

Ancient Lights for an Ancient Treasure

Elsa Bazzini (May 25, 2008)



Next Saturday in Rome, at the ancient fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo, Michelangelo's "Girandola" will finally come back to life, in commemoration of the anniversary of the Sistine Chapel.

Thanks to years of research by Giuseppe Passeri, coordinator of the event for the company Nona Invicta, and the partial funding of the Rome municipal authorities, it has been possible to recreate the famous Michelangelo's fireworks. The show will be the result of the examination of ancient documents from across Europe that allowed to reproduce firework-making materials identical to those used in Michelangelo's time.



At the beginning of the 16th century the great Michelangelo created for Pope Julius II an elaborate fireworks show. The extraordinary spectacle was called "Girandola". The Italian genius created an artistic sequence of explosions, shifting for the first time in history the focus during a firework show from noise to colour, that typically lasted around 90 minutes. It was quite different from modern firework shows, since it used few explosives and focused on transparency and colour definition. The Girandola was such a hit that it was quickly reproduced and soon became a key element of all largest celebrations in Rome. It was last seen in the Eternal City in 1834. Experts believe that the Girandola disappeared due to scarcity of materials such as lycopodium, a plant that grew in the Ural mountains and provided stability to fireworks.

The show will certainly color the Roman sky. According to Passeri, "The Girandola was an unmistakably baroque event, an astounding play of colours wedded to its surroundings". His team has done its best to reproduce the original shape of the fireworks, which were meant to mimic the eruption of Stromboli, the famous volcano off the Sicilian coast. If the 2008 Girandola resembles the ancient ones, it will be a wonderful spectacle, "a kind of elaborate game, like a fountain transformed into fire".

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