ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHAEOLOGY: THE COMMON MEANING OF PAST AND FUTURE BUILT FORMS

ALESSANDRO CAMIZ
"D'ANNUNZIO" UNIVERSITY OF CHIETI–PESCARA"

"con gli occhi proprij ho ueduto, & con le proprie mani misurato i fragmenti di molti edificij antichi"

"with my own eyes I have seen, with my own hands I have measured the fragments of many ancient buildings"

(Andrea Palladio, 1570)

The State of the Art

In the recent debate on the relationship between architecture and archaeology (Capozzi, Fusco, and Visconti 2019) (Mariniello 2016), the prevailing thesis is that contemporary design should take shape within the archaeological site, figuratively affirming its contemporaneity. This assertion characterizes much of recent Italian design experimentation in archaeological contexts (Basso Peressut and Caliari 2014) (Cellini et al. 2009), but above all, it fuels the controversy that often sees architects standing against conservation organizations, making their project's life extremely difficult. This contribution questions the necessity of such a figurative affirmation. In an archaeological area, prior to any architectural design, a subtraction design operation

Communication: Alessandro Camiz **E-mail:** alessandro.camiz@unich.it

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Figure 1. Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema, The Colosseum, oil on canvas, 1896.

—the excavation— was carried out, defining a negative stratigraphic unit (Harris 1989). This operation, the archaeological excavation, was introduced only in the Age of Enlightenment; it is therefore a modern invention. The archaeological excavation is a contemporary operation that makes the past visible, attributing value to it. The assertion of identity by contrast of the contemporary design layer, in our opinion, does not consider the negative stratigraphic unity as a prerequisite for the design process itself. The compositional action should therefore take into account, as in any other place, the context and the process underway within it, thus establishing itself as a figurative connection. If the composition's primary subject is the ruin uncovered by the excavation, the design should determine its frame rather than asserting itself as an independent figure, or

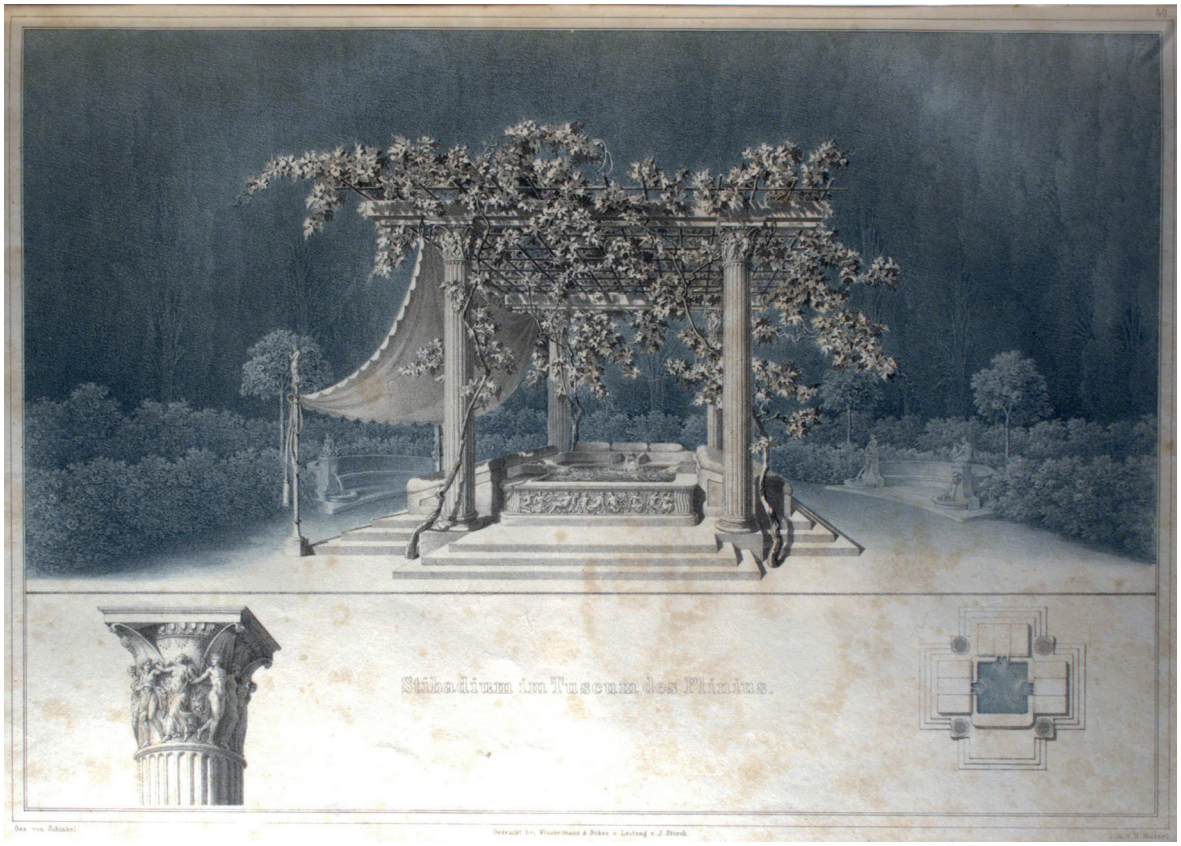

Figure 2. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Stibadium of Plinius' Villa, (Architektonisches Album, 1842).

even by applying contrast. This thesis could be considered by many conservative and passé, but once the substantial contemporaneity of the archaeological excavation is recognized, it follows that a design that fails to take this into account cannot be contemporary, and is therefore itself conservative and passé.

Archaeological design: tactics and strategy

Although it is not easy to find official statistics, Italy is probably the country with the highest number of archaeological sites. This is supported by the number of sites declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO: fifty-nine, the highest of any country in the world. Yet despite this well-deserved record, Italy does not seem to excel in archaeological project management. Examples certainly exist, and some of them are of high quality, for example, the Temporary Repository of Archaeological Finds at the Villa dei Quintili (Susanna Ferrini and Antonello Stella, 2002), the Access Pavilion to the Artemision excavations in Ortygia (Vincenzo Latina, 2012), and the ongoing redevelopment project for the Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome (Francesco Cellini, 2006). However, these numbers are certainly few when compared to those of other European countries, such

as Spain. If we were to broaden our analysis to include historical centres, a category of Italian invention (Toppetti and Capuano, 2017), the gap between Italian examples of contemporary architecture in historical centres and those in other European countries becomes even more evident. It's certainly necessary to distinguish between design in a historical urban fabric and design in an archaeological area; in our view, these are profoundly different things, but both suffer from a lack in Italy. In short, the country of historical centres and archaeology is unable to find the tools to design in these contexts. Of course, most will argue, it's the fault of the superintendencies which prevent architects from working as they should, and this is widespread political stance that accounts for what we believe to be a genuine disciplinary shortcoming. While there has been much debate in recent years about which scientific discipline is legitimately qualified to address archaeological design, and extensive experimentation has been conducted within teaching —for example, the nearly twenty-year experience of the Piranesi Prize, the work of the Roma Tre Faculty of Architecture, and the experiments of Raffale Panella and Alessandra Capuano, the methodological question of archaeological design, as we prefer to call it here, has not been seriously addressed within our discipline. While all disciplines are fully legitimated to address archaeological sites, and I am thinking especially of restorers (Carbonara, 1979), the question of design, at least nominally, belongs

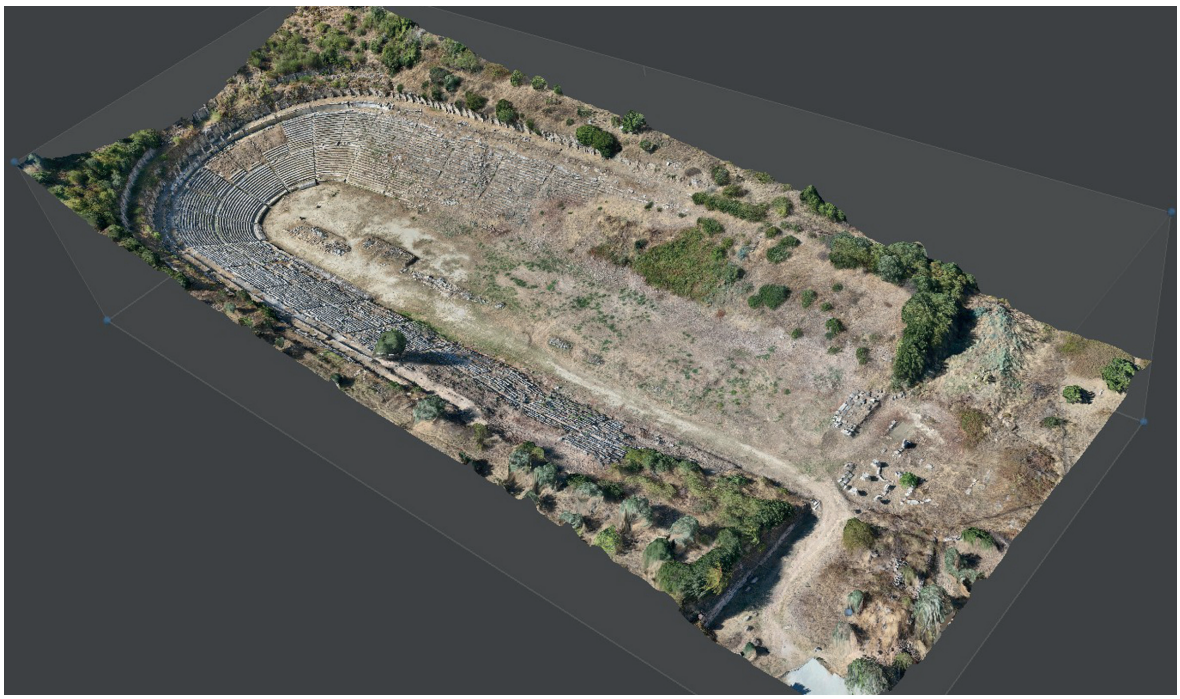

Figure 3. Magnesia on the Meander stadium, Aerial Photogrammetric Digital survey, (in collaboration with Görkem Kökdemir and Utku Özdemir, University of Ankara, Department of Archaeology, Magnesia archaeological mission, 2024).

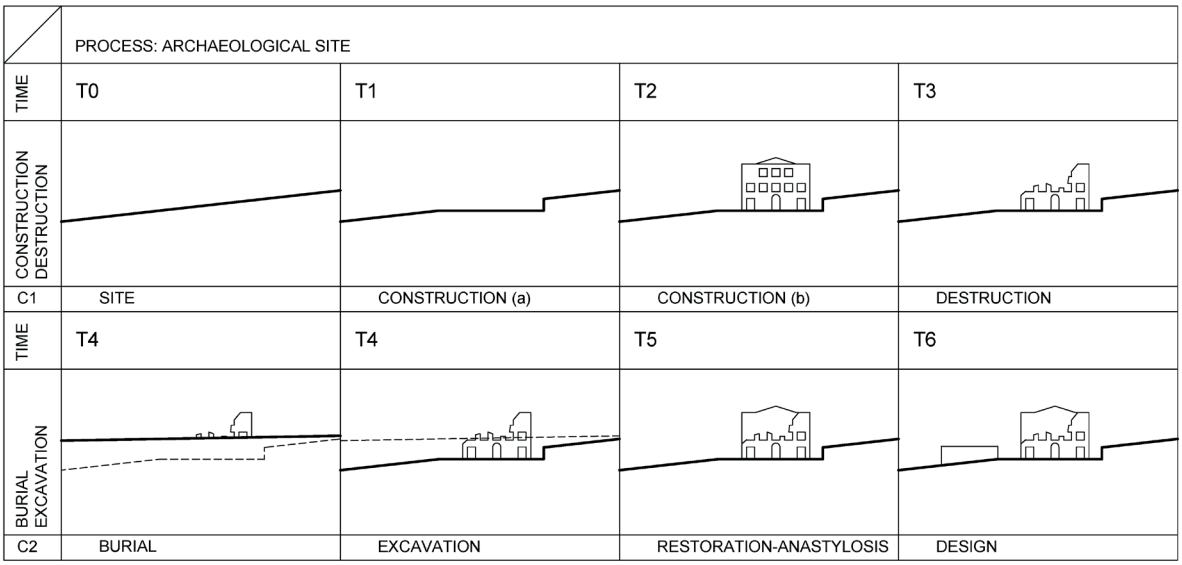

Figure 4. The formation process of an archaeological site should include the restoration project as a premise to the contemporary Design (A. Camiz drawing, 2023).

primarily to the field of design, not to interior design, not to landscape design, but of architectural design. Returning to the polemical opposition that too often sees architects and designers opposing superintendencies, we take the liberty of criticizing this political position that many colleagues often adopt so uncompromisingly, for both tactical and strategic reasons. Tactically, opposing superintendencies harms the architecture profession. If a superintendence halts a project because it deems it appropriate, its role of protection and safeguarding legitimates it to do so. Attacking it will certainly not push that superintendence to reconsider its position in this specific case, nor will it contribute in the slightest to restoring the trust and respect Italians generally have for the architect's profession. Strategically, however, a serious scientific reflection on the reasons why a project was halted would be far more useful than the usual outcry against the superintendence. Without this type of disciplinary reflection, and increased awareness of the nature of the problem and possible solutions, we will be condemned to remain in this situation for generations to come.

The Client: this unknown

We like to begin our examination with a classic reference: the first page of the architect's manual compiled under the guidance of Ridolfi. It's a questionnaire to be submitted to the client before starting any design project. When working in an archaeological context, the client is usually public, often composed of different and sometimes conflicting institutions. It would therefore be helpful to interview all

of them before any project to understand what they want, what they can accept, and what they absolutely will never accept, assuming that they know what they do want or not. This basic principle could also be extended by the designer, who should try to understand, even if the client isn't aware of it, what the client reasonably expects from the project and what they will never accept. On the one hand, this may also depend on the individual leading the superintendence, but I believe it largely depends on the context itself and the process underway.

In the 1950s, the Italian landscape of archaeological projects was very different from today. The experiments of Minissi (Vivio, 2015) and his collaborators had attracted international attention, and we are primarily interested in understanding the cultural underpinnings of that experience. It is now recognized that the experience of the Central Institute for Restoration and the teachings of Cesare Brandi (Brandi, 1963) were the foundation from which Minissi's projects started. Today, therefore, we must first turn our gaze to that school, with due updating of course, if we truly want to understand how an archaeological project can be undertaken. Along with Brandi's teachings, I believe we must humbly immerse ourselves in archaeology to understand its nature and objectives, to acquire the cultural tools needed to facilitate the necessary dialogue between architects and archaeologists, and above all, to understand the underway process in an archaeological site.

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