiers Roman coins or fragments of artifacts they found on the ground as a sign of gratitude. This phenomenon of dispossession was particularly evident in Central and Southern Italy, where many archaeological areas and museums located in small towns were not well protected against military occupation⁸⁸.

[32] One case that has received scant attention from scholars despite the valuable antiquities involved is that of the Libyan archaeological finds displayed at the colonial exhibition “Italian Overseas Lands” (“Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d’Oltremare”), opened at Bagnoli, a northern suburb of Naples, on 9 May 1940⁸⁹. The Libya Pavilion, one of the largest sections of the exhibition, displayed Roman remains that had been unearthed in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, in particular in the cities of Leptis Magna and Sabratha. The display featured models and casts of the major excavation buildings, selected mosaics and inscriptions, and antiquities, all attesting to the history of imperialism during the Roman Empire in Africa and to recent Fascist conquests. The antiquities, selected for the exhibition by the Italian Ministry of Africa and the Soprintendenza ai Monumenti e Scavi in Libya, were the most important finds excavated in previous years and included column capitals, statues, and jewelry⁹⁰. The marble bust of Jove Africanus from the Sabratha Capitolium and seven Neo-Attic bas-reliefs of dancing maenads excavated in Ptolemais

⁸⁷ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 207 (loose pages), letter by the Soprintendenza alle Antichità della Puglia to the Ministry of Public Instruction, 8 April 1949, and box 141 (loose pages), letter by the Soprintendenza alle Antichità della Calabria to the Ministry of Public Instruction, 15 December 1945.

⁸⁸ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 257, folder “Elenco delle opere d’arte asportate dai tedeschi o probabilmente asportate 1945, List of the artworks and antiquities removed, March 1945”. See Romano, in this special issue (as in n49), paras. 16-20, for examples of random thefts of antiquities in the Campania region in particular.

⁸⁹ *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d’Oltremare, Napoli 9 maggio–15 ottobre 1940, VIII: Documentario*, Naples 1940, 47-50; Giovanni Arena, *Visioni d’Oltremare. Allestimenti e politica dell’immagine nelle esposizioni coloniali del XX secolo*, Naples 2011; Nicola Labanca, ed., *L’Africa in vetrina: storie di musei e di esposizioni coloniali in Italia*, Treviso 1992.

⁹⁰ Gennaro Pesce, “La sezione archeologica del Padiglione libico alla triennale d’oltremare”, in: *Il Giornale di Bengasi. Quotidiano fascista della Libia orientale*, 29 May 1940.

(Cyrenaica) in 1935 were among these artifacts⁹¹. The celebrated discovery of the Augustan theater of Leptis Magna that took place in the same period as the 1937 Augustus celebration was represented by a large statue of a nymph seated on a rock⁹². Besides, there were 393 ethnographic jewelry pieces from the Natural History Museum of Tripoli and classical Byzantine bronze works from Leptis Magna and Sabratha (including two vases from the Severan Basilica of Leptis Magna, a late Roman helmet and four hanging multipart candelabra with chains found in the theater area of Leptis Magna, a Christian lamp, and a bas-relief from Sabratha depicting a youthful satyr).

[33] However, after the declaration of war by Italy, the exhibition was interrupted and these objects were inventoried and put into storage, together with the contents of the Naples museums, by the Naples Soprintendenza alle Gallerie⁹³. Due to their large size, however, some of the exhibited artworks were not removed by the Soprintendenza, and the ones that had not been on display were stored in the pavilions⁹⁴. The Bagnoli site remained unguarded for the duration of the war, and it was easy enough for soldiers and locals to take art objects and sell them, as reported by the Naples Soprintendenza at the end of the war⁹⁵. Beginning in early October 1943, the exhibit pavilions and their premises were occupied by US medical units with the 21st General Hospital. The engineering team that worked to transform the exhibition ground into a hospital stated that the site had been devastated and many objects and materials had been plundered. Finally, in January 1944, the Naples Soprintendenza and Allied Military Government officers visited

⁹¹ The bas-reliefs of dancing maenads were displayed in the Tolemaide room of the “Mostra d’Oltremare”. Giacomo Caputo, *Lo scultore del grande bassorilievo con la danza delle Menadi in Tolemaide di Cirenaica*, Rome 1958, 30; Richard Goodchild, “The Fountain of the Maenads at Ptolemais”, in: *Libya antiqua. Annual of the Department of Archaeology of Libya*, new series, 1 (1964), 121-127. The bas-reliefs of dancing maenads and the bust of Jove Africanus (photograph in the AGSL Digital Photo Archive of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, see “Libya, bust of Jupiter at Sabratha Museum”, <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agsafrica/id/4390/> [accessed 14 Sept. 2023]) returned to Libya in 1961, to the museum of Tolmeita (also: Ptolemais Museum) (https://www.temehu.com/Cities_sites/museum-of-tolmeita.htm [accessed 14 Sept. 2023]) and to the Sabratha Museum, respectively (https://www.temehu.com/Cities_sites/museum-of-sabratha.htm [accessed 14 Sept. 2023]).

⁹² Giacomo Caputo, “Il teatro augusteo a Leptis Magna”, in: Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, ed., *Atti del V Congresso nazionale di studi romani*, Rome 1940, 397-398; Giacomo Caputo and Gustavo Traversari, *Le sculture del teatro di Leptis Magna*, Rome 1976, 51-53, pl. 30. The statue was restored with gesso for the “Mostra d’Oltremare”. It returned to Libya in 1961 following the Italo-Libyan economic agreement signed in Rome on 2 October 1956 (Law no. 843, 17 Aug. 1957, GU no. 237, 24 Sept. 1957). Today it is conserved in Tripoli at the Jamahiriya Museum (inv. no. 59).

⁹³ NARA, ACC-Italy, RG 331, Headquarters MFA, box 1549, folder 393, “Dislocation of Art – Africa, June–August 1945”; Caputo (1958), 30. The storages were located in the countryside (such as at the Abbey of Montecassino or on Vatican territory). A part of the Libyan objects (coins and classical metalworks) were stored at the Museo coloniale in Rome, see NARA, Roberts Commission, RG 239, roll 67, folder “Conditions on Greece; Colonial Exhibit in Naples 1940 Italy (Recovery of Loot)”, Narducci inv. no. 56, 24 Nov. 1944.

⁹⁴ NARA, Roberts Commission, RG 239, roll 67, folder “Conditions on Greece; Colonial Exhibit in Naples 1940 Italy (Recovery of Loot)”, Narducci inv. no. 49, 24 Nov. 1944.

⁹⁵ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 166 (loose pages), report by the Naples Soprintendenza alle Gallerie, 8 July 1944.

the site on various occasions, and these inspections found that the looted objects included secondary exhibit materials (models, casts, etc.), ethnographic objects from Italian museums (such as the Museo Civico di Perugia and the Museo Civico di Bologna), and, among the excavated objects, a marble Corinthian capital with base from Leptis Magna (Fig. 6) and a marble statuette of Venus Genetrix from Sabratha's Theater Baths⁹⁶ (Fig. 7). In the postwar years, the story of these objects faded into oblivion, and the objects were not included in the 1956 Italo-Libyan agreement on economic collaboration nor in the settlement of issues surrounding a UN resolution that required Italy to return art objects to Libya⁹⁷. These objects, together with many others on display at the colonial exhibition, remain unaccounted for even today⁹⁸.



Fig. 6. Corinthian capital with base, marble. Formerly museum of Sabratha, Libya, current location unknown (photography: NARA, ACC-Italy, RG 331, Headquarters MFA, box 1549, folder 393, "Dislocation of Art—Africa, June–August 1945" © Courtesy National Archives, no. 6682)

⁹⁶ Among the looted objects, a 16th-century oval shield from the Museo Civico di Bologna (inv. no. 400) returned in 1995 (*I beni culturali della difesa. La difesa dei beni culturali*, exh. cat., ed. Patrizia Andreasi Bassi, Rome 1998, 66, 97-98).

⁹⁷ Giuseppe Vedovato, "La ratifica dell'accordo italo-libico (1957): Un cinquantenario di grande rilievo", in: *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* 74, no. 296 (4/2007), 561-584.

⁹⁸ Before 1940, the Venus Genetrix was displayed in room III of the Museum of Sabratha together with Jove Africanus. In Naples, it was hidden by a custodian "in a show room under the central tower", presumably part of the main administrative block of the exhibition building. The project of the new Sabratha museum (2008–2009) does not include this statue; Margherita B. Tara, "Sabratha scavi bastò a se stessa", in: Musso and Buccino (2013), 159-161, figs. 36, 43.



Fig. 7. Venus Genetrix, marble. Formerly museum of Sabratha, Libya, current location unknown (photograph: NARA, ACC-Italy, RG 331, Headquarters MFA, box 1549, folder 393, “Dislocation of Art—Africa, June–August 1945” © Courtesy National Archives, no. 6686)

Conclusions

[34] Italy’s Soprintendenze recorded many cases of looting and illegal trade in antiquities, including war souvenirs, many of which were abandoned by retreating German troops or taken from Italy by Allied soldiers. For example, German soldiers left a marble cover of a Roman funerary urn in Ravarino (province of Modena) in 1945 (Fig. 8)⁹⁹. The dispossession of these antiquities deserves further investigation.

⁹⁹ Today it is conserved in Pesaro at the Museo Archeologico Oliveriano (inv. no. 3952 [CIL VI, 3894]). For more about it, see ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 159 (loose pages), letter by the Soprintendenza alle Antichità dell’Emilia e Romagna to the Ministry of Public Instruction, 12 December 1947; Milena Ricci, “Un recupero a Modena”, in: *Epigraphica* 43 (1981), 245-246. Four Roman heads of the first century, discovered during excavations carried out at the cryptoporticus of the theater of ancient Trifanum between 1925 and 1926 and conserved in the Museo Civico di Sessa Aurunca (Caserta province), were plundered by allied soldiers. Two of these heads, depicting Emperor Tiberius and his son Drusus Minor, returned to Italy in 2017 from a New York private collection and the Cleveland Museum of Art, respectively. See Romano, in this special issue (as in n49), para. 19, for the head of Drusus. Both heads, purchased in good faith, were stolen by soldiers of the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division of the French Expeditionary Corps that illegally exported them to Algiers, hiding them among their equipment (report of the Naples Soprintendente on 21 November 1944, ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 159 [loose pages]). Amedeo Maiuri, “Il criptoportico di Sessa Aurunca”, in: *Rendiconti della Accademia di Archeologia, Lettere e Belle Arti [Napoli]* 36 (1951), 55-62; Alfonso De Franciscis, “Sculture di età romana a Suessa Aurunca”, in: *Studia suessana* 1 (1979), 17-25; Giuseppe Scarpa, “La testa di Tiberio rubata dai soldati trovata nella galleria del miliardario Usa”, in: *La Repubblica*, 1 April 2017, <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2017/04/01/la-testa-di-tiberio-rubata-dai-soldati-trovata-nella-usaRoma09.html> (accessed 14 Sept. 2023).



Fig. 8. Marble cover of a Roman funerary urn. Pesaro, Museo Archeologico Oliveriano, inv. no. 3952 (CIL VI, 3894) (photograph © su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Archivio Fotografico delle Gallerie Estensi)

[35] Although the artistic value attributed by the Soprintendenze to the exported antiquities was limited and many were modern copies or reproductions of famous classic statuary made by Italian foundries, several Italian art dealers and collectors profited from trade with Nazi Germany. Göring's behavior in Bellini's shop showed the insanity behind the demand for antiquity:

He was not a connoisseur, a scholar in this field: he liked objects like this, as they affected his imagination; he asked for advice from his 'experts' who knew less than him, and he did in his own way [...] he seemed insane, he ran from an object to another [...] complacency and delight were emphasized by his attitude¹⁰⁰.

This lust for antiquities and art objects fueled a prolific trade between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, only partially limited by the actions of the Ministry of National Education.

[36] Even if the Fascist regime was aware of the historical and cultural value of the gifted antiquities, their value became secondary in favor of a specific political purpose. Impoverishing Italian national heritage by gifting antiquities was the price to pay for realizing the Fascist political project of hegemony through its glorious Roman past. When in 1942 the director of the Nietzsche-Archiv in Weimar, Georg Lüttke, asked for a Greek statue to decorate a niche in the archive's hall, Mussolini ordered a search for something suitable among the Italian and Greek public collections, not realizing the historical and economic value of such a request¹⁰¹. Only the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts and the Italian School of Archeology in Athens firmly opposed Mussolini and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stressing the "exceptional value" of Greek statues for

¹⁰⁰ Bellini (2015), 129.

¹⁰¹ ACS, MPI, AABBA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 124, folder "Archivio Nietzsche-Richiesta di statua greca", letter by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of National Education, 19 Sept. 1942. The Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene also stressed the difficulty of removing an original Greek statue from a Greek public collection, as these were placed in anti-aircraft shelters.

the nation¹⁰². Their proposal to donate to the Nietzsche-Archiv a copy in bronze or marble by the Fonderia Chiurazzi of the busts of Dionysus or (presumably) Heraclitus from the Villa dei Pisoni in Herculaneum was unacceptable to Mussolini and his propagandistic use of antiquities for political purposes¹⁰³. Finally, the Roman replica of the *bearded Dionysus* by Praxiteles displayed in the Museo Nazionale Romano in Rome was chosen¹⁰⁴. Before the statue could finally be gifted to Nazi Germany, to Mussolini's great satisfaction, the powerless Ministry of National Education paid for a thorough restoration¹⁰⁵. The *Dionysus* case illustrates well that, despite legal restrictions on the transfer of antiquities, the great works played a central role in the strategic use of cultural heritage for Fascist ideological and political purposes, especially in relations with Nazi Germany.

Abbreviations used in citations and captions

AABBAA

Fondo Antichità e Belle Arti

ACS

Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome

GU

Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia

MAE-S

Ministero Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Ex-Archivio Siviero, Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Rome

MPI

Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione

NARA

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland

¹⁰² ACS, MPI, AABBAA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n101, letter by the Ministry of National Education to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 14 July 1942, and letter by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of National Education, 1 Sept. 1942.

¹⁰³ ACS, MPI, AABBAA, Div. III, 1929-1960, same box and folder as in n101, note of the Soprintendente alle Antichità di Roma, 5 Sept. 1942. The busts of Dionysus and (presumably) Heraclitus are displayed at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale at Naples (inv. nos. 5618 and 5623).

¹⁰⁴ About the bearded Dionysus, see Roberto Paribeni, *Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, Rome 1928, 353-354; *Invisibilia: Rivedere i capolavori, rivedere i progetti*, exh. cat., ed. Maria Elisa Tittoni, Rome 1992, 117-118.

¹⁰⁵ ACS, MPI, AABBAA, Div. III, 1929-1960, box 124, folder "Archivio Nietzsche-Richiesta di statua greca", receipt by the restorer Giuseppe Tonnini (9,000 lire), 23 February 1943. Other receipts are included for the bronze plaque remembering the gift and the clay copies by Vincenzo Ciotti (2,150 lire) and Francesco Mercatali (1,700 lire). The *Dionysus* was transferred to Weimar in January 1944 by Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring (see Cancik [1986], 141, no. 72). The statue was returned to Italy in 1991 ("Il ritorno del Dioniso Barbato", in: *La Repubblica*, 12 May 1991).

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