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Proceedings of the first ArCo Conference



Art Collections 2020

Design and Museum Design,
Digital Heritage, Historical Research,
Posters

Editors:

Francesco Valerio Collotti,
Giorgio Verdiani,
Alessandro Brodini

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Art Collections 2020

Design and Museum Design Session

(ARCO 2020, DMD)



Art Collections 2020, Design and Museum Design Session (ARCO 2020, DMD)

Rebuilding the ruins. Mediterranean open-air museums

Eliana Martinelli

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Abstract

The paper aims at studying the relationship between architecture and archeology, in the field of open-air museums' design in archeological sites. The issue of the heritage musealization and its implications on the design methodology are analyzed by comparing two examples, realized in different periods at the opposite sides of the Mediterranean world, but expressing two similar compositional approaches in using the ruins as an essential part of the new architecture.

The first one is the archeological museum of Karatepe, located near Adana (Turkey) and designed by Turgut Cansever between 1957 and 1961. This structure has been the first archeological open-air museum in Turkey, demanded by the famous archeologist Halet Çambel to host the ruins of 9th-century BC Hittite fortification, in particular those of two monumental gates. The architect aims to realize a permanent building separated from the ancient walls, but able to reintegrate them into the landscape. Therefore, he designs a modern system of shelters, composed of two U-shape roofs and two linear ones, which develops in high the ruins' floor plan, giving an exact interpretation of the dimensions and niches of the ancient gate. The building structure is highly innovative for that time: thin pillars arise from the ruins and support impressive reinforced concrete roofs. The light filters and spreads from a set of wooden slats, so that sharp shadows on the remains are avoided. The architecture is fragmented, nevertheless, the whole system, made of roofs, archeological remains and nature, is conceived as a unit. Thanks to the architectural reinterpretation of the ancient ruins, we can understand the past monumentality of the gate and its antique role in the landscape's composition.

The second case study is the musealization of Praça Nova archeological site at São Jorge Castle in Lisbona (Portugal), realized by João Luís Carrilho da Graça between 2008 and 2010. The site consists of a stratification of Phoenician, Roman and Arab settlements, discovered during the 1990s in the courtyard of a 16th-century royal palace. The architectural shapes and volumes are designed by Carrilho da Graça to give a formal definition of the archeological ensemble and, at the same time, to identify each historical layer. The whole area is delimited by a corten-steel wall, from which a volume arises to host the remains of a prehistoric settlement. A dark movable structure protects the 15th-century mosaics, but the more interesting intervention is the rebuilding of the 11th-century Arab houses: white suspended volumes seem to rise from the ruins, while the floor plan of the ancient houses is readable on the roof structure made of wood and polycarbonate, conceived to share uniformly the light inside the buildings. The two architectural samples differ in intention and conception; nevertheless, both are designed to give a modern interpretation of the ancient ruins and to redefine them. The new arising volumes are thought, in both cases, to rebuild the ancient form and to make the archeological ground plan identifiable, even at great distances, so that also the landscape is recomposed.

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Keywords: Open-air museums; archeological sites; heritage musealization; Turgut Cansever; João Luís Carrilho da Graça.

1. Rebuilding the ruins: a Mediterranean issue

The paper aims at studying the relationship between architecture and archeology, in the field of the open-air museums' design in archeological sites. The issue of the heritage musealization and its implications on the design methodology are analyzed by comparing two examples, the Archeological Museum of Karatepe (Turkey) by Turgut Cansever and the Archeological Site Center of Praça Nova in Lisbona (Portugal) by João Luís Carrilho da Graça. Although realized in different time periods, at the opposite sides of the Mediterranean world, the two works express similar compositional approaches in using the ruins as an essential part of the new architecture.

Building with the archeological remains is a recurring theme in both Mediterranean shores, but mostly in Europe, where the notion of cultural heritage is born: starting from the Athens Charter of 1931, several principles for conservation and restoration have been developed. Architects have always played an important role in creating an increased awareness in the society, by giving the possibility to visitors to experience the tangible cultural heritage and, indirectly, also the intangible one, with different exhibition methods.

On the other hand, architects from all over the world have always been fascinated by the Mediterranean archeology, which is considered an essential instrument of education for the architect's work. Ruins, indeed, can be used as a tool to develop the design process and, in some cases, a poetic of the fragment. As Aldo Rossi states, architecture value lies in the possibility of recognizing images, which resist time, in contrast to material deterioration. In this sense, a fragment does not imply a unique global image, but can refer to different ancestral, recognizable ones (Rossi, 1989). Therefore, a fragment can be repeated and interpreted to give shape to architecture: this compositional tool recalls every time different images, but comparable to various cultures.

2. The Archeological Museum of Karatepe by Turgut Cansever

In 1946 the prominent Turkish archeologist Halet Çambel discovered in Karatepe, near Adana, the ruins of a 9th-century BC Hittite fortification. Çambel firmly objected to transferring elsewhere the remains, in particular those of two monumental gates, and demanded to preserve them and the bas-reliefs *in situ*, in order to not destroy the integrity of the monument with the environment.

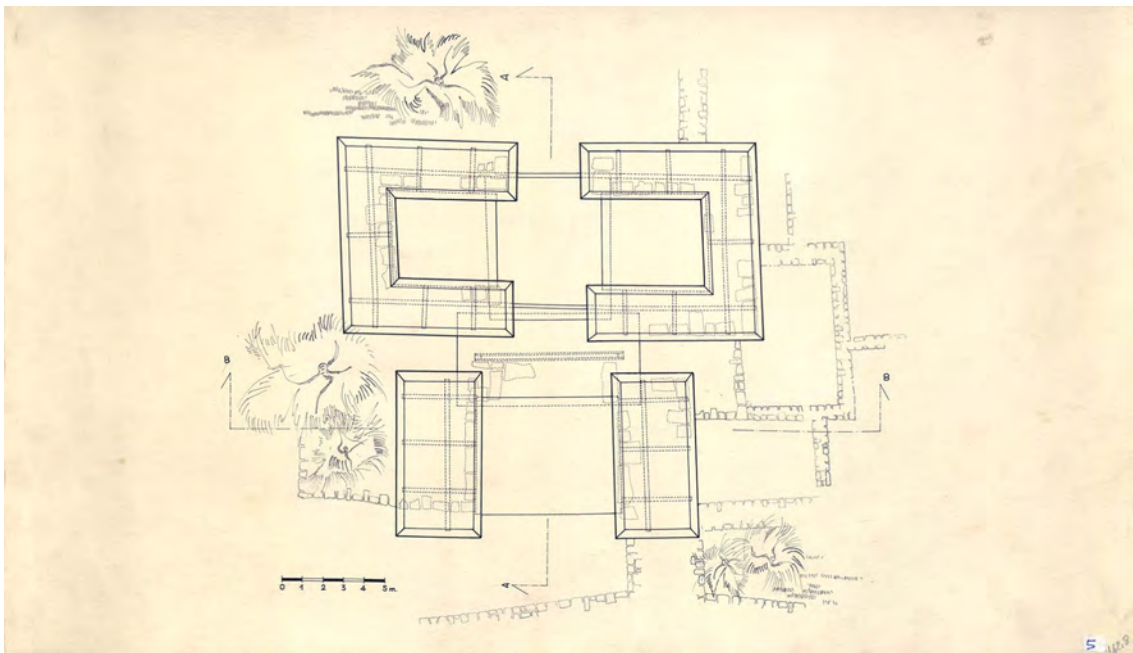


Fig. 1. Karatepe open-air museum: roof plan.

The architectural result would be the first archeological open-air museum in Turkey.

After a preliminary project drafted by Franco Minissi, in 1957 the Turkish architect Turgut Cansever was commissioned to design the museum. The architect's attitude was that of reinterpreting the ancient ruins with a modern idea, realizing a permanent building separated from the ancient walls, but able to reintegrate them into the landscape. Therefore, he designed a modern system of shelters, composed of two U-shape roofs and two linear ones, which developed in high the ruins' floor plan, giving an exact interpretation of the dimensions and niches of the ancient gate.

The exposed concrete structure was highly innovative for that time and was developed with the support of the engineer Vural Cinemre: thin pillars arise from the ruins and support impressive reinforced concrete roofs, whose perimeter precisely follows the ancient gate's planimetric directions. With the aim to minimize the necessities of maintenance and restoration, the engineers realized with success, for the first time in Turkey, a high-quality exposed concrete structure.

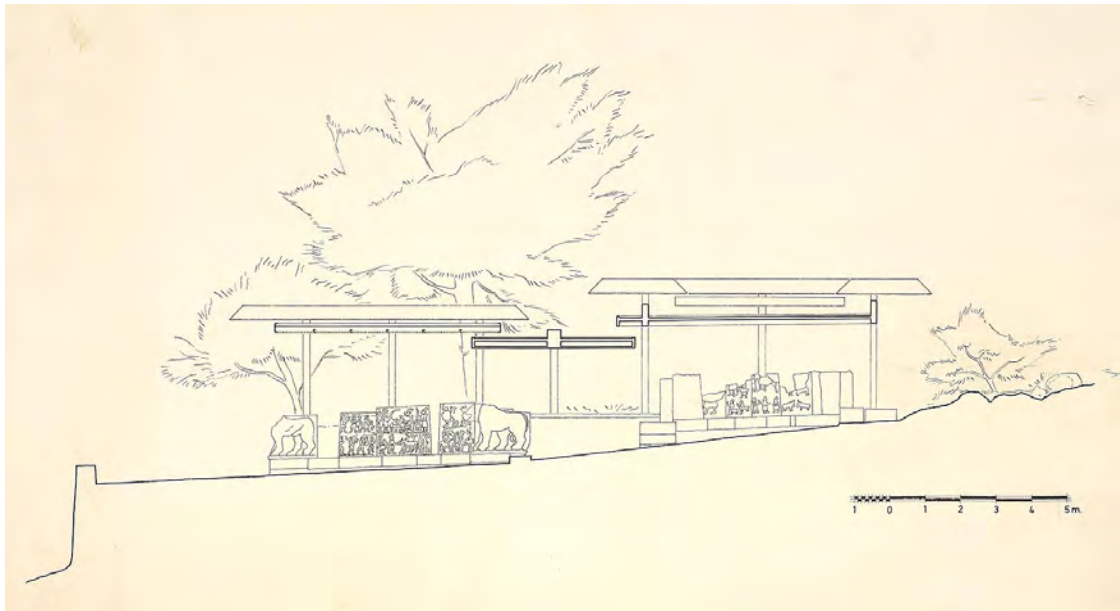


Fig. 2. Karatepe open-air museum: cross-section.

The light filters and spreads from two big skylights, placed between the linear roofs and the U-shaped ones. They are made of two iron structures, to which glass sheets and sets of wooden slats are hung, so that sharp shadows on the remains are avoided. The drainage system (drainpipes and gutters) is completely hidden inside the pillars and between the iron structures and the wooden slats, while the rainwater is collected underground (Çambel, 2003).

The entire architecture is composed of fragments, which interpret archeological parts; nevertheless, the whole system, made of roofs, ruins and nature, is conceived as a unit (Cansever, 1981). The design aims at reading the ancient remains and restoring the original volumes, in order to bring to light the past monumentality of the gate and its antique role in the landscape's composition.

In contrast with the antique monument's massiveness, the horizontal roofs seem to spread over the archeological remains (Cansever, 1981). From the photographs at the time, it is possible to find a morphological analogy with the Turkish housing type, theme dear to Cansever: the ruins' perimeter wall, as the garden wall of a traditional Turkish house, is surmounted by the jutting tectonic structure, open toward the landscape.

The realization was completed in 1961 and included a guesthouse, built with a similar structural system and founded on the rock. The building hosted the rooms for the archeological researchers working on the site and a small library-museum.



Fig. 3. Karatepe open-air museum: the museum during construction.



Fig. 4. Karatepe open-air museum: the roofs in relation to the ancient wall.

3. The Archeological Site Center of Praça Nova by João Luís Carrilho da Graça

The second case study is located at São Jorge Castle in Lisbon. The fortress, which arises on a hill near the river Tago's estuary, was founded in the Islamic period, in the 11th century, while during the 16th was transformed into the royal palace. It was classified as a national monument in 1910, but the restoration works, directed by the *Direção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais* (General Directorate for National Buildings and Monuments), started only in 1938. The intervention followed Viollet Le-Duc's doctrine, but gave the castle a conformation that it never had before. The restoration had a political value, in line with the regime's propagandistic intent to make the monument a symbol of the Portuguese nation.

In the 1990s, during the excavations for realizing a car park, a stratification of Phoenician, Roman and Arab settlements has been discovered in the castle's courtyard. The most important remains were a set of structures

dating back to the Iron Age, two Islamic houses and a paved surface belonging to the Bishop's Palace, and afterward to the Santiago Counts' Palace (Nobre Neto da Silva, 2014).

Accordingly to the relevance of the remains, in order to maintain the integrity of the system, it was decided to realize a musealization *in situ*. Two exhibition spaces were built: the Museum Center by Victor Mestre and Sophia Aleixo (2007-2008) and the Archeological Site Center by João Luís Carrilho da Graça (2008-2010).

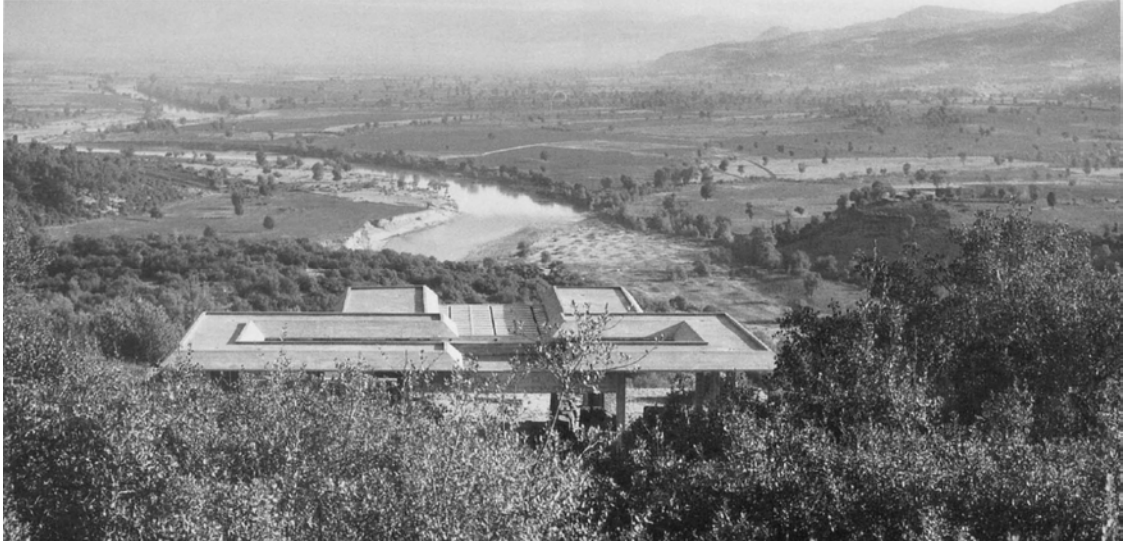


Fig. 5. Karatepe open-air museum: the museum in the landscape.

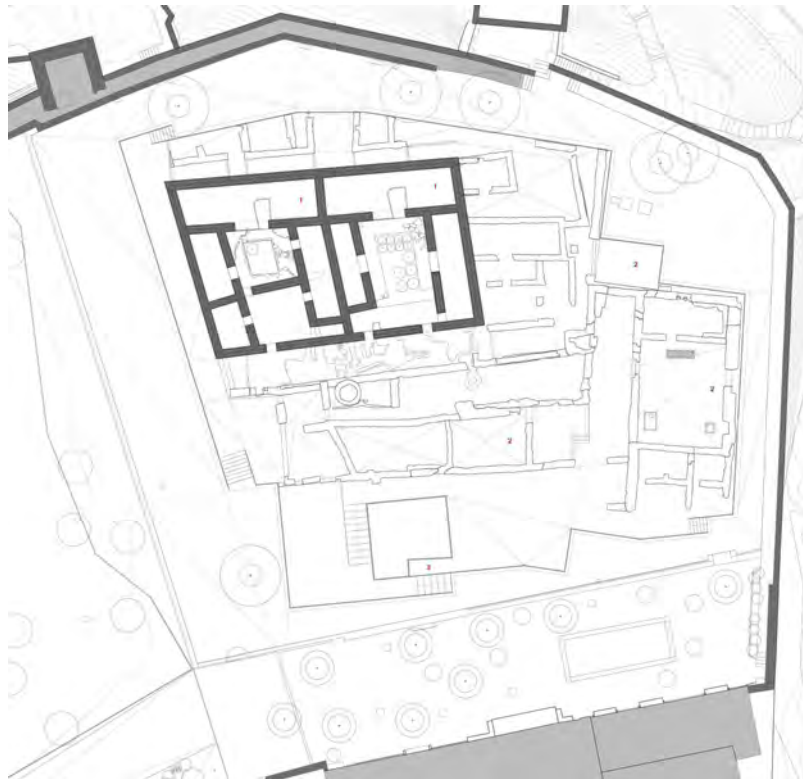


Fig. 6. Praça Nova open-air museum: project plan.

This last project, awarded with the Piranesi Prix de Rome in 2010, was designed in collaboration with the landscape architect João Gomes da Silva, with the aim to give a formal definition to the archeological ensemble and, at the same time, to identify each of the three historical layers. As for the first step, the whole archeological site has been delimited by a Corten-steel wall, to define a topographical area. An independent volume, crossed by horizontal slots, takes shape from these walls with a spiral form, which leads visitors at a lower level, towards the remains of the Iron Age settlement (Bucci, 2010).



Fig. 7. Praça Nova open-air museum: view of the project, between the Islamic houses and the metal volume.

Fig. 8. Praça Nova open-air museum: overall view of the project, towards the Islamic houses.

The second design operation was the realization of an elevated surrounding platform outside the border walls, aimed to define an intermediate space of relationship between the archeological site, the castle and the close Santa Cruz Church. The access to the ruins' ground level is marked by some limestone elements, which reveal the connection with the gravel paths.

Nevertheless, the more interesting intervention is the rebuilding of the 11th-century Arab houses: white abstracted suspended volumes seem to rise from the ruins, revealing the original conformation of the housing type, arranged around a courtyard. The ancient houses' floor plans are readable on the roof, made of polycarbonate screens protected by a wooden structure, which shares uniformly the light inside the buildings.

The seeming lightness of the structure, made of Knauf Aquapanel slabs supported by steel profiles, is expressed by just six support points, located where the ancient foundations are interrupted, so that they never touch the ruins. During the night, the artificial light underlines the detachment between the ancient foundations and the new white partitions, to create a surprising scenic effect and, at the same time, to highlight the separation between old and new (Bucci, 2010).

Finally, a dark movable structure protects the 15th-century mosaics of the Santiago Counts' Palace (former Bishop's Palace) and displays them by a reversed perspective on a mirrored surface located on its lower part.

4. Inhabiting the ruins: compared approaches

The two architectural samples differ in intention and conception; nevertheless, both are designed to give a modern interpretation of the ancient ruins and to redefine them. Cansever's suspended roofs and Carrilho da

Graça's arising volumes are thought to rebuild the ancient form and to make the archeological ground plan identifiable, even at great distances. Therefore, both architectures have a landscape and territorial value, considering the site as a natural and anthropic system to be preserved and, at the same time, to be completed. Carrilho da Graça prefers to speak of territory, rather than of landscape, because this term implies an anthropic influence in transforming the topography. In the territory, the traces of the ancient routes and settlements, based upon the topographical conformation, are still alive.



Fig. 9. Praça Nova open-air museum: view from above of the Islamic houses by night.

Another common theme is the clear distinction between preexistence and contemporaneity. However, the architects work with two different attitudes. In Adana, the modern structure is not conceived as separate from the ancient one, even using a different language; indeed, the concrete shelters are founded on the remains and their conformation is not ethereal: the imposing roofs seem to oversee the hill. Architecture results from revealing its constructive principles, expressed by wise use of materials.

For Cansever, the distinction between old and new is not significant, as well as the separation between conservation and invention, because the main responsibilities of the architect are those of solving the dichotomies and contradictions between past and present. He states:

“The hierarchy that arises from the evaluative relationship between the traditional and the contemporary, which are affected by man’s ontological constraints and existential needs, will be the guideline for preserving the traditional through a reconciliation of the past, the present and the future.

The attitude of change for the sake of change and the separation of conservation from creation should be discarded.

The fundamental principle in carrying out this task will be “not to change until the old can be replaced by something better” (Cansever, 1977).

Otherwise, for Carrilho da Graça the added elements are totally independent and autonomous in language and character, even if designed on the basis of the existing ones. The evident separation between ancient (permanent) and new (reversible) is the way to achieve balance in the composition. In this case too, the uniformity between architecture and constructive technique is important, but is aimed at searching for an abstraction, able to restore the memory of the past (Nobre Neto da Silva, 2014).

Praça Nova intervention is completely respectful of the preexistence, which remains intact and authentic, in order to show its vicissitudes. On the other hand, the new architecture claims its independence, becoming itself

the message that attests to the site's history, in a wide sense.

In conclusion, we can assert that both the musealization operations are based on the conception of inhabiting the ruins, in terms of holding. Mediterranean housing types are used to establish a dialogue with the heritage in a wide sense and to find a relation with the present time. Types developed throughout history and the world, thus their transposition in time and space has defined languages and elements common to different Mediterranean cultures. In this sense, these architectures allow visitors to a broader understanding of specific site and spaces.

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