**TRAJAN’S COLUMN:**

**ANATOMY OF A MONUMENT**

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Solemn and imposing, Trajan’s Column has dominated the forum of the same name for nearly two millennia, indifferent to the ravages of time and the affronts of man. An infinite number of human eyes have lingered on its cylindrical surface, densely decorated with episodes evoking in spiralling sequence the deeds of its promoter, Emperor Marcus Ulpius Nerva Traianus.

Yet among the throngs of visitors who for centuries have admired this amazing monument, surrounded by vestiges that provide a glimpse of the monumentality of Rome’s architectural splendour at the time of Trajan, few have stopped to ask themselves how it was possible to erect such an immense structure with the technical means available to builders of the time.

For this reason we thought it fitting to focus an exhibition on the reconstruction of the extraordinary enterprise of building this monument, in order to highlight the ingenuity, the technical expertise, and the physical labour of the men who made that achievement possible. Until now, strange though it may seem, this has never been attempted. The long voyage from the project’s initial conception to the quarrying in the Apuan Alps of the giant marble blocks, each weighing over thirty tons, to the ingenious solutions employed in bringing them down to the sea intact, to their transportation on special ships for 200 miles from Luni to the Port of Claudius-Trajan in Rome, to their unloading at the *Emporium* and their transfer to the construction site in Trajan’s Forum all constitute chapters in a story that cannot help but generate awe and admiration in those who are placed in the condition, as we are here, to follow it step by step.

The goal that we set for ourselves was to make visitors spectators in the complex phases of the execution of this memorable architectural endeavour, in order to grasp the daring and genius that characterized it.

The exhibition emphasizes the contribution of the authors of this project. Not only of Apollodorus of Damascus, who played a fundamental role in the design of the monument and in the planning of the construction site, but also of the master builders who poured their sweat and blood over those white blocks, of those who built the site’s powerful machines and controlled their operations, and of those who carved within those giant marble cylinders, set precisely one on top of the other, a perfect helicoid staircase.

This event pays tribute to that mass of nameless artisans, helping us to understand how the great civilizations – like that of ancient Rome – achieved excellence not only in the arts, letters, and civil, political and social organization, but also in technical and scientific knowledge and its practical applications.

This exhibition on the construction of Trajan’s Column is the result of the fervent, skilful and passionate work of Giovanni Di Pasquale, who, in the exhibitions he has curated on the technology of the world of Pompeii and, more recently, on the Syracuse of Archimedes, has already offered us eloquent proof of his profound knowledge of the evolution of science and technology in ancient Mediterranean civilizations, particularly that of Rome in the centuries of its greatest splendour.

The collaboration with a great contemporary artist has been fundamental: the internationally-renowned sculptor Claudio Capotondi, a refined shaper of white Carrara marble with traditional methods and tools, has established a prolonged and extremely fruitful dialogue with Giovanni Di Pasquale and the authoritative members of the international scientific committee. Without that interdisciplinary dialogue, to which, among others, Cinzia Conti and Giangiacomo Martines have offered an important contribution from the outset, the reconstruction of this complex history could not have produced such fascinating and convincing results. To Capotondi we owe the formulation of an absolutely plausible hypothesis concerning the process of the construction of the monument. But that is not all. Indeed, with his own hands, the hands of a highly-skilled artist, he has built the models of the technical devices and lifting and positioning machines that the Roman builders most likely exploited for that daring architectural enterprise. Moreover, he has offered eloquent proof of his formidable artistic talent in dozens of spectacular graphic reconstructions of the entire building cycle: a gallery of images with the incredible expressive force of a sequence of frames that give life to a gripping, film-like narration.

The Soprintendenza archeologica of Rome has contributed significantly to making this exhibition possible, accompanying the project’s development from its earliest conception with valuable suggestions, as well as making available original finds of noteworthy importance. I would particularly like to thank the Director of the Musei Capitolini, Claudio Parisi Presicce, and the Supervisor of the Museum of the Mercati di Traiano, Lucrezia Ungaro.

This operation of “living archaeology” of the technological culture of the ancient world intrigued Eike Schmidt, Director of the Uffizi Galleries. When I showed him the exhibition concept, he immediately offered to collaborate in its realization. He consulted his agenda and, without any hesitation, identified the location in which it would be held and set the inauguration date. I am extremely grateful to him for his enthusiasm and confidence in this new, fruitful partnership between the Uffizi and the Museo Galileo. In addition, Eike Schmidt made available to us the profound archaeological expertise and precious collaboration of Fabrizio Paolucci, head of the Uffizi’s Department of Classical Antiquities. He designated the Limonaia in the Boboli Gardens as the site of the exhibition and, thanks to the expert work of Francesca Montanaro and Patrizia Tarchi of the Uffizi Registrar Office, took responsibility for the complex management of the loan of original works granted by prestigious institutions. The Uffizi Galleries also guaranteed indispensable organizational support and the drafting of the exhibition plan, carried out with his customary expertise by architect Mauro Linari.

I would like to thank RovaiWeber Design Studio for creating the suggestive graphic layout that characterizes the exhibition, and Opera Laboratori Fiorentini for carrying out the installation with the coordination of architect Piero Castri, and the guidance of Laura Stiattesi for the models and reconstructions. Finally, my thanks to Claudio Pescio and Dario Dondi from Giunti Group for their expertise and commitment in the publishing of the catalogue.

The entire staff of the Museo Galileo has enthusiastically participated in the realization of this initiative.

I would particularly like to underline the decisive contribution of our Multimedia Laboratory, which, with the coordination of Jacopo Tonini, has produced a number of fascinating digital film clips that present the various phases of this remarkable construction endeavour. No less important was the contribution of the Web Unit directed by Iolanda Rolfo, which created the exhibition’s rich and informative website. Finally, Laura Manetti has overseen all phases of the process, handling communications with the numerous collaborators and managing relations with the Uffizi Galleries and the publisher.