CHAPTER 22
MUSEUMS AS SITES OF RECONCILIATION
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For museums that collect Greek and Roman art, 2006 was a watershed year. Evidence seized during raids on the Swiss warehouses of several prominent antiquities dealers revealed the details of fraudulent business practices, graphically documented by photographs of artifacts, still covered with dirt from freshly plundered sites. Some of these images were matched to objects on display in the galleries of international museums. With these records, Italian prosecutors exposed a global network of traffickers closely tied to auction houses and private collectors—a network that brought works of art to the secondary market and thence to distinguished public institutions. Particularly among North American museums, demands for the restitution of stolen and illegally exported cultural property have had major repercussions, both in terms of negative public perception and the costs of litigation. Jeopardizing the cosmopolitan ideals that museums embrace, the expanding investigations that source countries are pursuing signal that the problem of illicit antiquities from all eras and regions of the world will be resolved neither easily nor soon.

In the wake of the antiquities scandals, however, there have been positive outcomes. Evidence can no longer be waved aside that site looting and the burgeoning commerce in unprovenanced artifacts go hand in hand. Going well beyond the quiet repatriation of stolen works of art, agreements have been forged that entail exchanges between museums as well as other kinds of productive partnerships. The cultural agreements that several U.S. museums have struck with Italy, described below, call for long-term loans, collaboration on exhibitions, and conservation projects. Most importantly, strict policies governing acquisitions of ancient art and other objects that fall under the definition of cultural property have established a “bright line,” a date after which the provenance of objects must be documented.

When it comes to antiquities, private collectors and archaeologists have long been at odds over acquisition practices. Globalization and the politics of culture in the 21st century, however, are redefining their public obligations. Making ancient art meaningful and accessible—and bridging the gap between scholars who work in the field and those who work in galleries—demand creative strategies. By acknowledging the multiple values of items previously seen solely

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through the lens of fine art, museums can function as sites of reconciliation. This chapter describes some recent developments at the J. Paul Getty Museum, which has been a lightning rod for controversies that have polarized professions as much as nations.

A. THE FRANCAVILLA PROJECT

In 1994, the Getty Museum informed the Italian Ministry of Culture about the presence of a large quantity of artifacts that had been determined to come from a location in South Italy known as Timpone della Motta. Situated close to the Calabrian coastal town of Francavilla Marittima, Timpone is the location of a religious sanctuary, where Italian and Dutch excavators discovered a series of temples in the 1960s and 1970s. Active from about the eighth century B.C.E., the sanctuary was frequented by the inhabitants of a nearby Iron Age settlement. Later it was associated with the Achaian colony of Sybaris, famed in antiquity for its wealth and extravagant lifestyle. When the research priorities of the local archaeological superintendency shifted to Sybaris proper, looters pillaged Timpone, emptying the contents of one or more votive deposits. The deposits contained dedications of terracotta figurines, bronze implements, gold and silver jewelry, and decorated pottery. The haul was clandestinely exported from Italy to Switzerland in the 1970s, with some of the finer pieces ending up in private collections. Quantities of objects emerged on the Swiss art market, from which selections were acquired in 1975–78 by the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. Other artifacts made their way in batches to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu between 1978 and 1982; the remaining pottery finds wound up in the Institute of Classical Archaeology in Bern.

Specific features of the material from the authorized excavations made it plain to the excavators that the Copenhagen, Bern, and Malibu groups all belonged to the Timpone deposit. To date, over 100 joins have been made between museum fragments and freshly excavated materials. Joins with the objects still in situ have also confirmed their common source. These discoveries set into motion a project to study, conserve, and publish the Malibu and Bern groups. Conceived by Marion True and supported by the director of the Archaeological Institute in Bern, Dietrich Willers, the aim of the Francavilla project was to de-accession and amalgamate the dispersed votives, and to relocate the entire collection to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale della Sibaritide, which is the archaeological museum in nearby Sibari (ancient Sybaris).

Rather than a unilateral restitution of looted antiquities, the project seized the opportunity to convene an international team of researchers to inventory and analyze the entire assemblage. The Getty objects were sent to Bern in

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