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SABRATHA AND LEPTIS MAGNA THE GLORIES OF ROMAN TRIPOLITANIA

By GUIDO CALZA



ARCHAEOLOGICAL discoveries made in Tripolitania are veritable revelations for all because, though the neighboring French colonies of

Tunis and Algeria have for many years yielded rich Punic and Roman finds, Tripolitania has not been visited except by hurried travelers, whose observations and descriptions have not allowed us to anticipate the sumptuousness of the vestiges of Rome.

Oea [Tripoli] had kept the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, the sole monument which revealed her Roman origin, hidden under the pitiable garment given it by the Arabs and Turks. This has now been liberated from overcrowding modern filth and surrounded by a "zone of respect," which has been laid out as a charming garden. The demolition of the wretched little Tripolitan houses still standing in front of it will soon make it visible to all who disembark at Tripoli.

The arch, erected through the munificence of C. Calpurnius Celsus to commemorate the victory over the Parthians in 165 A. D., stood in the centre of the ancient city at the intersection of the two principal roads of the colony. It is a quadrifront structure, the two narrower fronts being on the *Cardo*, the two wider on the *Decumano*. Four pilasters built of large blocks of Pentelic marble carry the cupola, an admirable construction of trapezoidal blocks which form an octagonal calotte only four inches in thickness, placed, by means of a singular constructive expedient, over the top of the rectangular arch with openings underneath, which are closed by heavy architraves. The summit of the arch terminated, probably, in a cusp. The niches on the east and west sides were intended for honorary statues of the two emperors, one of which, representing Lucius Verus, has been found, and is in the museum at Tripoli. Two other niches may, perhaps, have contained the statues of the donors, who were notabilities of the



LEPTIS MAGNA: THE EXCAVATION OF THE STREETS



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE RING, BY JOHN W. ALEXANDER



THE ENTRANCE HALL OF THE THERMAE OF LEPTIS MAGNA WITH THE CIPOLLINO MARBLE COLUMNS INTACT



THE GREAT AMPHITHEATRE OF SABRATHA FOUND IN THE LAST EXCAVATIONS

colony. The entire arch is richly decorated. Around the vaults are Apollo and Minerva in chariots, drawn by griffins and winged sphinxes; below them, prisoners and trophies of arms, and, under the arches, a decorative motive common in Roman art: vine-tendrils twined in spirals.

The vestiges of Rome are, however, not numerous in the capital of the colony, and the archaeologists full well knew they need not look for tokens of the Roman Empire at Tripoli so much as along the coast and in the interior, where successive dominations have been less able to efface and degrade the remains of the antique civilization. As Minister of Foreign Affairs di San Giuliano had sent a mission into Libya in 1910, composed of Professors Halbherr, Aurigemma and Beguinot, to make archaeological reconnaissances in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania—the first sign of our interest in those lands we were to conquer a year later—Dr. Aurigemma was sent to Tripoli as In-

spector of Public Monuments in 1912 by the Director of Fine Arts. To him, in fact, are due the first restoration of the Arch of Marcus Aurelius and the foundation of the Museum in which are collected all that had been dispersed under the Turkish régime: not merely the objects found in the new excavations—such, for example, as funeral trinkets, and, especially, great numbers of glass objects in perfect condition from the Tripolitan necropolis on the beach—but also some very beautiful colored mosaics brought in from a countryhouse, discovered in 1914 by our soldiers in a place called Zliten, between Homs and Misurata.

We have, therefore, succeeded in determining on the conquered soil the phases of a flourishing civilization that scattered farmhouses and country homes all along the coast in the vicinity of the three largest cities: Oea (Tripoli), Sabratha and Leptis. And when, two years ago, the complete conquest and pacification of the whole country, and

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

the settlement of the political and colonial situation through the intelligence and wisdom of the Governor, Count Volpi, had guaranteed absolute security of possession to us, the Governor himself desired that the sporadic archaeological reconnaissances be followed up by great excavations at Sabratha and Leptis. These now permit us to announce to the world the conquest of a monumental zone which not only equals, but is perhaps superior to, any other in northern Africa. The results attained are testified to by such luminous witnesses of Roman culture, resurrected by the energy of Italy, that a distinct addition has been made to the patrimony of modern civilization, which will recognize and assimilate its noble and vivifying educational power.

Little more than the name of Sabratha was known until recently. A few scattered notices left to us by the ancients did not permit us to reconstruct its history, to recast its life or to appreciate its original importance. It must have been an emporium of consequence, situated about eighty kilometers west of Tripoli. It was founded by those intrepid and skillful mariners, the Phoenicians, around a natural harbor, and became the outlet of a great caravan-route that led to the coast from the far-distant Fezzan, and from ancient Cydamus, now Ghadames, on the Algerian border. Yet beside its presumed activity under the Carthaginian dominion and the fact that it sided with the Romans in the war between Rome and Jugurtha, nothing is known of it as an emporium with certainty,



THE OCEAN OF SAND UNDER WHICH THE IMPERIAL CITY OF LEPTIS LIES BURIED

except that it had the right to coin money and to name its own magistrates. The most important notice of it in relation to the Empire comes neither from Africa nor from the ancient writers, but from Ostia, the commercial emporium of the whole Mediterranean. There in the third century of our era a *Statio Sabrathensium* was maintained, an office for the representatives of the merchants of Sabratha. Moreover, the name Sabratha is illustrious for two reasons: it was the birthplace of Domitilla, who became the consort of Vespasian; and it absolved from an absurd accusation of magic that brilliant orator, the philosopher Apuleius, who defended himself against his calumniators before the tribunal of Sabratha, presided over by the Proconsul Claudius Maximus, in an harangue sparkling with wit and humor. This was in the year 157 A. D.

Tripolitania was invaded by the Vandals and, after their brief dominion, by the Byzantines, who brought a new series of wars upon the region. These ended only in 548, and from them dates a large part of the fortifications which were constructed over antique Roman edifices. Sabratha held within her walls a temple dedicated to the Virgin, Procopius affirms. The city became a heap of ruins after the Arab invasion, when the Berber natives offered a

sanguinary, heroic resistance in the year 643.

The very brief history of the city is, therefore, lacking in eloquence. Instead, the archaeological reconnaissances, the excavations, and the finding of numerous long inscriptions have made it once more throb with life. The city lay all along the sea, and is now known in almost its whole extent, which was considerable. The two mausolea and the amphitheatre have revealed its eastern extremity, while the port and the capitol are almost in the centre. The amphitheatre, more than half of which has been brought to light after only a few months' work, discloses the importance of the city and the size of its population, for it is only one-third smaller than the Colosseum. It is a suggestive ruin, this ellipse of seats, built of the local limestone, which is

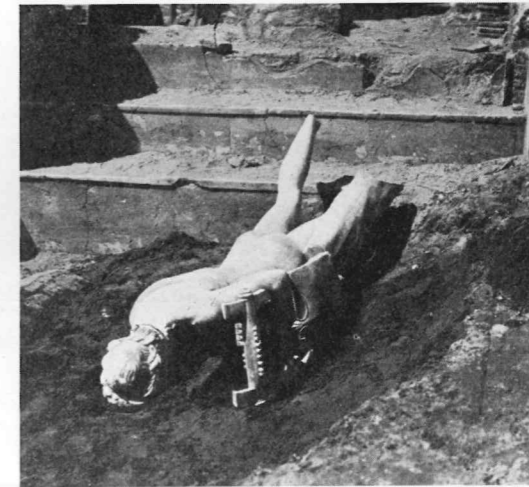
so soft that it scales off in contact with wind and water. We had the good fortune to see it populated with hundreds of natives enveloped in the white *burnus*, almost giving the impression of the spectators of ancient times wrapped in the Roman toga.

Excavation has revealed the peculiarities of its construction. A high wall, supported by a solidly constructed vault and separated from the upper rows of seats, permitted the more fortunate spectators to watch the gladiatorial combats from close-by. The underground chambers at either

side of the principal entrance have also been explored. They were intended as dens for the wild beasts and as storage-rooms for the apparatus used in the games. The popularity of this monument is proven by an inscription which recalls to memory the gladiatorial contests—lasting five days—which were offered to the city by the munificent Gaius Fulvius Pudens. In this way the son continued the traditional generosity of his father, who had adorned Sabratha with twelve marble fountains, even bringing the water for them at his own expense.

Although this amphitheatre—the only one thus far known in Tripolitania—measures approximately 2441 by 1890 feet (62 x 48 metres), and is the second in size in Africa, coming next to that of El-Djem, we wished to search elsewhere at Sabratha for the imprint of the do-

minion of Rome. Dr. Bartoccini, the very young archaeologist who has directed the excavations with admirable energy and intelligence for the past two years, led us to the ruins of the major temple of the colony, the Capitolium. Nothing remains of it now except three *cellae* for the statues of Jove, Juno and Minerva, elevated on a podium, to which we ascend by a broad stairway divided into two branches by a large altar. One of these consecrated statues has been found, a colossal bust—*Jovi Africanus*—with a lofty pedestal of Greek marble, bearing the



HOW ONE OF THE MANY STATUES OF LEPTIS WAS FOUND

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

inscription of the donor. This good-humored Jove of Sabratha stands enthroned in front of the central *cella*. Though modeled without delicacy of treatment, after the most usual type of the statues of the supreme god of the Romans, it seems majestic to us, and especially imposing here among the

in a pagan edifice, with an octagonal basin in the centre, used for baptism by immersion. A series of sepulchral inscriptions found in the excavations allow us to date it from the close of the fourth century of our era. What pitiful hand, wishing to preserve it during the ages, could have hidden the august



A GENERAL VIEW OF THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE STREETS OF LEPTIS

white ruins of an African temple; a bulwark of the religion that linked this distant colony directly with Rome and the Empire.

When Christianity became strong enough to plant its church here also, it decreed that the emblem of the new Faith, the mystic sign of the cross, should triumph close beside the Capitol. This church is an apsidal hall

image of this Capitoline Jove in the subterranean chambers of the temple? Without doubt the followers of the new religion of Christ recognized in such figures, belonging to the pagan Olympus, the symbols of a cult under which Imperial Rome had grown and prospered. They may have respected them for this reason. Who, if not Rome, had guaranteed to these colonies the safety

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

of the region, adorned them with important monumental edifices, and paved the roads with basalt over which we pass on our way to other excavations?

Between these monuments is a thermal establishment. Its various halls are adorned with polychrome geo-

ments of sculptured ornaments and of statues—which must have been colossal—place us in immediate contact with the life of the city, which drew wealth from her maritime commerce and splendor from the liberality of private citizens and of the most frequently mentioned Emperors and Empresses—



A GROUP OF VALUABLE STATUES BROUGHT TO LIGHT AT LEPTIS AND PLACED IN A REED HUT PRIOR TO THEIR RESTORATION

metrical mosaics, in rather delicate designs, constituting an organic architectonic whole. Facing the sides of the entrance-hall are two *piscinae* with hexagonal apsidal basins and a complete system for heating by means of three communicating *calidaria*. The numerous inscriptions, placed provisionally in the storehouse at the offices of the excavations, with many frag-

Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus, Commodus, Faustina and Flavia Domitilla.

Sabratha, therefore, prepares one in both mind and spirit for the more complete, superb vision of her elder sister, Leptis Magna—the eldest sister, perhaps, of all the Roman cities of Africa. After rather more than a year of eager, intelligent work, Leptis has restored to

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

us about thirty excellent sculptures, a numerous series of triumphal reliefs, and finally, many public monuments, whose grandiose character makes them worthy of Rome. Such are the Thermae, the Basilica, and the Arch of Septimius Severus. Not only do the skeletons of these buildings remain, but their imposing architectural lines and their rich ornaments, which make them seem solemnly alive. Had they not been conceived and constructed on such lines,



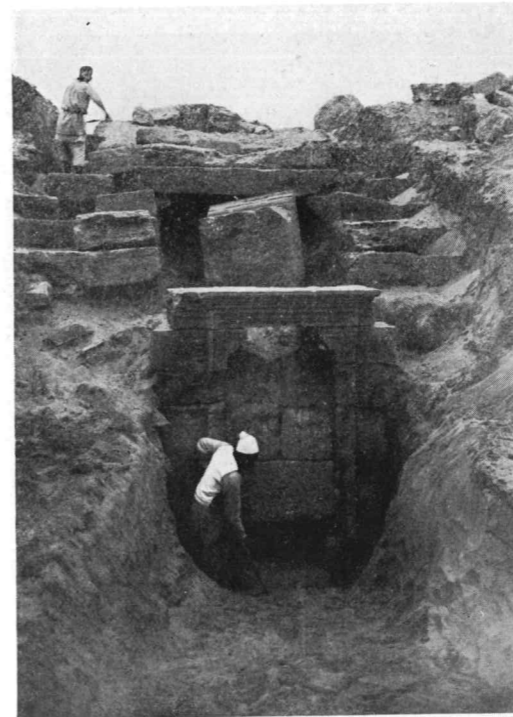
A FRAGMENT OF THE BAS-RELIEF ON THE TRIUMPHAL ARCH OF LEPTIS MAGNA
ERECTED IN HONOR OF THE EMPEROR SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS

fully corresponding to the pomp of an imperial Roman city, and did we not know that for centuries and centuries no people, no civilization, has been able to continue the life and the civilization of Rome, we might be tempted to believe these monuments recent, they seem so fresh and new. The pall of sand which, extending itself softly, gradually over the city while it was still intact, has covered and protected each object in a delicate but lasting and impenetrable envelope, adding to the beauty of the ruins a fascinating view of little sand mountains more than forty feet in height. With all its softness, the sand has proved a much more solid protection than the ashes were for Pompeii, or the rubbish which covered other vanished cities.

A good view, giving a useful impression of the grandeur of this Roman colony as a whole, and of its perfect state of preservation, may be had by climbing up to Point Lebda—to which Professor Romanelli, the first excava-

tor of Leptis, was our guide. On this steep rock by the sea may have stood the ancient lighthouse at the mouth of Wadi Lepta, the estuary of which formed the ample basin of the harbor. This basin is intact; also, the big, high wharves, built of local limestone, with their mooring-stones and the little stairs which allowed one to go down to the water-level. The solid wall which follows the curving coastline and was constructed to protect the internal horn of the port from the violence of the breakers is still undamaged. The horn, however, could not have lasted long, if—even so early as the end of the third century, before the age of Constantine, and while the city was still splendid with its monuments—boats went five miles off to anchor under the shelter of the promontory of Ermeo. This port, measuring four hundred metres each way—160,000 square metres—and therefore much larger than the mercantile ports of Carthage and other African cities, was without

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY



ARABS EMPLOYED IN THE EXCAVATIONS

doubt the instrument and original cause of the prosperity and importance of Leptis. The city was founded by Phoenicians about 1000 B. C., and the port sheltered a merchant marine which was first in the service of Carthage, then in that of Rome.

Yet on entering the so-called Imperial Palace, one ceases to marvel at the size of the port. The lofty walls of the great Basilica surround a hall with two apses, where eight enormous red granite columns are already in place, their Corinthian capitals eighty centimetres (more than two and one-half feet) in diameter. On them rests the white architrave which renders the name of Septimius Severus eternal. A whole host of cipollino columns which will soon return to their old places and reassume their old functions, lean against the walls, which are constructed of beautiful freestone, and of

which there still remain the finely carved marble doorways and Doric friezes with metopes and triglyphs. This vast hall, divided into three naves by colonnades and preserved to a height of more than forty feet, will, when the excavations are completed, be the surest witness of the splendor of Leptis and the most striking example of the architectonic sumptuousness of Roman monuments.

Leptis was the birthplace of the Emperor Severus, and owes its splendor in great part to this fact. Yet Rome herself, the very seat of Empire—not solely the birthplace of Emperors—has left nothing so perfect that it can support comparison with this Basilica, if only the excavations continue to reveal what the first discoveries announced. Nor can the slightest doubt of this remain after one has visited the Thermae of the city—fifteen thousand square metres in extent!

From a large atrium adorned with eight cipollino columns and a marble base dedicated by the citizens to Septimius Severus, their greatest patron, one enters two large *piscinae*, which are still intact with their marble facings and with almost priceless ornamental statues on bases still in their niches. The statues include a figure of Mars, one of a sea-god, an Aesculapius, and Apollo Musagetes, a Venus Pudica, Marsyas (with a vigorously expressive head), a Hermes with the child Dionysius, a good copy of the Diadumenus by Polyclitus, and a torso of an Ephebe, believed to be an original by Calamis.

Because of their artistic value, these sculptures have been taken to the offices of the excavations, and the room where they have been placed temporarily has become a little museum—the first step toward the foundation of the



GENERAL VIEW OF THE THERMAE OF LEPTIS

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

one which will be built a few years hence near the ruins and which will, no doubt, be superior to many European museums, since it is impossible to suppose that only the Thermae contained works of art. The Forum and the Basilica must also have contained artistic treasures, and not by local artists. Moreover, the finding of forty square metres of reliefs belonging to the quadrifront arch which stood at the gate of the ancient city, makes us believe this the more strongly. This arch was dedicated to the Emperor Severus; and these sculptures represent him in his triumphal quadriga, in battle-scenes, in the act of sacrificing to the gods, and accompanied by his Empress and their sons. When the reliefs have returned to their places, and the columns and entablature have resumed their functions of supporting the wide vaults, this arch will become the monumental entrance to the city through some of whose excavated streets we have just been passing.

A city twice as large as Pompeii or Ostia, built for the most part of stone and marble, which did not have time to grow old or to wear out, and which neither time nor man could disfigure or sack, represents an *unicum* in Roman archaeology. It alone may illustrate the pomp of an Empire, the generosity of an Emperor who was never forgetful of his far-away fatherland. Destiny has ordained that we Italians should bring to light this, the most brilliant gem, perhaps, which Rome has left in all Latin Africa, so rich in cities and memorials of the great central Power. All civilization will recognize and acclaim, in the monumental character of this colony, the august image of the common fatherland: *Roma communis patria*. But we must not forget that Leptis Magna represents, above all else, the heroism and sacrifice of the soldiers of Italy, for by making our tenure of it secure, they have enabled us to be the instruments of its resurrection, a glory to the Italian Government and to Italian archaeology.

