Case 7: No Nudes Is Good Nudes

After sanctions against Iran were lifted in January 2016, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited European heads of state to rebuild economic relationships. When the president visited Italy, he passed through the corridors of the Capitoline Museums, where Italy’s iconic statues of Greek and Roman deities were normally displayed. On this occasion, however, they were hidden in tall white boxes. Apparently intended as a demonstration of respect for Iran’s cultural and religious values, covering the statues triggered outrage and ridicule from many Italians.

Nobody admits to ordering the shrouding of the scantily (or un-) clad statues of the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. A spokesperson for the Capitoline Museums claimed that the Prime Minister’s office ordered the “cover-up.” Prime Minister Matteo Renzi denied prior knowledge of the action. Italian Culture Minister Dario Franceschini called the concealment “incomprehensible” and insisted that neither he nor Prime Minister Renzi was aware of the order. Reuters reported that the Iranian Embassy had made the request. NPR reported that although President Rouhani appreciated the consideration, he denied that any such request had been made.

Italians angered over the veiling of the quintessential icons of Italian art charged that the cover- up was a renunciation of Italian culture, a gesture not of respect, but of submission. They claimed hiding the statues betrayed fundamental Italian identity and values for economic interests.

France dealt with a visit from the Iranian president differently. During planning for his visit to France, Iran requested that wine not be served when President Rouhani had lunch with President Francois Hollande. The request was denied and the lunch cancelled. In the end, Iran, Italy, and France considered the visits successful. Both visits resulted in multibillion euro deals with Iran.

Case from the 2017 International Ethics Bowl on February 26, 2017 in Dallas Texas

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