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LIBYA: ROMAN SABRATHA MUSEUM RETURNS TO ANCIENT SPLENDOUR



(by Francesca Spinola) (ANSAmEd) - TRIPOLI - As of yesterday the ancient Mediterranean city of Sabratha, about 100km west of Tripoli, have their Roman Museum and nearby Punic Museum again. Built by Italians between 1930 and 1934 and designed by Italian architect Vincifori, the Roman Museum has miraculously remained intact although marked by damages inflicted by time and abandonment. Restoration, sponsored by ENI and the Gaddafi International Foundation for Charitable Associations, have brought this rationalist building back to its original splendour. "We have used a philological approach to perform a conservative restoration based on the original designs, which are kept in the archives of the Red Castle of Tripoli today," explained Italian architect Michelangelo Lupo, which in the past three years, has personally supervised the restoration of what is considered a piece of the country's history in Libya. Lupo, who is specialised in art history, has directed other important restoration projects on ancient palaces in Trento and Rome, as well as historical buildings in Egypt, including a Coptic convent. Lit up by the early spring sun of Northern Africa, the Museum reveals an arcade that frames an internal courtyard surrounded by three original doors from the 1930s. These lead to a spacious hall, where the light is majestically captured by the high and lateral windows in rooms illuminated by reinforced concrete and glass blocks from the 1930s. The central hall contains floor mosaics from the aisles of the Basilica Giustiniana, one of the most beautiful churches from Byzantine Sabratha, built in the 4th century AD. The lateral pavilions contain, on one side, statues and frescos, and on the other, objects taken from the tombs of Sabratha, placed inside of display cases, which have maintained their 1930s style of wood and glass. "The value of Lupo's restoration is that he did not alter the original principals of the museum and he fought to carry out a non-invasive restoration", was the comment of archaeologist Luisa Musso, who was present at the inauguration, among the guests of honour. Musso since 1995 has been the director of the Archaeological Mission of the Roma Tre University in Leptis Magna and performed, in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities in Libya, research in the city, suburbs, and in the area. Along with her at the inauguration ceremony were the Consul General of Italy, Francesca Tardioli, and other Italian diplomatic

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representatives, the head of the Libyan Department of Archaeology, Zinati Mabruk, and representatives from the two groups who collaborated in the restoration: ENI, the Italian Hydrocarbon Group, present in Libya as its top national commercial partner and under the Memorandum of Understanding for Social Projects signed with Libya in 2006; the Gaddafi International Foundation for Charitable Associations, named after the Libyan leader and managed by his son, Seif Al Islam Al-Gaddafi, who for years has been pushing for oil companies to respect the archaeological heritage of the country. "Three years ago in my office at the Red Castle of Tripoli the idea of restructuring this jewel, evidence of what beauty was created in the past by the Italians was developed," said Juma Anag presenting the project and expressing his thanks "to Seif Gaddafi and ENI in Northern Africa". Several ENI representatives were present including General Manager Franco Polo. (ANSAmEd).

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