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Beyond Authenticity: on the Idea of Architectural Recovery in Archaeological Sites

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Abstract
Ruins are not simply objects to be studied, documented and protected. When reinterpreted and provided with a new context through an architectural project, they can produce unexpected civic meanings and once again acquire importance in collective life. They can be more than picturesque settings designed to arouse the curiosity of tourists, becoming places where people can meet and with which they can identify. This process, though, is neither simple nor frequently implemented. The often-misunderstood concept of authenticity may prevent its realization, acting as a restraining device by inserting architectural remains in a protected enclosure, as if they were the bearer of an untouchable originality. However, the transformations these remains went through over time tells a different story and shows that a demarcation line between history and contemporaneity based on scientific evidence is quite difficult to determine, since past and present always interact. This article reviews the phases of architectural preservation's history after the misunderstood concept of authenticity arose and took hold, becoming a hurdle for the definition of a contemporary idea of architectural recovery in archaeological sites: an expression that, in this discussion, is meant as a revitalization of ruins in conceptual terms rather than in material ones.

Keywords: Architectural recovery; Archaeological Sites; Rafael Moneo; Oswald Mathias Ungers.

Introduction

The history of reuse and reconceptualization of ruins or dilapidated buildings is much more ancient than the history of preservation, which is a relatively recent discipline. Reused or reconceptualized ruins were the outcomes of architectural projects lacking specific theories or laws concerning preservation. Before the French revolution, the past interacted with the present as a common and, to some extent, obvious practice. Several architectural projects were carried out in which the overlap between 'old' and 'new' took on remarkable importance; not only in the reuse of ancient buildings, but—more specifically—of dilapidated buildings and architectural remains. Some well-known examples come from Italy: the Temple of Athena in Siracusa (Sicily), circa fifth century B.C.E., which was turned into a Christian cathedral in 640 C.E.; the Church of Saint Mary of the Angels in Rome, which was built between 1561 and 1564 by Michelangelo over the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian; and the Savelli-Orsini Palace, in Rome as well, which was designed by Baldassare Peruzzi during the sixteenth century and was built over the ruins of the Theater of Marcellus. None of the works can be attributed to the narrow context of architectural preservation; however, their reuse and reconceptualization certainly prevented them from falling into oblivion. They are, we could say, examples of an empirical, untheorized kind of architectural recovery.

Things changed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the city became a disputed territory among many professional figures: architects, engineers, urban planners, and, last but not least, real estate speculators.[1] This was also the moment when preservationists and historians, later

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joined by archaeologists, built a tacit cultural alliance based on the belief that architectural remains and historical buildings had to become the subject of documentation; as a consequence, the (alleged) authenticity of these 'objects' could not be forged in any way.

The advent of Historicism

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the standards to be applied to ruins, and the methods to preserve them, began to be a topic of discussion in the context of archaeological restoration, when that concept still coincided with the restoration of historic monuments. This practice conventionally begins with the consolidation projects for the Roman Colosseum, which had been damaged by an earthquake in 1806. Neither Raffaele Stern nor Giuseppe Valadier, the two architects who were in charge of two different projects in 1807 and in 1828-29, respectively, intended to address the issue of the reuse of the building; instead, they were expected to provide design solutions to reinforce the building itself in order to prevent its ultimate collapse. In other words, they had to face a structural problem, rather than a problem of reuse or reconceptualization. The official narrative concerning these two projects, which were to underpin the concept of authenticity in the years to come, may be summarized as follows. Stern made repairs on the east side of the Colosseum and put in place a large support aimed at buttressing the original structure; however, he made no attempt at concealing his addition. Valadier decided instead to mend some of the arches on the building's west side by formally simplifying the original language of the Flavian amphitheater. Both architects chose bricks, which could be easily distinguished from the original travertine stone. Authenticity, in these cases, meant that the additions would be easily recognizable and separate from the original. When the two architects were faced with the reconstruction of the Arch of Titus, also in Rome, they had to replace missing elements with new ones. Once again, they elected to use a simplified language and a different material from the original one, but they also chose to isolate the arch from the medieval walls that had come to surround it after centuries of historical change.[2] On the one hand, they tried not to affect the authenticity of the original forms of the building; on the other hand, they removed it from its urban context! The famous archaeologist Giacomo Boni, who rejected the notion that reconstruction work on ancient monuments should become standard practice, wrote that the restoration of the Arch of Titus must not be repeated.[3]

Boni's opinion dates to the beginning of twentieth century, yet it is based on a mindset which came into existence in the previous one, when movements such as Idealism and Positivism started competing for cultural hegemony in the philosophical realm. German Idealism began to develop in parallel with the Romantic Movement, and its main assertion was that only a reality of the spirit exists. As a consequence, the material world was to be considered nothing but an outer manifestation of an inner reality. French Positivism, however, supported a very different philosophical view, according to which only the material world exists and even the spiritual realm of the human being can be explained in physical or biological terms. Curiously enough, these two opposing philosophies agreed about the importance of history, since both Idealist and Positivist philosophers believed in the concept of 'becoming' rather than in the concept of 'being': the becoming of the spirit for the first; the becoming of materiality for the second. Therefore, history was considered to be the representation of 'becoming,' meant as a philosophical concept. To be more precise, Idealist philosophers believed that the material realm has to be known in order to

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understand the spiritual realm behind it. In contrast, Positivist philosophers believed that the material realm has to be known in the belief that nothing else exists behind it. Since the material world was made of historical events, both for the Idealist and for the Positivist philosophy, history became an important object of philosophical knowledge. From this moment on, the relationship between authenticity and history could rely on philosophical assumptions.

In the field of architectural preservation, this outcome generated a paradox: history was divided from contemporaneity and became the 'realm of documentation.' Once inserted in a separated enclosure, history lost its main feature, that is, the ability to represent the 'becoming,' since it excluded the present from the historical dynamics. Only as an entity separated from the present, could history be studied in a historical perspective, where critical distance played a fundamental role.[4] Based on this assumption, a new attitude with respect to history arose and developed throughout the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth with the name of Historicism. At the beginning, it involved German philosophers and historians; later, it spread all over Europe with many local variations. Historicist thinkers believed that history had to be subjected to scientific investigation because they took for granted that history was a science.[5] Some historicist philosophers went further and maintained that historical evolution was ruled by a specific law according to which every historical phenomenon was bound to go through three main phases: birth, development and decadence. Birth and development were considered noteworthy, while decadence could become meaningful only as a premise for a new birth. Otherwise, it was the moment when the historical phenomenon started dying.

This belief gave new vigor to the discipline of philology, whose etymology means, 'love for the discourse.' Its aim was to collect all of the written sources of a historical phenomenon in order to understand if it had been passed on correctly or not. Authenticity became synonymous with scientific accuracy in the historical inquires, and its specific task was to divide fact from fiction and to distinguish truth from falsehood. This argument was to become crucial even in the realm of architectural preservation, where monuments (and buildings of the past, in general) started to be thought of as documents, or records of the past, rather than works of art or objects to be reused and reconceptualized in the present. It is useful to remember the authors whose works in the field of architectural preservation were grounded in this belief.

The monument as a document

A specific theory of preservation began to be defined only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some architects, the so-called restorers, started formulating a particular approach for those buildings from the past that had never been completed or that had been destroyed in part.

The forerunner of stylistic restoration was architect Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, who restored several medieval French buildings, such as the Nôtre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, between 1844 and 1864; the fortified town of Carcasson, between 1852 and 1879; and the Pierrefond Castle, between 1857 and 1879. In those cases, he rebuilt the missing or damaged parts of the buildings, and invented new ones, relying on his own interpretation of the buildings' original configurations rather than on historical evidence regarding them. Between 1854 and 1868, he published his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e^ au XVI^e^ siècle* (An Analytical Dictionary of French Architecture from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Century), in which he gave his famous definition of the term restoration: "To restore a building is not to maintain it, repair it, or remake it:

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it is to re-establish it in a complete state which may never have existed at any given moment." Thus defined, restoration was an invention that aimed to give stylistic coherence to a building; once accomplished, the building would move from a state of incompleteness (or, sometimes, from a state of dilapidation) to one of newfound unity. In Viollet-le-Duc's opinion, it was exactly this unity—made possible by restoration work—that ensured the authenticity of the building.

Using diametrically opposed arguments, art historian John Ruskin—who was also an artist, a writer, and a polemicist—cast the foundations of conservation in direct contrast to the concept of restoration. In 1849, in his most famous work, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and specifically in the chapter titled *The Lamp of Memory*, Ruskin established that there is no memory without architecture and that memory should not be rendered meaningless by the performance of restoration. The corollary of this statement is that the beauty of an ancient or historical building does not reside in its material quality or in its design, so much as it does in its age, which is evidenced by "the golden stain of time." It is not the building itself that is worthy of the beholder's admiration, but the effects of the elements—of nature—over centuries. Thus, somewhat ironically, Ruskin did not seek to preserve dilapidated buildings; rather, he aimed to protect the authenticity of the process that led to their ultimate destruction, which he considered a legitimate outcome when ordinary maintenance was no longer capable of preserving them for use. In his opinion, this process should not be interrupted because buildings from the past belonged to those who had built them and to their successors. Ruskin made allowances, not without some reluctance, for the possibility of employing "a crutch," namely the use of underpinnings to prevent the collapse of a building, but only when the collapse could be a source of danger. Performing any other acts of restoration, though, would be foolish, much like it is foolish to try and bring a corpse back to life. In Ruskin's opinion, authenticity was related to the aging process of the building, which did not abide restoration work of any kind.

Viollet-le-Duc's naive positivist optimism, which assumed that it was possible to restore the completeness of ruins, and Ruskin's emphatic romantic intransigence, with its abandonment of ruins to their ultimate fate, represented the two extremes of an analysis of the relationship between old and new in architecture, which could not be explained simply by their opposing mindsets and subsequent rivalry. Something much more important was at stake; specifically, a clash between the role of the architect and the role of the art historian, who jostled over the ultimate definition of architectural heritage, one debate after another in which the concept of history came to be the unexpected central focus and matter of contention.

Camillo Boito, the Italian architect and art historian, sought to mediate the roles of restoration and conservation by stating three fundamental concepts.[6] First, work on buildings of the past should be limited to situations where it is strictly necessary to intervene. Second, in cases where work is indeed required, it should use new and recognizable architectural forms. And third, every activity should be documented extensively.[7] Only under these conditions, he maintained, would historical buildings preserve their authenticity. Boito's approach is known as philological restoration because he considered historic monuments to be documents, or records of the past, rather than works of art. This explains his famous warning: "To deceive one's contemporaries with restorative forgeries is a grave misdeed, but not as grave as it is to deceive posterity."[8] His ideas, though, are more concerned with dilapidated (but still usable) buildings than with architectural remains in archeological sites.

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Architectural preservation as a clash of values

Alois Riegl (lawyer, museum curator, art historian) introduced new ideas in the context of architectural preservation, which presented the issue of authenticity in a new light. Three of his books, which he published in 1893, 1901 and 1903, deserve to be remembered: *Stilfragen* (Problems of Style); *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Oesterreich-Ungarn* (Late-Roman Art Industry); and *Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (The Modern Cult of Monuments. Its Character and Its Origins). In the first two books, he contextualized the aesthetical judgement regarding the works of art and architecture of the different historical eras, each of which was based on a specific *Kunstwollen* or 'will to art.' As a consequence, these works had to be studied, not judged. In other words, all of them had to be conserved and protected. In the third book, which was conceived as the introduction for a bill that sought to preserve Austro-Hungarian architectural heritage, Riegl introduced the idea that architectural preservation was the outcome of a clash of different and conflicting values: memory values on the one side, present-day values on the other, each of them further divided into sub-categories.[9] His discussion of architectural preservation showed that authenticity had to do not only with the issue of documentation, but first and foremost, with a complex evaluation process, which implied different and conflicting types of judgement: historical, aesthetic, functional, sentimental, and so forth. Despite this advancement, his theory was not exempt from aporias. Consider the arbitrary decision according to which buildings would become eligible for the rights of conservation when they turned sixty years old.[10] Why not fifty or seventy? This is not just a technical matter. To this day, the idea that history has a limit, beyond which the present begins, is still shared and accepted by many government bureaucracies and academic circles. Yet, the assumed self-evident nature of this presumption is purely deceptive. There is no philosophical or scientific basis that authorizes anyone to split history into chunks. Of course, this does not mean that architects can ignore the action of time on buildings, particularly when they have to work in archaeological sites.

Georg Simmel, the sociologist and philosopher, rekindled the discussion on this topic in *Die Ruine* (The Ruin), a 1911 essay in which he looked at ruins as evidence of the moment in the history of a building when the balance snapped between the architect who had created it and the materials he had selected from nature for its construction. From his point of view, the disintegration of a building was simply the process by which nature, through the passage of time, regained possession of the materials used by architecture, and changed them. It was akin to retribution for the violence to which nature had been subjected by the spirit of the architect who had reshaped it. Simmel saw this phenomenon as the result of an "accident," and therefore, as irrational. Nonetheless, once the process had been triggered, it became irreversible, and its irreversibility became its ultimate end. While a single piece of a building was still standing, it should be regarded as a product of nature's work, and from this fact it derived its attraction. Only a dull mind, Simmel maintained, would want to fully rebuild the original shape of a building using the scant fragments that remained of it as a starting point. Any reconstruction effort would effectively deny the effects of nature, or time, on the building itself; an intolerable lack of authenticity, in his opinion.

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Contemporary projects in archaeological sites

All of the aforementioned ideas about authenticity were connected to a specific historical context: the nineteenth century and the years immediately before WWI, a span of time that was characterized by the conflict between stylistic restoration and pure conservation. From the 1931 Congress of Athens to the 1964 Charter of Venice, this conflict ultimately became an ideological clash between tradition and modernity. In archaeological sites, both traditional approaches (based on the concept of imitation) and modern ones (based on the concept of differentiation) gave birth to questionable interventions. On the one side, there were arbitrary reinventions, such as the reconstruction of parts of the Knossos Palace in Crete between 1900 and 1931, by Sir Arthur Evans and 'his' architects, or that of the Stoà of Attalos in Athens between 1952 and 1956, by the American School of Archaeology. On the other side, there was the consolidation work based on the juxtaposition between old and new construction materials, such as stone and reinforced concrete, which turned out to be hardly compatible. For example, consider the case of the Athens Acropolis, restored by Nikolaos Bolanos between 1895 and 1933, or the countless works of *anastilosis*, many of which are found in southern Italy, meant to be one of the few correct ways to intervene in archaeological sites. In the 1980s, however, an important trend-change occurred, due to the awareness, progressively acquired by architects, that the idea of recovery had not only to do with material issues but also with conceptual ones. Some of these architects realized that contemporary design could play an important role not only in the preservation of archaeological sites, but also in their reuse and reconceptualization. Consequently, they addressed the issue of authenticity in new terms. A brief analysis of two possible examples explains how this was done.

Between 1980 and 1986, Rafael Moneo designed and built the Museum of Roman Art in Merida, a Spanish city that was established by the Romans. The square plan of the *castrum* (intended to be a primitive encampment and, consequently, the original settlement) is still visible today, as are the theater and the amphitheater, which appear as large ruins, side by side (Figure 1). The design choice that immediately catches the viewer's eye is the relationship between the arrangement of the walls of the new building and that of the original one, which belonged to the urban fabric of the Roman epoch. The orientation of the new walls is rotated in relation to the ancient ones, to match the current urban fabric (Figure 2). In this way, the building with its large brick walls acts as an element of mediation between the old and the modern world. On the upper floor (Figure 3), a main gallery of sequential arches, illuminated by skylights (Figure 4), is home to important relics and establishes the direction of the flow of visitors. Since the light enters the building from above, it causes the great arches to look like the bearing walls of ancient abandoned *horrea* (granaries), as if they themselves were ruins. We can see how the language chosen by the architect is an interpretation, certainly not an imitation, of the language of Roman times. This makes the ruins a source of inspiration, or—even better—of re-visitation.[11]

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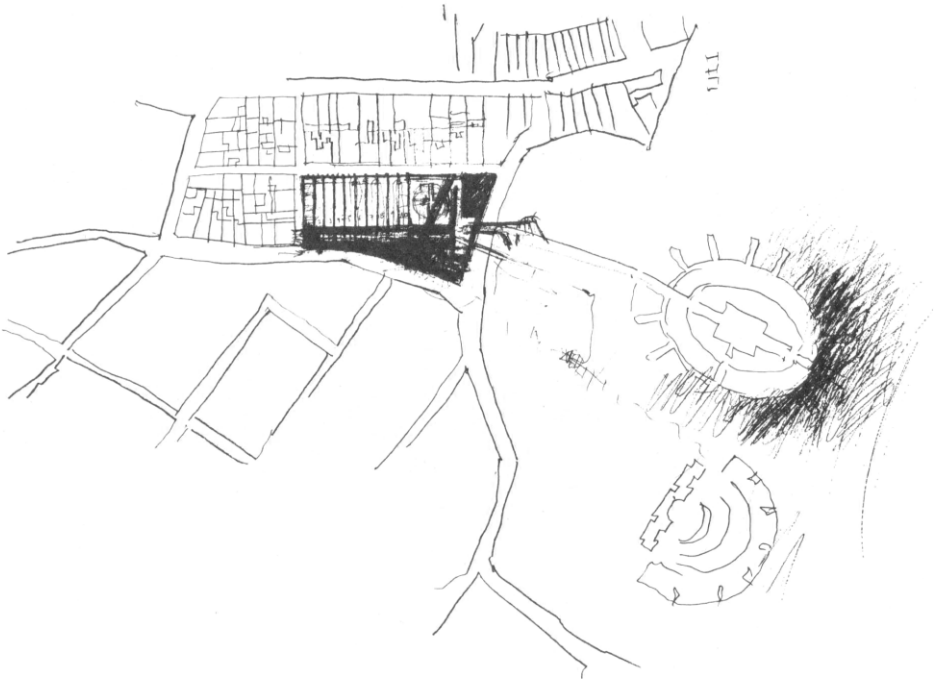

Fig. 1 – Rafael Moneo, Museum of Roman Art in Merida, Spain.
Site plan's study sketch – Rafael Moneo courtesy

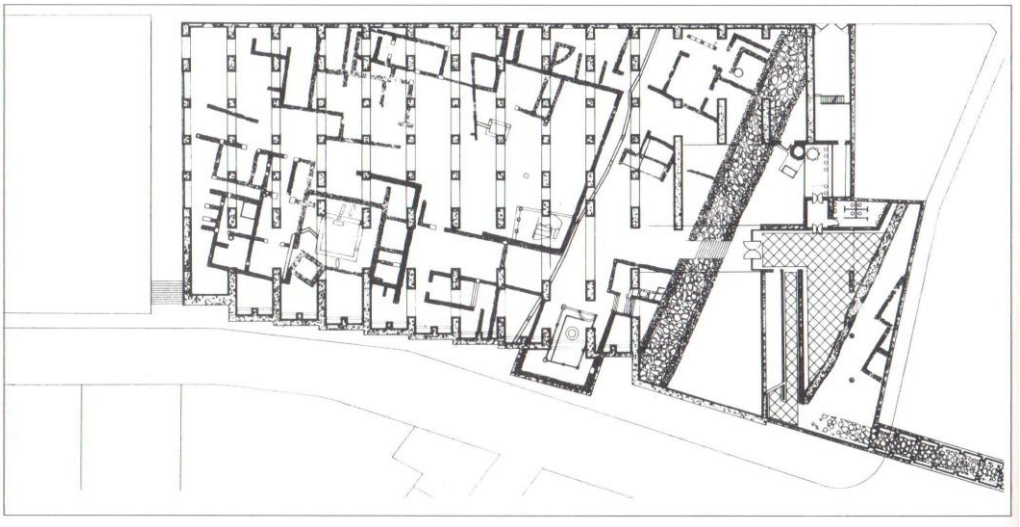

Fig. 2 – Rafael Moneo, Museum of Roman Art in Merida, Spain.
Plan at the ruins floor – Rafael Moneo courtesy

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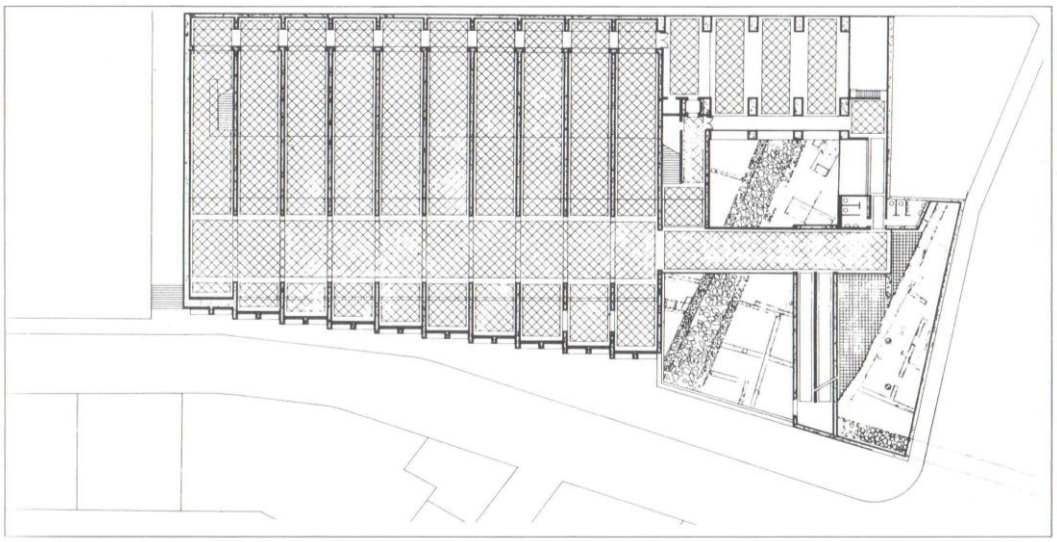

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Fig. 3 – Rafael Moneo, Museum of Roman Art in Merida, Spain
Plan at the main gallery floor – Rafael Moneo courtesy

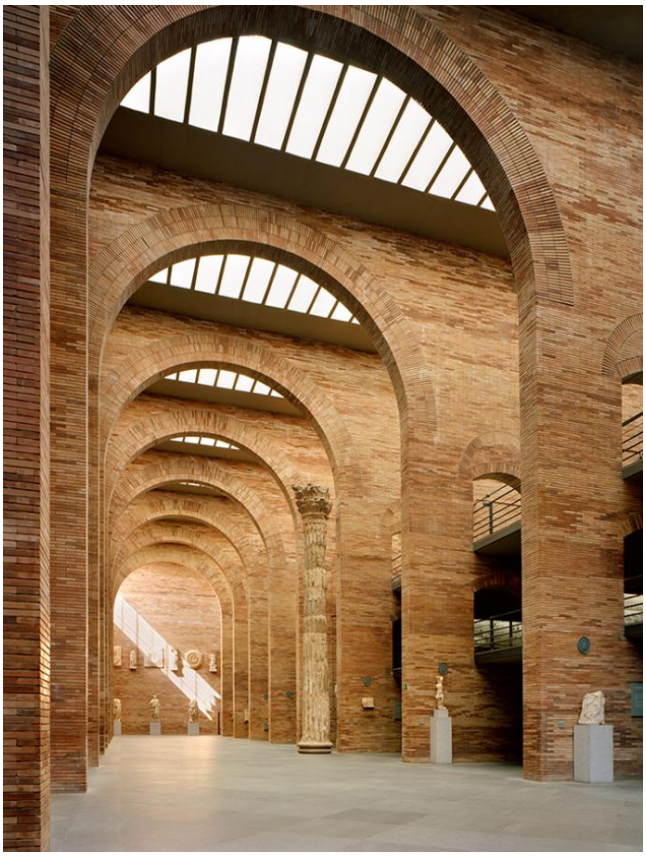

Fig. 4 – Rafael Moneo, Museum of Roman Art in Merida, Spain.
Interior view – Rafael Moneo courtesy. Photographer: Michael Morán/OTTO

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Between 1986 and 1998, Oswald Mathias Ungers designed and built the Museum of Forum Baths in Trier, Germany, after the ruins were fortuitously brought to light during the excavation of a site for a parking lot. Here again, the architect decided to rotate the construction axis of the new site with respect to the architectural remains that marked the ruins of the largest Roman baths north of the Alps (Figure 5 and Figure 6). He also chose to make the aboveground portion of the building into a large, simple hall, almost like a foyer, in the shape of a rectangular prism with glass walls and an iron ceiling, to represent its two goals: first, to signal the existence of the ancient subterranean city, and second, to give the newly built museum an adequately important entrance (Figure 7). The different arrangement of the plans of the ancient city and the modern one is itself an element of urban design. Inside the square, which sits alongside the new architectural element, there are two axes in the shape of a cross meant to evoke the ancient orthogonal orientation of Roman times. In this case, the relationship between the new construction and the archaeological site is based on the idea of 'reveal' and it is designed to remind people (not only the experts but the distracted passers-by as well) of the existence of a part of the city that tells a forgotten story.[12]

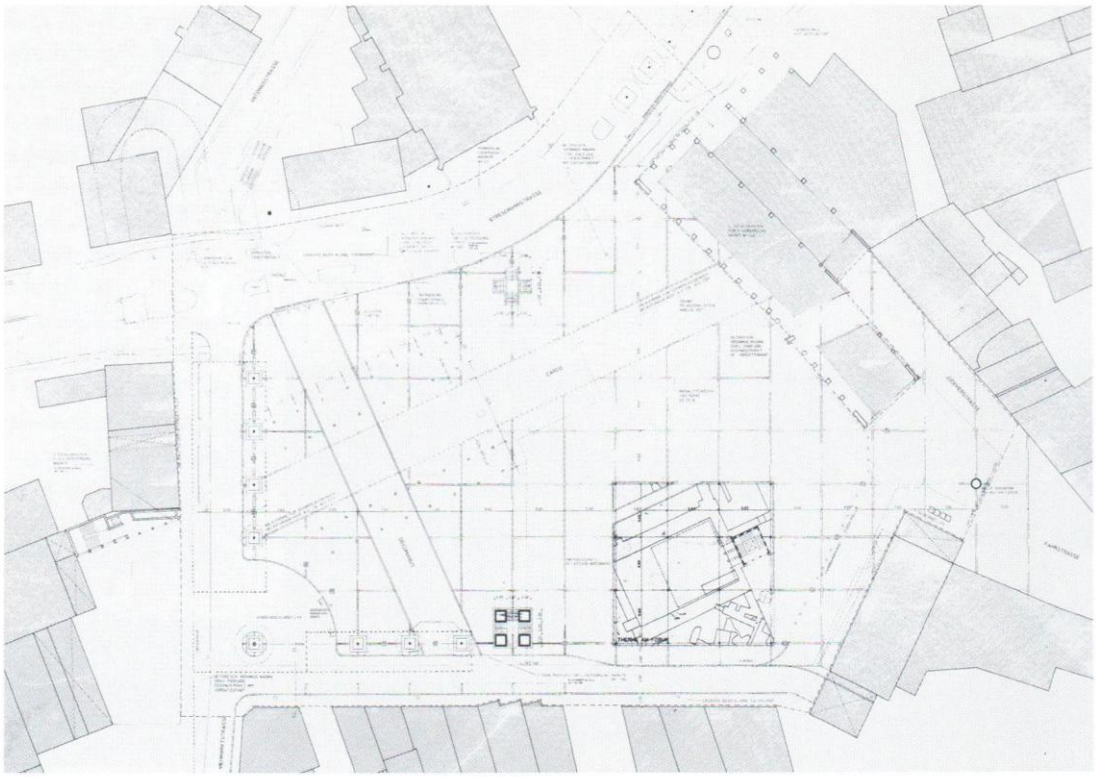

Fig. 5 – Oswald Mathias Ungers, Museum of Forum Baths in Trier, Germany.
Site plan's study sketch – UAA (Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft) courtesy

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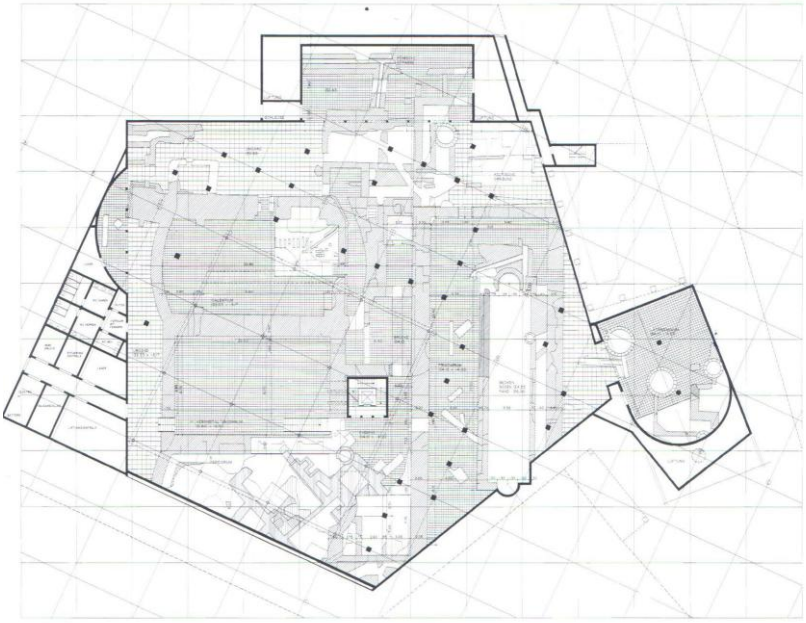

Fig. 6 – Oswald Mathias Ungers, Museum of Forum Baths in Trier, Germany.
Plans at the ruins floor and at the square floor – UAA (Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft) courtesy

Fig. 7 – Oswald Mathias Ungers, Museum of Forum Baths in Trier, Germany.
Interior view – UAA (Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft) courtesy

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Conclusions

The projects by Moneo and Ungers are highlighted in this article because they provide a new perspective on the relationship between architecture and preservation in archeological sites. To be more precise, they testify to the birth of a new awareness according to which architecture plays a twofold role: functionally speaking, it gives architectural remains a physical shelter; conceptually speaking, it gives them a new meaning. Both in the Merida project and in the Trier project, authenticity has to do with the natural aging process of architectural remains conceived as 'material objects'; moreover (and above all), authenticity has to do with the unexpressed ability of those same remains that, as 'conceptual objects,' can give birth to a new narrative. In this logic, ruins are no longer objects that are about to die forever, nor are they parts that can be integrated to restore the original image of the building. Rather, they are objects waiting to become something else, and it is exactly in this 'becoming' that the idea of architectural recovery gains theoretical credibility. Ruins, as conceived in the aforementioned projects for instance, can actually live again by connecting past and present without denying or falsifying their condition as ruins since their natural aging process is not altered in any way.[13] Documentation is still possible, but it is no longer the ultimate goal of the project. Rather, the goal is a new architectural concept, whose meaning is connected to the contemporary world. The recognition of the twofold feature of architectural remains is the fundamental prerequisite for architects to return archeological sites to the collectivity in terms of cultural artifacts that can be transformed rather than places to be enclosed. In so doing, architects can show that authenticity, when not merely celebrated or mummified, may become a shared starting point for a new project to originate and for a more articulated concept of preservation to take hold.

Notes

[1] This topic is adressed in: Guido Zucconi, *La città contesa. Dagli ingegneri sanitari agli urbanisti, 1885-1942* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1989).

[2] For a different interpretation of the consolidation works regarding the Colosseum and the Arch of Titus, see: Paolo Marconi, *Il restauro e l'architetto. Teoria e pratica in due secoli di dibattito* (Venice: Marsilio, 1993) 14-29. The critical interpretation of this scholar bucks the general trend with the two theses it offers: one is that the solution chosen by Stern differs from Valadier's only because it had to be implemented with extreme urgency; the other is that the simplified language that Valadier chose for the Arch of Titus (a project that he inherited after Stern's passing) looks the way it does because it is actually unfinished.

[3] See: Giacomo Boni, "La conservazione dei ruderi ed oggetti di scavo," *Bollettino di Archeologia*, 7, 1913, 57-67.

[4] Critical distance implies an evaluation on concluded historical events; in other words, evaluators have to be outside the historical events they are expected to evaluate.

[5] For an articulated discussion on Historicism, see: Georg G. Iggers, "Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1), January 1995, 129-152.

[6] Françoise Choay, *L'allégorie du patrimoine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992) 121-124.

[7] Boito expressed his beliefs at the Third Congress of Engineers and Architects, held in Rome in 1883; then he gathered them in a document called Prima Carta del Restauro (First Restoration Charter) where the idea of the 'monument as a document' appears in the very first sentence. See: Jukka Jukilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Bath: Butterworth & Heinemann, 1999) 464.

[8] A slightly different translation of this sentence can be found in: Cesare Birignani, "Restoration in Architecture. First Dialogue," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation History, Theory and Criticism*, 6 (1), Summer 2009, 68-83. Boito, who is still celebrated in Italy as a crucial figure in the field of architectural preservation, was more akin to

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Ruskin than to Viollet-le-Duc in theoretical issues; nevertheless, when he was given the chance to restore an urban gate in Milan, called Porta Ticinese, he seemed to be more affected by the idea of stylistic restoration.

[9] For a critical evaluation of Riegl's categories, see: Thordis Arrhenius, "The Cult of Age in Mass-Society: Alois Riegl's Theory of Conservation," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation History, Theory and Criticism*, 1 (1), Spring 2004, 75-81. See also: Margarete Olin, "Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentivness," *The Art Bulletin,* 1989, 71(2), 285-299.

[10] For a long time, this contradictory feature of Riegl's text was erroneously attributed to his followers. On this topic, see: Michele Lamprakos, "Riegl's "Modern Cult of Monuments" and the Problem of Value," *Change Over Time: An International Journal of Conservation and the Built Environment,* 4 (2), Fall 2014, 418-435.

[11] A more recent project in an archeological site authored by Moneo, started in 2000 and completed in 2008, is the transformation of the area around the Roman theater of Cartagena, Spain, into an archaeological museum.

[12] A second project by Ungers in a different archaeological site of Trier, started in 2003 and completed in 2007, is the entrance to the Kaiser Baths.

[13] See: Dariusz Gafijczuk, "Dwelling Within: The Inhabited Ruins of History," *History and Theory*, 52 (2), May 2013, 149-170. In this article, "ruins are taken as structures that evoke and summon the past to an encounter with contemporary reality."