

# ALBEROBELLO, BETWEEN FAIRYTALE AND REAL: THE HISTORY OF THE TRULLI, A WORLD HERITAGE SITE OF TIMELESS CHARM



The **Trulli of Alberobello** , in the province of Bari, recognized in 1996 as a **World Heritage Site by UNESCO** , are an architectural example of universal value, a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a lost civilization. Before discovering something more about these beautiful buildings, let's go back in the history of the city, reconstructing its origins. The name Alberobello derives from the Latin **Sylva Arboris Belli (forest tree of the war)** which refers to the times when the area was covered with lush vegetation. The city was born between 400 and 500, by some farmers who were sent there by the Counts of Conversano, owners of the area at that time. Given that the law in force at the time, in the Kingdom of Naples, the **Pragmatica de Baronibus**, subjected every new human settlement to royal authorization, obtained after payment of the due taxes, the Counts of Conversano forced the farmers to colonize what was then a oak forest, erecting only precarious buildings, lacking the stability of ordinary dwellings.



Thus the Trulli were born, built with dry stone (therefore without mortar) at the behest of **Guercio** , in order to facilitate its demolition in case of royal inspection, which would not have seen the tracts of the

urban settlement, even if abusive. The Trulli, from then on, spread widely, also for practical and economic reasons, such as the abundance of limestone from which it was necessary to clear the agricultural land, their lower construction cost, the best shelter from the heat offered from their thick walls. In 1797, a group from Alberobellesi asked for help from King **Ferdinand IV of Bourbon**, which issued the decree by which the city was freed from all tax demands. These fascinating dwellings have created evocative environments, between precariousness and solidity, between the curse of a difficult stony land and the ingenuity of its pragmatic use. The Trulli continue to amaze millions of visitors, being witnesses of a culture and a stone civilization that has its roots in history. Alberobello occupies a land heavily subjected to the erosive action of rainwater, both on the surface and in depth, and the **stratified calcareous rocks** thus offer the building material that distinguishes not only the image of the city, but of the entire territory.



The Trulli, scattered here and there, among almond and olive trees, tell a common history throughout the Mediterranean, given the similarities that link them to the Sardinian nuraghi, the French bories and similar buildings existing in Turkey, Spain or Africa. Thus, from Alberobello to Locorotondo, from Martina Franca to Cisternino, every day the luminous and fairytale **Valle d'Itria** continues to represent the immobile dream of a nature still on a human scale. The **symbols** have always aroused a strong curiosity affixed to the cone of the Trullo, drawn by hand, using the lime, a symbol of purification, used as a disinfectant. Some of them are aimed at protecting the family, others are against the evil eye, others have been used to worship some gods in order to obtain a good harvest. In 1940, to be able to easily identify them, they were classified into primitives (eg Hebrew candlestick, radiated cross, tree cross that unites the celestial world, the earth and the Underworld); magic, related to astrology and the zodiac (the most famous are related to Jupiter: a kind of L with

an arrow indicating the lightning bolt; to the bull and the trident); Christians (the most common symbol is the Cross, emblem of Christianity, which takes various forms: dotted, astatine and radiant); pagans, ornamental and grotesque.



The coverage of the Trulli ends with the **pinnacle** and is generally formed by three superimposed stones: a cylindrical, a bowl-shaped or flat, a sphere. Even today, the meaning of the pinnacle is shrouded in mystery, but several hypotheses have been put forward: there are those who attribute magical values to it, those who think it has only an ornamental function, placed on the Trullo to complete the work, based on the inventiveness of the manufacturer trullaro; there are those who believe that it was imposed by the ruler himself. To build the Trulli, which thanks to their particular structure allow excellent internal air conditioning, cool in summer and cozy in winter, it takes real specialists, the **trullari masters** which can currently be counted on the fingers of one hand. After having dug on the ground and formed a circle or a square, they make a deep hole in the vicinity for the well, collecting rainwater, and then begin to arrange the local limestone in a circle which, as the construction takes shape, it becomes increasingly narrow. The Trulli are the object of great pride for the Pugliesi, a treasure of inestimable value to protect, so that future generations can also enjoy and admire them; they are one of the most extraordinary examples of Italian popular architecture; they express the immeasurable ability of adaptation and the **exceptional ingenuity of the inhabitants of these lands** that, only with the local stone, have shaped houses of similar beauty.