



THE *TRULLI* OF ALBEROBELLO

“Looking at the trulli from close-up, admiring the ingenious structural abbreviations, the steps inserted into the walls, the benches incorporated into the inside walls, the alcoves dug out of the massive sides, the chimney that pops out from the ceiling, you think of a job done almost by memory, like making a horseshoe with a few blows, or fashioning a chopping board from a log.”

La valle dei trulli, Leonardo Sinisgalli

Tradition has it that Alberobello became inhabited merely for questions of tax. We are in the 17th century when it was still feudal and the area was ruled by the greatly-feared Giangirolamo II Acquaviva d'Aragona, Count of Conversano, not too affectionately nicknamed “the One-eyed man of Apulia”. To avoid paying the unfair taxes imposed by the Spanish Crown, the Count had an idea: in case of inspection by the king’s emissaries, the peasants who had settled in his feud, called Sylva aut Nemus Arboris Belli, could have “dismantled their *trullo*” and scattered, showing that they were not homes. It was not, of course, an architectonic invention of his: the *trullo* roof (from late Greek which means “dome”) is widely spread throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, as far as Asia Minor and Atlantic Europe. The various rows of limestone slabs, called *chianche* here, a cheap and easily found material, are laid dry, one on top of the other, dry, in concentric circles of a diameter which decreases towards the top. Walking along the lanes which climb up through the two historical parts of Alberobello, you are amazed every time by these volumes which are so pure, evocative and enigmatic.



CULTURAL HERITAGE
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CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The *trulli* of Alberobello are an exceptional example of a human settlement that has remarkably stayed as it was built. They also illustrate the long-term use of dry-built constructions, which is a technique with a history of many thousands of years in the Mediterranean.





“The first time I saw Alberobello, it took my breath away: I did not think that a more unexpected or whimsical city could exist in the world, or perhaps in Marco Polo’s China, or in some hidden away place in Asia. I had to realise this later, as truly nothing in the world is as similar to Alberobello as Gheremé in Cappadocia. Except that in Gheremé the trulli are natural, they are cones of pink stone, cones of peach ice cream, cones from Disneyland.”

This description of Alberobello by Cesare Brandi in *Pellegrino di Puglia* dates back to 1960, but it does not seem to have changed today.

There are almost 1500 *trulli* that huddle together in the centre of Alberobello, giving it a fairy-tale-like skyline. Begin your visit in **1 Largo Martellotta**, a large elongated square between the two old neighbourhoods of the village, and look for the **2 Belvedere Santa Lucia**: the view that opens up to you is incredible, with the *trulli* of the Rione Monti stretching out opposite you for a perfect photo. Now climb up one of the alleys that form the quarter: let yourself be dazzled for a second by the countless souvenir shops, discover pinnacles and symbols painted on the roofs, peep into a *trullo* to discover what life used to be like, the clever hydraulic work and the perfect insulation (the buildings are cool in the

summer and warm in the winter), hunt for the *trullo* made up of two domes standing side by side and for this reason called “Siamese”. The **3 Church of Sant’Antonio** stands at the highest point of Rione Monti: it was built in 1927 and, needless to say, has a dome and bell-tower in the shape of a *trullo*. Now flee from the maddening crowd and seek refuge in the peaceful **4 Rione Aia Piccola**, where the *trulli* are mainly the homes of local people and there is an unreal tranquillity in the streets. Go into the alleys respecting the peace and quiet: your reward will be picturesque, and above all authentic, corners. To learn more about these buildings and the art of the master *trulli*-builders, it is worthwhile visiting the **5 Museum of**

the Territory – Pezzolla’s house, the largest complex of adjoining *trulli* (there are no fewer than 15 of them). Go to the **6 Casa d’Amore**, the largest building built with cement after Alberobello was freed from feudal power in 1797, under King Ferdinand IV of Bourbon: before that date, only dry stone was allowed for building. Conclude your visit at the **7 Trullo Sovrano**. In the northern part of the village, behind the large church of Saints Cosmas and Damian, it is the largest in Alberobello, the only one to have an upper floor. After having admired its huge dome, which is 14 m high and surrounded by 12 other cones, you can go into this museum-home and visit its rooms, still furnished as it was originally intended.



AN ENCHANTED VILLAGE

“They are tiny round huts, with a sharp conical roof, which only tiny little men can seem to enter. They each have a little chimney and a doll’s window, and with that funny plaster at the top of the cone, which is the coquetry of cleanliness, and it gives the impression of a nightcap on the head of a clown, with even [...] a cross or a star painted in lime on his forehead! What is that at the top of every trullo? Something like two funnels, one inside the other, with the point downwards, or like a funnel with a ball on top of it, just for fun...”

Un popolo di formiche, Tommaso Fiore

The *trulli* adopt poor but brilliant architectonic solutions. The pinnacles that tower at the top of the cones and the symbols painted on the roofs are hypnotising. In the shape of a disc, a pyramid or sphere, the former are emblems which can be primitive, the latter magic or Christian and both have specific protective or propitiatory functions.



‘THOSE CIRCLES OF STONE, PLACED ONE ON TOP OF THE OTHER, CROOKED AND YET SO PERFECT UP TO THEIR POINTED TOP, ALMOST AS THOUGH THEY BRUSHED AGAINST THE CLOUDS, LIKE THE HOUSES, LIKE THE WALLS, WERE MADE SIMPLY OF ONE STONE ON TOP OF ANOTHER, DRY STONE NEXT TO DRY STONE, HE THEN THOUGHT OF SOME PICTURES HE HAD SEEN IN

BOOKS, OF WHEN MEN BUILT TEMPLES WITH HUGE BLOCKS TO SPEAK TO THE STARS. FOR A LONG TIME HE WONDERED ABOUT THAT MIRACLE OF GENIUS AND SIMPLICITY. PERHAPS IT WAS THE MAGIC OF THE WIND THAT KEPT THE STONES TOGETHER.’

The character in the illustrated album *Giravento ad Alberobello* is a man who walked with a light soul through the city of *trulli* and its countryside, being



able to find a reason of interest in every single stone, flower and tree. Giravento is really a fine person! Before visiting

1 **Alberobello**, you really should watch the series of cartoons called *Trulli Tales*, set in an enchanted village of *trulli* at the foot of a century-old olive tree, which conceals a secret book of recipes which risks disappearing forever. The village of Alberobello is made up of many white cone-shaped houses, with the stones forming the roof. If you look carefully at the painted symbols, you will discover a cross, a heart or a star; have fun looking for the differences between the various pinnacles, i.e. the stones at the top of the domes. After having gone all round the village, ask your parents to take you to visit the 2 **Castellana Caves**. You will first of all go into an enormous underground cave, with the sun's rays coming through the hole at the top, and then you will follow a fascinating route, made up of stalactites, stalagmites and alabaster columns which have formed very slowly, drop by drop, over millions of years. Some of these limestone formations recall animals, human faces or monuments: try to find them. There are also two adventure parks in this part of Apulia, perfect for adrenaline lovers. At the 3 **Zoosafari in Fasano**, you can drive through various natural habitats populated by giraffe, tigers, gorillas, elephants and many other exotic and rare animals: you will feel as though you are in Africa or in the Pampas! You can then let your hair down on the merry-go-rounds and roller-coasters of the adjoining **Fasanolandia Park**. If, on the other hand, you are more interested in physical activities, you can throw yourself into journeys suspended on century-old trees in the 4 **Ciuchino Birichino Adventure Park** in Ostuni, with courses on survival, orienteering, falconry and archery...



ALBEROBELLO in books

Reading suggestions to discover the trulli and their history.

- **La valle dei trulli**, Mimmo Castellano (1959). A small and interesting book with contributions including by the Lucanian poet Leonardo Sinisgalli and beautiful old photographs.
- **Pellegrino di Puglia**, Cesare Brandi (1960). One of the most fascinating reportages from Apulia, Brandi makes an artistic and literary journey to many places, including the *trulli* of Alberobello. In addition to their undeniable magic, the art critic and historian notes their modernisation which has been too hasty, recommending it soon be curbed...
- **Un popolo di formiche**, Tommaso Fiore (1978). A lucid sociological and sentimental journey through Apulia, during the advent of fascism. The politician and writer compares his countrymen to ants, that over the centuries have dug out and aligned

so much stone that it has become their characteristic material.

- **I misteriosi simboli dei trulli**, Maria Letizia Troccoli Verardi (1989). It is impossible to avoid the attraction of the numerous symbols painted on the conical roofs of the *trulli* of Alberobello and the Murge, which are never purely decorative, but always connoted with precise religious and protective meanings.

- **La cultura del trullo**, Carla Speciale Giorgi, Paolo Speciale (1989). The *trulli* are analysed by archaeologists, architects, historians and anthropologists, but also by the many poets and travellers who have visited this special place over the centuries.

- **I trulli di Alberobello. Un secolo di tutela e di turismo**, Annunziata Berrino (2012). From the "discovery" of the *trulli* in the second half of the 19th century to state protection in 1910, from the inscription in the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites to the explosion of tourism and the prospects for their protection, restoration and sustainable use.

Children's books:

- **Giravento ad Alberobello**, Biagio Lieti (2010). With illustrations by Fiammetta D'Aversa, this is a beautiful illustrated album (for readers of six and above) which has as its main character Giravento, a man who can still be amazed like a child, all the more so in this magic village with enormous fairy's hats.

- **My mini Puglia**, William Dello Russo (2015). From Bari to Lecce, from the Gargano to Taranto, this is an illustrated book to leaf through, with the splendid illustrations by Camilla Pintonato, for an adventurous journey to discover the region of *trulli*, castles and two seas lapping the region's coastline.

- **Trulli Tales – Le avventure dei Trullalleri** (2017). A collection of four shaped books, for very young children. In the Kingdom of Trullolandia, four special friends, Ring, Zip, Stella and Sun, have been selected to become the magician-chiefs of the village and defend the magic book of Nonnatrulla from the attacks of the scoundrel Copperpot and his assistant, Athenina.