
A SHORT HISTORY OF GENTILI AS RESTORATION AND RENOVATION COMPANY IN BAGNOREGIO AND TUSCIA REGION

Francesco Bizzarri¹ and Andrea Gentili^{2*}

¹*Local History Amateur Scholar, Via U. Urbani, 23, 01022, Bagnoregio, Italy*

²*University of Tuscia, Largo dell'Università, 01100, Viterbo, Italy*

(Received 1 October 2017, revised 14 December 2017)

Abstract

This short contribution aims at illustrating the history of Gentili SRL Company, involved since 19th century in building construction, renovation activities and monumental restoration, in the territory of Tuscia, a historical Italian area rich of churches, palaces and monuments, between Umbria, Toscana and Lazio regions.

Keywords: building, renovation, restoration, historical, region

1. Historical panorama

Gentili Company was established in 1863. It was declared Historical Enterprise and was added in the Registry of Historical Italian Enterprises in 2013. This Registry includes companies having more than 150 years of activity (Figure 1).

The Gentili family takes its origin from the ancient village of Bagnoregio, a small town in Viterbo district (Figure 2). Gentili surname is already present in a document of 1546, concerning the relationship between the Community Hall of Bagnoregio and the Jewish Community established in the village [1].

To better understand the history and evolution of Gentili Company, it is necessary to outline a short panorama of Bagnoregio and of its origins. The town of Bagnoregio has a Etruscan-Roman origin, clearly observable in the numerous Etruscan tombs visible along the tuff's walls of the hill where the town was built, the plenty of Roman inscriptions and sculptures and the organization of the streets following the Roman urban plant based on the *Cardus/Decumanus* axes [2-3].

The name of the town in the Etruscan and Roman periods is not known. *BALNEO REGIS* (Migne Edition) or *BALNEUM REGIS* (Vatican Edition) appeared as names for the town, in a letter dated to 600 AD written by the Pope Gregorius Magnus to Ecclesius, Bishop of Chiusi (Siena district) [4-6]. Just few

*Corresponding author, e-mail: info@gentilirestauri.it, tel.: +390761792560

years later (in 604 AD) the village was called BALNEUS REGIS by Paulus Diaconus in his *Historia Longobardorum* [7].



Figure 1. Inscription certificate in the Registry of Historical Italian Enterprises.



Figure 2. Historical view of Civita of Bagnoregio at the end of 19th century.

The letter of Pope Gregorius Magnus is very interesting because is related to the selection of the Bishop for Bagnoregio, according to the suggestion of Aufridus (Aufret), Magister Militum of the Castrum BALNEO REGIS.

The letter proves that Bagnoregio town was a Castrum at the beginning of the 7th century, with a complex social and religious organization. A German authority ran the town, before the official Longobard conquest in 604 AD [7].

Bagnoregio was located in the Byzantine Corridor between the Roman Ducatus and Spoleto Ducatus and the town changed hands several times from Byzantine to Longobard power during the end of the 6th century (Agreement between Gregorius Magnus and Longobard King Agilulfus 593 AD) [8].

The existence of Aufridus (or Aufret) was finally proved in 1726 AD, during the restoration works in the ancient Church of Saint Peter and Paulus in Bagnoregio, a golden ring seal, in Longobard style, with the face and the name of Aufret, was found [8, 9].

For a long period the rings seal was wrongly estimated bellowing to Alfred the Great, the Saxon King of England who lived in 9th century. Finally Lusuardi Siena, Kurze and Gannon wrote the true history [8, 9] and at present the precious jewel can be admired in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where was present since 1871 (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Ring seal of Aufret.

The name changed in BALNEUM REGIUM as reported by Paulus Diaconus [7], and during the 13th century in BAGNOREGIO as reported by the poet Dante Alighieri in his *Divina Commedia Paradiso, Canto XII*, referred to Saint Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, Theology and Philosophy doctor, also called Doctor Seraficus for his mystic thinking. He was born in Bagnoregio (1217-1274), became professor of Theology and Philosophy at Sorbona University in Paris. He was also Cardinal and General of Saint Francis Order. Among others works, he wrote the *Legenda Major*, the official biography of Saint Francis of Assisi. The Italian painter Giotto based on the *Legenda Major* his frescos of Saint Francis life in Basilica Superior Assisi.

During centuries the name of the town changed in BAGNOREA/BAGNAREA and finally in 1921 during the Kingdom of Vittorio Emanuele III became BAGNOREGIO.

The town of Bagnoregio, after the domination of Goths, Longobards, Franks and the Earls, became independent Municipality. This historical transformation was firstly documented in a parchment dated back to 1161 AD, at present stored in the Archives of the Community Hall of Bagnoregio [8, 9].

Bagnoregio was affected, starting from its erection, by continuous erosion phenomena of the clay tuff's ridge on which the small town was built. In fact the town is located on the top of a volcanic hill and affected by continues landslides that are progressively reducing the urban area. The town has been investigated in the last years to define a general plan for a restoration of the cliff-town system [10]. This plan is based on an integrated approach capable to solve the existing problems, minimizing the impact of interventions (sustainable mitigation).

During last years, several phenomena affected the cliff and Civita di Bagnoregio slopes. The main recorded landslides were: in February 1992 a rock fall due to an extraordinary snowfall; in the summer of 1993 another rock fall; in December 1996 a debris landslide, when the materials involved in the 1993 rock fall were remobilized and triggered along the clayey slopes; at last a small landslide in August 1998, involving the access area of Civita. In the period between 1999 and 2001, deformations of the Northern portion of the cliff with phenomena of rock fall and with a huge final debris landslide occurred.

The recently proposed approach to mitigate landslide phenomena affecting Civita is a low impact design constituted by concrete excavate well located near the edge of the cliff. This kind of works will allow applying, in the external portion of the cliff (instable tuff blocks), specific measures like nails, anchors and injections to strengthen the cliff itself [10, 11].

The erosion was and is still now operated by two streams called Rio Chiaro and Rio Torbido. Moreover, the town was also affected by numerous earthquakes that during the centuries caused several destructions. One of the most serious earthquake occurred in 1695 AD. For these reasons, since the beginning of the municipality period, population of Bagnoregio tried to apply measures against the erosion phenomenon, such as that proposed by Antonini in 1765 (Figure 4) [A.C.B. *Liber consiliorum*, c. 19t,15/12/1765].

Even in the municipality statute of 1373, several rules were established in order to preserve the territory, the bridges, the roads, the ridges, the streams and water drainages, the houses, and the public and religious buildings [12]. Moreover, in the statute, the Society *Corporazione dei capomastri muratori* (Guild of master builders) was included. This society was created by construction workers and stonemasons, who were a sort of brothers (*confrati*) that could help each other in case of necessity [13].

2. Gentili Company

The Society of *Corporazione dei capomastri muratori* assumed, during the centuries, the complete responsibility of taking care for the safety of the territory and buildings in Bagnoregio. Giuseppe Gentili, the founder of Gentili

Building Company in 1863 at present Gentili SRL Company, belonged to this Society.



Figure 4. Drawing representing a view of the Bagnoregio and Civita area with particular reference to geomorphological instability and planned hydraulic measures. This drawing, by F. Antonini, was enclosed to the relation sent by Bagnoregio Municipality to the *Sacra Congregazione del Buon Governo* of Rome in 1765 [A.C.B. *Liber consiliorum*, c. 19t,15/12/1765].

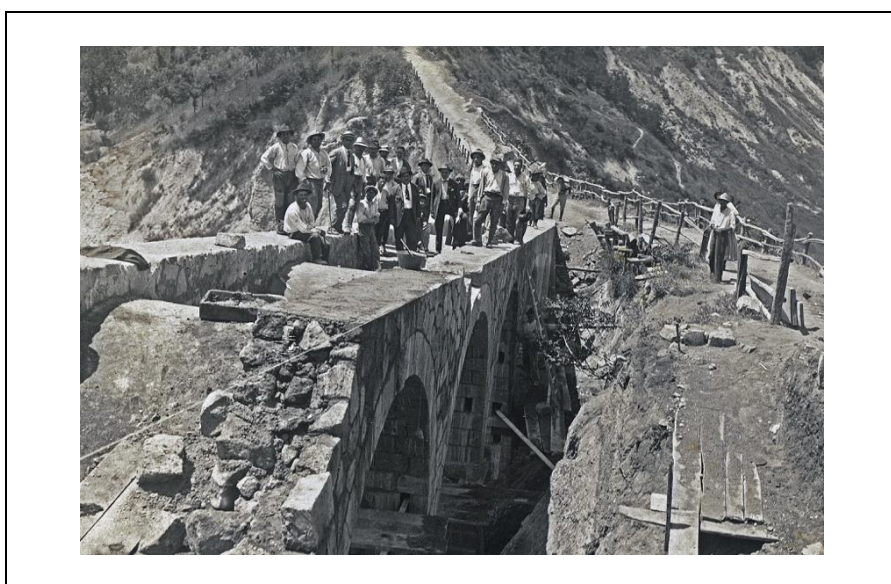


Figure 5. Restoring works of the Civita's bridge by Bonaventura Gentili (called Lillino, 2nd generation of the family, 1901).



Figure 6. Restoring works of the ancient Church of SS. Annunziata in Bagnoregio, by Nello Gentili (3rd generation, 1940).



Figure 7. Restoring works of Saint Peter Church in Tuscania after the 1972 earthquake by Antonio Gentili (called Toto, 4th generation).

Gentili family, since its institution, was active in building construction, renovation and restoration with continuity and especially devotion to their job. Gentili Company performed a lot of restoration works, made through six

generations of activity from father to son. These works may be found in the website of Gentili at: www.gentilirestauri.it. In the Figures 5-9 some of the most relevant activities are shown.



Figure 8. Restoration work in the church of Saint Flavianus in Montefiascone by Nello Gentili (5th generation, 1980).



Figure 9. Restoration works of the Bishop Palace in Montefiascone by Andrea Gentili (6th generation, 2016).

3. Conclusions

Based on the long experience of Gentili Company and on the recent degree in Science of Cultural Heritage [14], Andrea Gentili, representative of the last generation of this family, is going to develop a modern approach in restoration and renovation of historical buildings. In particular, special attention is addressed to the choice of materials and procedures, to the respect of original assets, to the use of compatible mortars and stones, and also to the application of scientific investigation and archive research as preliminary and fundamental step in restoration of historical edifices.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank Professor Claudia Pelosi and Professor Luca Lanteri for their support in the preparation and revision of the paper.

An early version of this article was published in the Proceedings of the 9th European Symposium on Religious Art Restoration and Conserve (ESRARC 9), Kermes, Lexis Compagnia Editoriale, Torino, 2017.

References

- [1] A. Luzzato and A. Tagliacozzo, *La rassegna mensile di Israel* III serie, **44(7/8)** (1978) 496-511.
- [2] F. Macchioni, *Storia di Bagnoregio dai tempi antichi all'anno 1503*, Agnesotti, Viterbo, 1956. 44-53.
- [3] M. Caggiano De Azevedo and G. Schmiedt, *Tra Bagnoregio e Ferento ricognizioni archeologiche in Etruria*, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Roma, 1974.
- [4] J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus Sancti Gregori Papae I cognomento Magni opera omnia*, Sancti Gregorii Magni Registri epistularum Lib. X-Indict. III, epistola XXXIV, vol. III, J. P. Migne, Paris, 1849.
- [5] G. Monceli, *Origine della diocesi di Bagnoregio*, *Risveglio*, **48(Supplement September)** (1980) 6-8.
- [6] F. Petrangeli Papini, *Estratto bollettino di Doctor Seraphicus, Bagnoregio*, **14** (1967) 1-35.
- [7] P. Diacono, *Storia dei Longobardi*, Libro IV, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milano, 1991, 372-373.
- [8] S. Lusuardi Siena, *I Signori degli Anelli*, Atti della giornata di studio Milano, V&P università, Milano, 2001, 20-29.
- [9] A. Gannon, *Antiq. J.*, **92** (2012) 115-127.
- [10] G. Delmonaco, C. Margottini and D. Spizzichino, *Low-impact interventions for the preservation of Cultural Heritage: the dying town of Civita di Bagnoregio (Central Italy) and the killer landslide*, Proc. of the International Conference PROHITECH09, Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2009, 1455-1459.
- [11] C. Margottini, *Evoluzione morfologica dell'area di Civita Bagnoregio in tempi storici*, in *Civita di Bagnoregio*, ENEA, Progetto Civita, 1990, 23-28, 57-70.
- [12] F. Petrangeli Papini, *Bagnoregio cronologia storica*, Agnesotti Editore, Viterbo 1972, 1-247.

- [13] G. Capocaccia and F. Macchioni (eds.), *Statuto della Città di Bagnoregio del MCCCLXXIII*, Bagnorea Scuola Tipografica, Viterbo, 1921, 1-241.
- [14] A. Gentili, *Indagine conoscitiva, conservazione e restauro dei dipinti murali di palazzo Bonaparte a Canino*, Dissertation thesis, University of Tuscia, Viterbo, 2017.