



## U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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Contact: ICE Public Affairs  
Phone: 313-215-7657

# News Release

## News Releases

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Toledo, OH

### *Transfer ceremony clears way for looted ancient vessel to be returned to Italy*

TOLEDO, Ohio — A rare Etruscan black-figure kalpis, which has been traced back to 510 B.C., will be returned to the Italian government following a transfer ceremony Tuesday at the Toledo Museum of Art.

A June 2012 [agreement](#) between the United States and the Toledo Museum of Art followed by Tuesday's transfer ceremony is the culmination of an extensive investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to restore the true provenance of the kalpis.

The kalpis, a ceramic vessel used in ancient times for holding water, depicts a mythological scene of pirates being transformed into dolphins by Dionysos. It was smuggled out of Italy after an illegal excavation prior to 1981. It was then sold in 1982 to the Toledo Museum of Art by art dealers Gianfranco and Ursula Becchina, who had earlier purchased it from convicted art smuggler Giacomo Medici. The Becchinas misrepresented the true provenance of the vase to the museum by providing falsified documentation.

Following a January 2010 lead from HSI Rome, Cleveland-based HSI special agents launched an investigation into the true provenance of the artifact. Working closely with law enforcement officials in Italy, HSI special agents were able to definitively establish that the documentation provided to the Toledo Museum of Art was falsified and part of a larger scheme by the Becchinas to sell illegitimately obtained cultural property. Gianfranco Becchina was convicted in February 2011 of illicitly dealing in antiquities by a court in Rome. That conviction was appealed by Becchina and remains in the Italian court system.

According to court documents, the kalpis has been valued at more than \$665,000.

"Art and antiquities are given a monetary value in the marketplaces in which they are traded," said William Hayes, acting special agent in charge of HSI Detroit. "But the cultural and symbolic worth of these objects far surpasses any dollar value to the people and nations of the origin of these works. We are pleased today that this ancient vessel will be returned to the people of Italy. And other governments around the world can be assured that HSI remains a committed partner in the effort to return stolen and looted priceless cultural objects to their rightful owners."

Ambassador of Italy to the United States Claudio Bisogniero said, "Collaboration with U.S. authorities in this sector is one of our top priorities, not only because of the intrinsic value of the properties as in the case of the Etruscan black-figure kalpis, but also because these returns are a tangible way to restrain international trafficking in works of art. We are very pleased by this result, especially since it coincides with the start of our celebrations for 2013-Year of Italian culture in the United States."

"It has been said that, 'Principles only matter if you stick to them even when it is inconvenient,'" said U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio Steven M. Dettelbach. "And so, I want every museum, every business and every school child here in Toledo to see and understand that today is about living up to a very basic principle. When you find out that something is not rightfully yours – no matter how special, no matter how beautiful or no matter how costly that thing might be – you give it back."

"Today we transfer to law enforcement authorities a celebrated Etruscan kalpis because we have uncovered evidence that it has inadequate provenance," said Toledo Museum of Art Director Brian Kennedy. "This is the first step toward this object being repatriated to Italy, where we understand it will be placed on public view in Rome."

HSI plays a leading role in criminal investigations that involve the illegal importation and distribution of cultural property, including the illicit trafficking of cultural property, especially objects that have been reported lost or stolen. The HSI Office of International Affairs, through its 73 attache offices in 47 countries, works closely with foreign governments to conduct joint investigations, when possible.

HSI's specially trained investigators assigned to both domestic and international offices, partner with governments, agencies and experts to protect cultural antiquities. They also provide cultural property investigative training to law enforcement partners for crimes involving stolen property and art, and how to best enforce the law to recover these items when they emerge in the marketplace.

Since 2007, more than 6,600 artifacts have been returned to 24 countries, including paintings from France, Germany, Poland and Austria, 15th to 18th century manuscripts from Italy and Peru, as well as cultural artifacts from China, Cambodia and Iraq.

## ICE ##

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21<sup>st</sup> century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities. For more information, visit: [www.ICE.gov](http://www.ICE.gov). To report suspicious activity, call 1-866-347-2423.*