

# Vatican may release holy Jewish artifacts from its storage galleries

A recent initiative may be bringing Rome and Jerusalem closer together as the Vatican has expressed interest to advance a project releasing artifacts from their archives and allowing them to be placed in a museum.

Investigative archaeologist Rabbi [Harry Moskoff](#) has been searching for the [Ark of the Covenant](#) for decades and though he has yet to discover the holiest Temple artifact, he was recently contacted by the Vatican. In a stunning example of religious largesse, Vatican officials have expressed a willingness to reveal artifacts from the Holy Land that have been in their possession for hundreds of years. To facilitate this, Moskoff established the Vatican Museum Exchange Program.

The remarkable story began almost two years ago when a lawyer representing the Israeli government contacted Moskoff.



Rabbi Harry Moskoff (Photo courtesy)

“A high profile lawyer, who happened to be religious, was researching a case at the National Library of France,” Moskoff related. “He came across a document recording gifts that were given to Pope Innocent III by Baldwin I, the Emperor of the Latin Empire of Constantinople in the year 1204.”

The document listed the gifts which were, in fact, artifacts taken from the Holy Land.

“The lawyer contacted me on behalf of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs because he knew that I am an investigative archaeologist,” Moskoff told Israel365 News. “He told me that the Vatican may be interested in sharing with the public Byzantine era artifacts from Israel from the 11th, 12th, and even 13th centuries. This includes ancient *makhta* (incense shovels) and *khatzotzroth* (silver trumpets), as well as other smaller Jewish cultic items that were used for sacrificial rites.”



Incense shovel (Photo courtesy)

At least ten incense shovels of this type have been found by archaeologists in Israel and were known to have been used in synagogues during the late Roman period.

“Since I had proof that these Byzantine artifacts were in the Vatican and given my background, the Israeli officials wanted me to pursue this,” Moskoff said.

Moskoff has thus far met with officials in the Vatican three times at their behest in an attempt to facilitate moving the artifacts from storage in the Vatican to a venue where they can be seen by the public.

“At this point, the officials neither confirm nor deny possessing these Byzantine artifacts items,” Moskoff said. “But if they exist, these are not artifacts that were taken from the Jewish Temples in Jerusalem.”

“So far, the negotiations have been positive. They have shown me respect and our purpose is to generate good relations. The first step will be to video the artifacts. Hopefully, the artifacts will be moved to the Vatican Museum where the public can see them.”

The Pope is reportedly aware of the program and Moskoff received an email from the Vatican’s Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin expressing willingness to move forward with the project.

“While the artifacts are not the originals from the Temple in Jerusalem but they might help us understand more about the Temple items,” Moskoff explained.

“There are actually several organizations behind this and even ministries in the government, though many do not want to be revealed at this time as having a part in the negotiations with the Vatican. A lot of people want to see this happen on a humanitarian level, sharing of significant artifacts with the public.”

“This is not restitution,” Moskoff emphasized. “This is an act of goodwill on the part of the Vatican towards the Jewish people.”

This seems to be a new policy at the Vatican. In March, the Vatican returned to Greece three 2,500-year-old sculpture fragments from the Parthenon that have been part of the Vatican Museums' permanent collection for the past 200 years. Similarly, Pope Francis announced on Sunday that talks were underway to return artifacts in the Vatican Museum.

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