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Open Air Museum....

SOCIAL CHRONICLES

by Janet Donovan | on March 5th, 2015 |

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Italian Embassy

"Benvenuti to the Italian Embassy for the opening of the remarkable 'Symposium' exhibit," said Claudio Bisogniero, Ambassador of Italy. "Happy to see that you are so numerous tonight, despite tough competition from *House of Cards Season 3*. But, Italian culture is even more powerful than Frank Underwood!"

Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero

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"As many of you know, Italy is considered the largest 'Open Air Museum' in the world," he emphasized. "But this also means that we are exposed to the highest number of art thefts. The trafficking of archeological artifacts has increased dramatically, and areas like Etruria and Magna Graecia – in central and southern Italy – are obvious targets for thieves." Magna Graecia was an area inhabited by Greeks, but in Italy, along the southern coasts.

Actually, for anyone that has enjoyed the Italian landscape in any part of Italy knows it's a treasure trove for 'drive-by' stealing.

Enter the Guardia di Finanza art recovery team that has managed to recover in just two years (from 2012 to 2013) 874,163 artifacts and 416 painted works. The team efforts also led to the seizure of 136,873 counterfeit artifacts – a lot of heavy lifting.

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In anticipation of Expo Milano 2015, the Embassy of Italy is hosting the exhibition "Symposium: Food for Mind, Body, and Soul" featuring ancient masterpieces recovered by the Guardia di Finanza until May 15th.

The exhibition-symposium displays thirty rare archaeological artifacts recovered from the illegal market thanks to the investigations of Italy's Guardia di Finanza, a special police force reporting to the Italian Minister of Economy and Finance.

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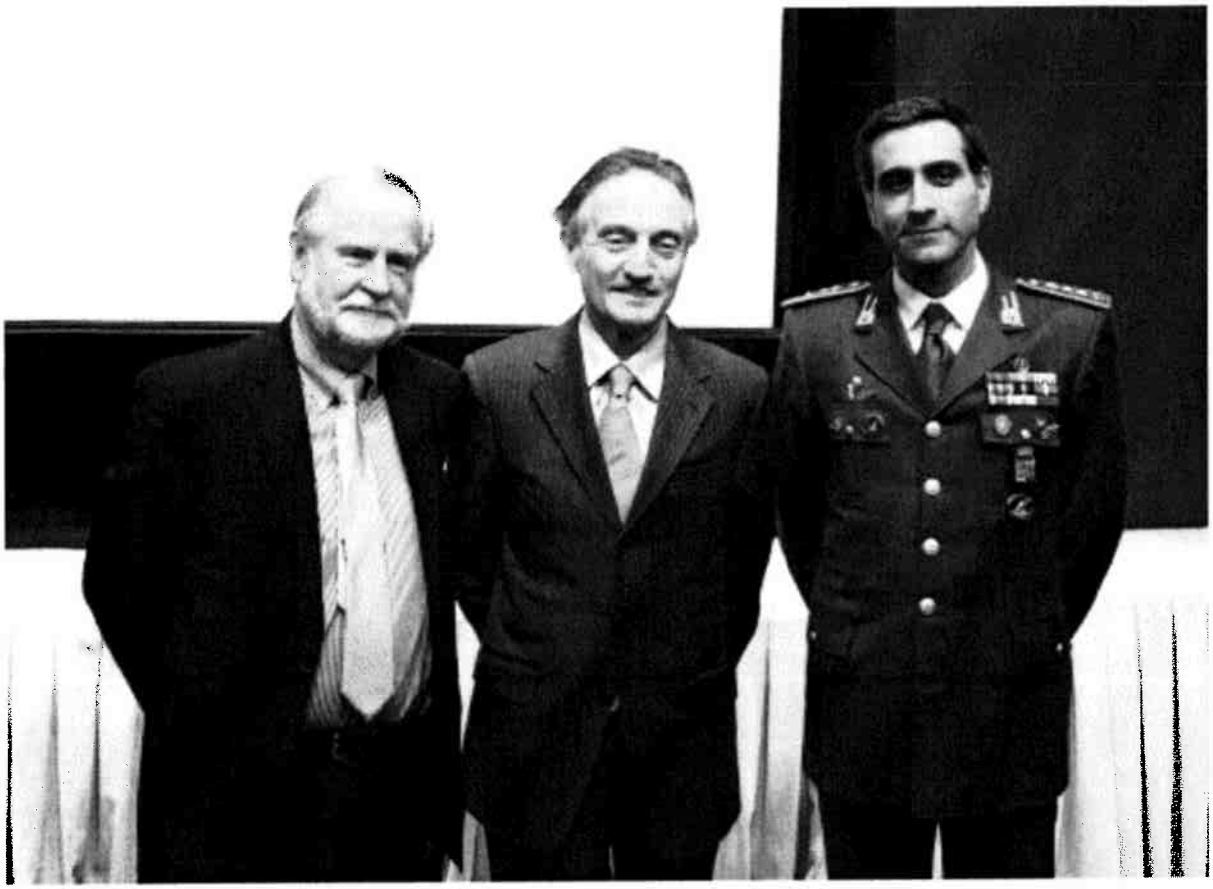
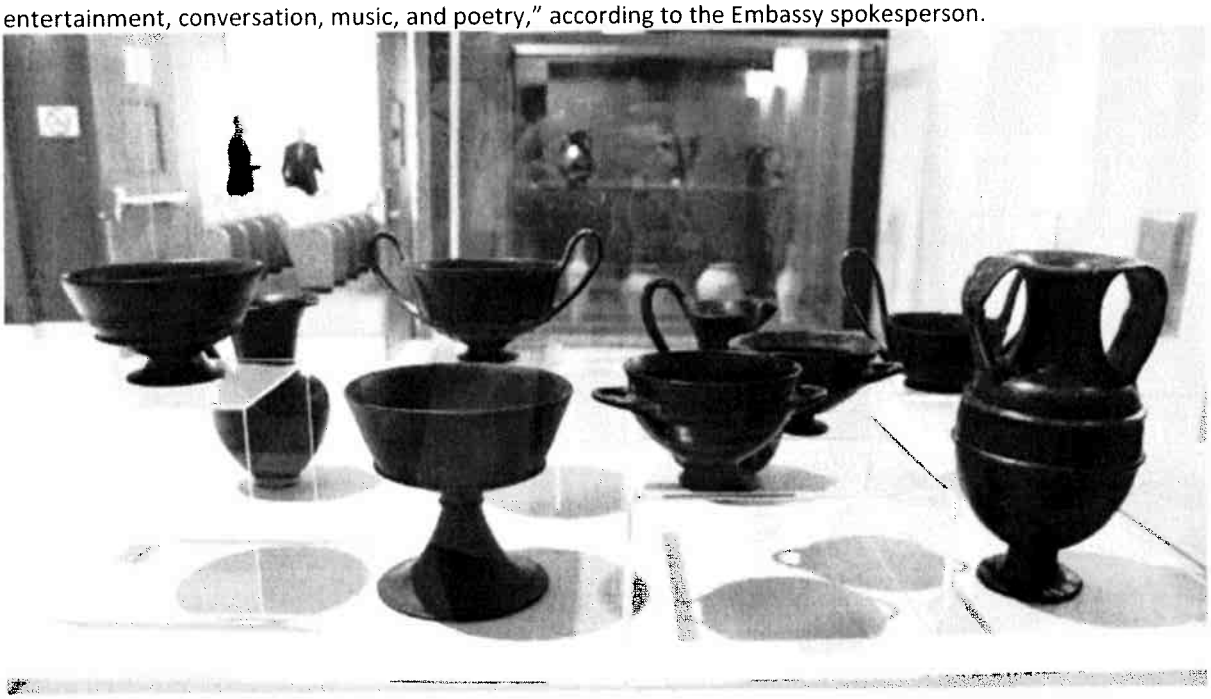


Senator Harris B. McDowell III of Delaware, Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero, Col. Antonio Leone of the Guardia di Finanza

"These objects, all of inestimable value, originate from underground burial chambers and archaeological sites from ancient Greece, Etruria, and Sannio and have a common theme: food. The initiative represents an original prelude to Expo Milano 2015, the exceptional world's fair focused on food and nutrition that will take place in the global city of Milan from May 1 to October 31 of this year. Amphorae and vessels used to transport and mix foods and wines, vases from which wines were poured and cups used for drinking, the bust of a satyr and several portraits will recreate the environment of those ancient banquets, symposia, centered on entertainment, conversation, music, and poetry," according to the Embassy spokesperson.



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"This exhibition is of great interest for at least three reasons," said Ambassador Bisogniero. "First, because it will give the public in Washington an opportunity to view and admire pieces of great historical and artistic value. Second, because it will allow us to experience the atmosphere of the symposia in antiquity, as celebrated by many classical authors, from Plato to Plutarch. Third, because it calls attention to the success and remarkable resolve and professionalism of Italy's Guardia di Finanza agents, who work tirelessly both in Italy and abroad to combat trafficking by unscrupulous criminal organizations."

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Alexander Nagel, Ph.D., discussed the practice of symposia in a lecture entitled "Drinking, Dining, and Displaying: Feasting, Food and Wine in Ancient Etruria."

The event opened with a presentation on the concept of symposium in ancient Rome by Professor Nagel of the Department of Anthropology of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

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