



BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

THE ETRUSCAN ARCH RESTORED TO ITS ANTIQUE SPLENDOUR
NEW LIFE FOR A SYMBOL OF PERUGIA

Perugia, 20 December 2014

The project to restore and upgrade the Etruscan Arch has been completed after 18 months work. The restoration commissioned by the municipality of Perugia and the Culture and Tourism Ministry was made possible by support from Brunello Cucinelli Spa, which covered the entire amount of the project (€1.3m). It is therefore noteworthy not only in terms of the monument's conservation and upgrading but also as an example of virtuous collaboration between the public and private sectors.

The recovery of the most impressive and prestigious monument surviving from ancient Perugia and traditionally seen by the people of Perugia as an emblem of their identity also involved direct contributions from Umbria's Culture and Landscape direction, Archaeology department and Architecture and Landscape authority, and structural consulting from Ing. Arch. Massimo Mariani.

THE ETRUSCAN ARCH

The Etruscan Arch or Augustus Arch is one of the main gates in the city's Etruscan walls. Facing north, it is a round arch with a double ring of blocks. Over the arch is a frieze in relief with grooved pilasters, Ionic-Italic style capitals and shields. The inscriptions on the arch - *Augusta Perusia* and *Colonia Vibia* – were added in the Roman age, the first after the fire in Perugia in 40 BC following the conquest of the city by the emperor Augustus (of which there are extensive traces on many of the blocks), and the second by the Umbrian emperor Trebonianus Gallus (251-253). The restoration has highlighted traces of red in the lettering of *Augusta Perusia*, showing it was originally “rubricated” and thus also visible from a distance.

Flanked by two enormous trapezoidal towers, the gate was built with the *opus quadratum* technique using blocks of local travertine laid in straight courses without mortar. Of the six city gates this is the only one not to have undergone major modifications – apart from the construction of an elegant renaissance *loggia* in the left tower (connecting to the adjacent *Soprintendenza dell'Umbria* building). The fountain at its foot was added in the 16th century.

RESTORATION WORK

Work was done on the gate and walls on an area of around 1,400 m², excluding the rear side and the intrados which were restored in 2012 with public and private funding.

Preliminary work included plano-altimetric and thematic surveying, structural measurements (endoscopic, petrographic, thermographic, etc.), static tests, mapping of decay and the chronology of construction and previous restorations.

Structural studies showed there was no instability in progress and enabled a reassuring diagnosis to be made of the arch's state of conservation, thus excluding the need for any static consolidation.

Comprising the removal of infesting vegetation, cleaning of surfaces with specially tested techniques, removal of pollutant deposits, stucco work and the filling in of gaps, the restoration, was basically an extraordinary maintenance operation that improved both the conservation of the monument and its appearance without substantially modifying the historic image of it consolidated over the centuries.

The tendering process was organized by the municipality of Perugia. The work (begun in April 2013 and completed in November 2014) was directed and constantly monitored by officers of the municipality of



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Perugia (D.L. Arch. M. Cristina Timpani) and MIBACT, and involved the continual presence of a specialist restorer (Dott. Adamo Scaleggi).

The contract was awarded to Nei Restauro e Costruzioni (Potenza), with sub-contracts to Spaccia srl, Pernicini srl and KC Ponteggi (Perugia).

THE ETRUSCAN ARCH: THE PROTAGONISTS

ANDREA ROMIZI, MAYOR OF PERUGIA:

“The restored Etruscan Arch is a wonderful Christmas gift for the people of Perugia. A monument symbolizing the city and its history has regained its antique splendour thanks to the painstaking care of numerous technical professionals, art historians, archaeologists and restoration specialists.

On behalf of the citizens of Perugia, and not only them, given the Arch is a world heritage, I thank Brunello Cucinelli Spa, the company that made it possible, for its generosity, which must be seen above all as an act of love for Perugia. For this, and to express the gratitude of the people of Perugia, we grant it the keys to the City.

The restoration of the Etruscan Arch is an extremely relevant fact in itself but it is also a point of departure for many other things, including a complete renovation of the Piazza, which must recover its essence as the vital heart of this part of the city, which is also the centre of university life here; the upgrading of the city walls, in which the Arch is a nodal point, a heritage underestimated for too long and which must be seen as an opportunity for a revival of local culture and tourism; and the project for the ancient Etruscan Dodecapolis, which is being promoted by Perugia and deservedly aspires to become a Unesco site.

With its “new” Etruscan Arch, Perugia is now even more beautiful.”

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Looking at the monumental aspect of the Etruscan Arch, now restored to its candid splendour, I feel as if I could hear the passing of time, of the centuries that have handed it down to us practically whole and for whom we have restored it to its original beauty.

A *Porta Pulchra* bridging past and future, a symbol not only of memory but also of the living identity and industriousness of the people of Umbria, which we have transmitted, over the centuries, well beyond the walls of our cities and villages and throughout the world.

Today, admiring its beauty, antique and new at the same time, we believe that listening to the voice of the *genius loci* is the basic condition for improving mankind and cultivating that *spirit of conservation* that enables us to restore the antique value of “humanity” to future generations.

I am sure that that genius of our *inspirational father, the emperor Augustus*, if he were here today after 2,000 years, would be astonished by the splendour of this monument.



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THE ETRUSCAN ARCH: NOTE BY FRANCESCO SCOPPOLA, ARCHITECT AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF UMBRIA'S CULTURAL AND LANDSCAPE HERITAGE

The Etruscan Arch, with the city gate flanked by slightly tapering towers, seems comparable to a fortification seemingly wooden but resistant to fire described by Vitruvius in his treatise dedicated to Augustus, *De Architectura* (book 2, chapter IX, 14-16), already commented with annotations going back 10 years now (Gazzetta Ambiente n. 4/2004, p.105-118). Those pages talk of a military setback for Augustus, perhaps on the Adriatic coast at the site then known as *Ad pirum filumeni* and which Vitruvius called Larignum.

First all, gratitude is felt and must be expressed to all those who made it possible to achieve a worthy restoration of the monument and also hope that it may continue to be conserved and appropriately valorized, not in a monetary sense, in terms of profits, but in the sense of values that are inestimable, not economic, and that may be disseminated for the enhancement of our common cultural heritage. In short, we must focus on that kind of wealth that Vitruvius, in the same treatise, believes to be the only real asset and distinct from material riches because it alone can survive time or shipwreck. The astonishing, epic military account of the smoke from the fire clearing to reveal the tower of tree trunks still intact is so striking one keeps rereading it. I quote it here from the Italian version (still largely unpublished) by Francesco Pellati. "... there being a strong castle, called Larigno [...]. By the gate of said castle there was a tower [...] with beams laid criss-cross, like a pyre [...] the soldiers were ordered to approach the tower and throw down bundles of sticks and burning torches, of which the soldiers soon amassed a huge quantity. After kindling the material around the wooden tower rising towards the sky it seemed the construction must be completely destroyed. But the fire being extinguished on its own and the tower seeming still intact, Caesar [Augustus] was amazed and ordered a ditch to be dug around the castle out of spear's throw. [...] and so the castle was called Larigno, which was the name of that wood, which was carried here on the Po, to Ravenna, in the colony of Fano, and supplied from Pesaro, Ancona and other townships in the region". The hypothesis already formulated is that their resistance, prolonged by the phenomenon of the incombustible wood set against the Roman army of Augustus by the inhabitants of a fortified settlement at the foot of the Central Apennines (called Larigno by Vitruvius), is not at all apocryphal but actually happened in the place indicated as *Ad pirum filumeni* in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, near the mouth of the Cesano between Fano and Senigallia, slightly inland from the coast.

The project to restore the Etruscan Arch was drawn up, initially with kind consulting from the late Prof. Arch. Paolo Marconi, by the municipality of Perugia and the Culture and Tourism Ministry, through its agencies in Umbria, with funds provided by a private sponsor, Brunello Cucinelli, to cover the entire amount of €1.3m.

The project is of considerable importance not only in terms of the conservation and valorization of the monument but also as an example of private funding for public assets, the first in Umbria and second in Italy after the Coliseum. But the first in terms of funds dedicated per unit of surface area of stone of the monument. In other words, the most generous in relation to size. In times of tight cost control this might seem odd, but if recovery is not based on investments in sectors that generate indirect returns of over ten times the amount invested in one year, on what should we base our strategy for overcoming the crisis?

Modified in the Renaissance with the *loggia* of palazzo Brutti, the monument in front of the University for Foreigners bears the old inscription, with traces of *rubrication*, of *AVGVSTA PERVSIA* made after the fire of Perugia in 40 BC caused by Augustus's conquest: it is extraordinary but of similar acts in the same years we have a detailed account in Vitruvius's architectural treatise speaking precisely of the moment in which a city gate was set alight. This inscription was later joined by *Colonia Vibia* added by the Umbrian emperor Trebonianus Gallus (AD 251-253).

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