ITALY-USA - The Monuments Men Foundation returns 8 precious volumes to Italy

30 May 2013

A ceremony was held today at the Embassy of Italy in Washington DC, in collaboration with the Cultural Heritage Protection Unit of the Carabinieri and the Interpol Liaison Office, to mark the return to Italy of eight antique volumes, believed to be property of the University of Naples. These volumes were recently entered into the possession of the Monuments Men Foundation, whose aim among other things is to promote the return of works of art taken from Europe during the Second World War.

The Ambassador of Italy Claudio Bisogniero participated at the ceremony together with the President of the Monuments Men Foundation, Robert Edsel, author of several books on the subject, including the recent Saving Italy and The Monuments Men, soon to be a major motion picture directed by and starring George Clooney.

"The recovery of works of art is one of our priorities," underscored Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero. "Together with the Carabinieri and Interpol - he added - we have established an excellent cooperative relationship with U.S. authorities, which in recent years, has led to the discovery and the return of numerous works."

How the books were recovered

The books were given to the Foundation by Irving Tross, a 96-year-old American veteran who served in the 88th Infantry Division, 339th Field Artillery Battalion. Mr. Tross had found them among the ruins of the church and convent of San Francesco in Minturno, where a part of the volumes belonging to the University of Naples had been sheltered during the Second World War. The convent was subsequently damaged by bombing.

"Mr. Tross has set a great example which I hope will encourage other veterans and their families to look in their attics and basements for any lost wartime items," stated Mr. Edsel. "These books are just the tip of the iceberg for the millions of cultural items still missing since WWII, which the Monuments Men Foundation hopes to help locate in the coming years."

Among the 8 volumes (4 dating back to the XVI century, 1 from the XVII century and 3 from the XVIII century), there is a Latin translation of one of Isaac Newton’s works, a Hebrew grammar that had been published in Cologne in 1567, an edition of Boccaccio’s “Fiammetta” of 1533, and a selection of Petrarch’s works of 1542.

The Embassy of Italy in Washington thanks the Monuments Men Foundation and its President, Robert Edsel, for its multi-year commitment in this sector and for its cooperation in returning these eight precious books to Italy.
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