

Masterpiece from Rome on display in the British Museum

The *Spinario* visits London for the first time

15 March – 14 April 2005

Gallery 23

Admission free

From 15 March, the *Spinario* (thorn-puller), one of the iconic treasures of the Capitoline Museums in Rome, will be on display in Gallery 23 of the British Museum. The exhibition will be opened by the President of the Italian Republic during his state visit to the United Kingdom. It will be the first time this exceptional sculpture, which is very rarely loaned abroad, will be on view in Britain.

The *Spinario* is a Roman masterpiece of the late first century BC. One of the few large-scale bronze sculptures to survive from antiquity, it brilliantly captures the intense concentration of a boy extracting a thorn from his foot. Because of its rarity and perfection the statue has had a profound influence on artists over many centuries. First documented in the 12th century, the *Spinario* later became one of the ancient works of art that inspired the Italian Renaissance. It was among the first ancient sculptures to be copied and influenced leading painters and sculptors such as Luca Signorelli, Filippo Brunelleschi, Antico and many others. The *Spinario* continued to inspire artists throughout the 17th and 18th centuries when it became one of the 'must-see' items of the Grand Tour. Such was the statue's fame that in 1798 it formed part of the triumphal procession of great works of art sequestered by Napoleon for his new museum in Paris, only to be returned after his defeat.

Apart from its obvious significance in the context of Renaissance and post-Renaissance art, the *Spinario* holds important testimony to the way the Romans themselves viewed and adapted Greek artistic models. In the British Museum the Capitoline bronze will be juxtaposed with a marble thorn-puller from the Museum's own collection. Together, the two statues illuminate the transformation of the *Spinario*-type from a naturalistically represented peasant boy of the third century BC into an idealised youth modified to suit Roman neo-classical tastes.

The exhibition has been organized by the British Museum and the Capitoline Museums in Rome with close support from the Italian Embassy in London and will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue. It has been made possible thanks to the financial contribution of Banca Intesa as part of its ongoing cultural programme.

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