

Knowledge and Enhancement of Architectural and Archaeological Heritage: the Palace of GLA in Tirana

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ABSTRACT

This study relates two research fields developed by the Faculty of Architecture of Bari: the first one began since 2006, focused on the knowledge and enhancement of modern Italian architecture in Albania, and the second one characterized by the synergy between the disciplines of interior design, museology and museography applied to the topic of the archaeological museum.

The study-case is the Palazzo della Gioventù del Littorio Albanese (GLA), a building designed by the Florentine architect Gherardo Bosio in 1939 for the monumental centre of Tirana, which includes nowadays a variety of activities (Archaeological Museum, gym, library and Rector's office of the Polytechnic of Tirana).

A multidisciplinary Laboratory Degree carried out at the Faculty of Architecture of Bari during the a.y. 2012-2013, examined the original features, the transformations over time, and the potentiality of the Palace. The Laboratory developed a project of architectural requalification, partial re-functioning and expansion of this building, strengthening the cultural vocation and thereby contributing indirectly to the enhancement of the urban context.

In particular, the Laboratory studied the existing Archaeological Museum, proposing a renewed ordering of the archaeological finds, and elaborated a project of enhancing the interior spaces, rationalization of the exhibition itinerary and renovation of the exhibition systems.

It also developed a hypothesis of restriction in order to accommodate cultural activities annexed to the museum.

The expansion of the museum has grown at the level of the basement of the building, with volumes not visible on the outside, preserving the original features of the architectural form. The possibility of requalification of the Palace of GLA as a museum centre fits into the framework of the development of the museum network, of which the Museum of Tirana could be a fulcrum able to offer a summary of the archaeological heritage of Albania.

KEYWORDS: archaeological an architectural heritage - archaeological museum - Palace of GLA in Tirana - Museography - Museology - exhibition - experience of knowledge

1 THE GLA PALACE OF TIRANA: AN EXAMPLE OF ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE IN ALBANIA²

The Palazzo della Gioventù Littoria Albanese of Tirana is a significant example of the cultural heritage of Albania. In fact it is a representative architecture of the twentieth century, head office of an important museum that preserves archaeological finds from all over the country.

The history of this building falls within a large program put in place by the Italian architects and engineers between the 20's and 30's for the construction of the new identity of the Tirana capital. In 1939, the architect - engineer Gherardo Bosio, acting director of the Ufficio Centrale per l'Edilizia e l'Urbanistica, drew a monumental axis for the development of the new Tirana, concluded on the south by Piazza Littorio (now Square Mother Teresa), a wide space, bordered by basements, stands, tiers, porticos and characterized by the relationships between the Casa del Fascio, the Palace GLA and the Opera Dopolavoro Albanese.

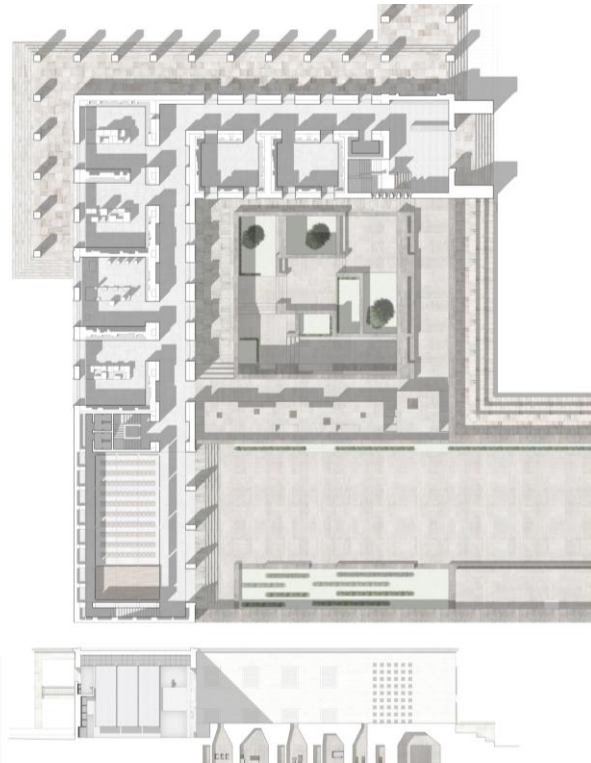


Figure 1: The GLA Palace of Tirana, plan of the ground level and section

The GLA is an urban palace thought to overlooks the empty spaces and designed with the other buildings that make up the square into a counterpoint relationship.

The building is organized in an open court plant, made up of two building bodies "L"-shaped held together by a portico that turns on the sides of the court. It stands on the square with a symmetrical front which consists of two compact wings and the passing portico that ties them together. The perforated facade enters into a dialectical relationship with the compact front of ODA. On the opposite side, the building establishes a relationship with the Piazza Italia through the open courtyard and through two lateral asymmetric building bodies. The portico, consisting of a sequence of architraved pillars, constitutes the transition from the main square to the behind courtyard and the visual filter between the National Stadium and the ODA. It simultaneously measures the building and the square's space.

The building is characterized by a "classic simplified language" of Piacentini's influence, like other buildings made by Bosio in Tirana. The giant order of the portico is an element found in many Italian architectures of the 30's: for example the monumental entrance of the University "La Sapienza", the Palazzo degli Uffici and the Museo della Civiltà Romana for the E42 in Rome.

The building is made through rigorous formal control based on geometrical rules. Regulating lines based on the squares and Golden Sections allowed proportioning the plant and elevations, up to the construction elements. A module of 4.50 meters, constant in all the buildings of monumental axis, as

stated in Bosio's plan, sets the rhythm of the structural bays. Within the clear volumetric articulation, the divisions between the rooms are related to the functional logic, while following the modular scanning.

The building is constructed with a mixed structure. Each wing is built with different construction systems: a reinforced concrete framed structure, clearly identified on the portico and buffered with bricks in the large-span structures such as the gym, and a continuous load-bearing masonry structure of concrete hollow blocks in the wings with lesser spans. The structure is hidden with coatings, which cover a large part of the building: travertine stone slabs for the main facades, plaster for the functional and secondary facades, Carrara marble for the frames of the windows and doors. The original designs, rich in detail, demonstrate the technological carefulness and Bosio's accuracy mainly in the choice of materials.

While recognizing the urban value of GLA Palace, the Laboratory has decided to develop primarily an upgrading project of the interior spaces and the exterior areas pertaining to the building.

We faced thus the project of accommodation, partial reutilization and expansion of the building, strengthening his cultural vocation. Specific object of the experimentation is the Archaeological Museum, which is studied to reorganize the exhibition spaces and the exposition systems. Even for the gym, which is currently in use although in a state of severe degradation, we have studied a possible conversion in order to accommodate multifunctional activities annexed to the museum.

Multiple disciplines have contributed to the study of the building, for a deepening of his compositional principles, original formal features, constructive logics, interior spaces, in order to highlight its potentialities. The process research has started with a thorough documentary reconnaissance carried at the Central Archive Technical Construction of Tirana (AQTN) and the Central Archive of Albania (AQSh) and with material knowledge of the building through the survey and the critical redesign. We analyzed the articulation and hierarchy of spaces that characterized originally the building and the transformations that have occurred over time, the composition grammars and techniques construction. Although designed for different functions and used as museum only from 1957, the building has been adapted over time without volumetric and structural distortions to the various needs: military, educational, cultural and institutional.

We have investigated the "integral" approach of Bosio toward the interior and urban architecture, due to its formation as decorator-architect-planner. In three specific cases: Hotel Dajti, Palazzo Luogotenenziale, and Villa Reale in Tirana, he proves a mature synthesis of the relationship between architecture, interiors and furniture.

Accordingly with Italian tradition developed from the 50's on the reuse of historic buildings for museum purposes, the discipline of the Museography has directed the project to the maintenance and enhancement of spatial character of the building. At the same time the discipline of Museology, which has teamed synergistically with the Architectural design, has studied the updating of the current museum ordering and its educational system.

The project proposes the conversion of the improper uses of the building and the liberation of superfetation's: in particular the coffee bar on the portico and the tensostructure in the court that houses since 2007 the Kolonat fast food. The gym and the spaces on the upper floor have been incorporated in the museum system. The expansion of the museum, intended to the spaces for temporary and outdoor exhibits, laboratories and services for the public, made it possible to rationalize the current exhibition itinerary. The expansion was made at the level of the basement of the building, with volumes not visible from the outside, preserving the original architectural form of the Palace (Figure 1).

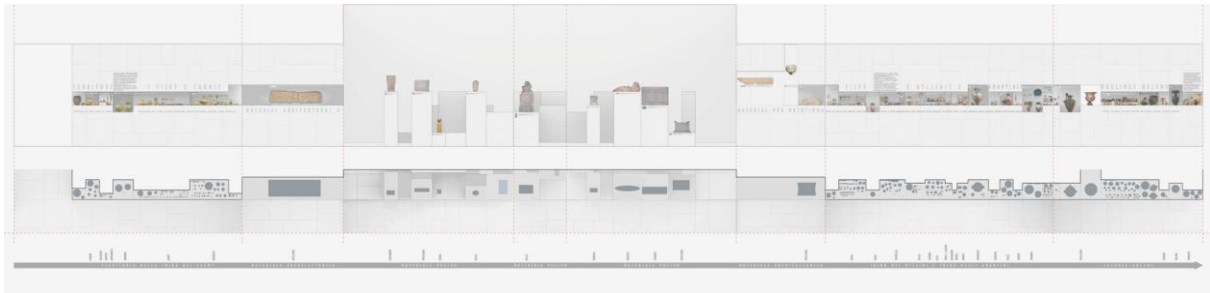
We have created a circular itinerary, which takes place around the court, with start and end in the atrium of the building. The path is organized on several levels: the ground floor coincides with the current itinerary and ends with the current gym, a multifunctional space for conference room, small and temporary exhibitions; on the second floor are located a library, a meeting room and the offices of the Archaeological Institute. The path continues from the ground floor to the underground, developed in two galleries "L" shaped that enclose the court. In this floor there are small rooms connoted with lighting conditions, shapes of space and materials typical of the hypogean architecture. This floor contains a lapidarium, a media room, a gallery for temporary exhibitions, coffee bar and services, a section of the laboratory of casts, deposits, and a bookshop which connects back to the atrium access, at the end of the

path. The court is an open space separated from the square and used for outdoor exhibition and resting areas. The court, perfectly square shaped, is designed according to the Fibonacci's spiral, alternating six garden terraces at different levels, with small water pools and green small lawns.

Inside the existing building body has been kept the original spatial organization. The principles of the project are in line with the research conducted by Bosio on the interior, making clearer and emphasizing the composition through rooms and galleries that characterize the building.

In accordance with the principle of "coating", a theme that is often experienced by Bosio in its research of the interiors, the walls of the museum are wrapped with a wooden structure that serves as exhibitor and as repository.

2 INTERIOR DESIGN AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM EXHIBITION



Figures 2-3: Interior design, front view of the exhibition



Figures 4-7: Exhibition spaces

The museum exhibition project is developed by combining their redevelopment intent with the compositional and structural characteristics of the architectural structure and the project of sorting museum and its educational system.

The interior design project integrates the principles of architectural composition. These principles refer to: the hierarchical structure of the space, the geometric precision of measurement of the room as a

spatial unit both in plan and in elevation, alignment of discontinuity walls of windows and doors according to profound visual axis, the recognition of some horizontal dimensions as sorters articulation of the facade facing the outside and inside of the building.

The project construction is confronted with the need to maintain unchanged the current legal system, divided into five sections, and to improve the exhibition form. The project aims to solve some critical points that refer to the need to provide adequate counseling to the very large number of objects, to distinguish between classes, types, sizes, and ultimately enhance the didactic apparatus.

The shape and construction of the building on one side and sorting museum on the other, representing the programmatic conditions with which we compare the new layout project, which aims to define the act of showing how the process of an experience.

It is a process aimed at defining a *new* experience: the experience of knowledge, which is built in a synergistic way with the redevelopment of the building and the project sort of archaeological works. The architectural shell, the materials used for the preparation, display techniques and objects to be exhibited are designed according to each of the others, and form a unitary structure. Each part of the installation, objects and means, makes sense as part of the cognitive process of the experience: the perception of the object in its structure is added to the interpretation of the exhibition set up in the same museum, the relationship between the pieces on display, as well as guide to reading and understanding of the same.

The action of the show which takes shape through the imaginative process of knowledge is accomplished through physical means which are the primary shrines.

In this project they are elements that develop from floor to ceiling, as reflected in the architectural structure such as thickening of its walls. Combine to form the measure and proportion in modular geometric mesh of the room and interrupt intercept where the discontinuities of the profound visual axes that pass through the sequence of exhibition spaces. The compact volume theca declares its function as "designed to show support" because of the deep horizontal cut which affects the continuity of matter, and according to height tightened and diverse, welcoming pieces of history. The wooden artifact allows the eye of the visitor's perception of compressing the eye and focus on the vacuum line that suspends the massive construction and embedding objects in the exhibition.

The share of the tax showcase aligns with the amount of the tax of the windows, so as to establish a relationship of continuity in the construction of the lines of horizontal stratification between architecture and construction.

The structure of the case varies its depth in relation to its location: it is 70 cm, if close to the wall, 140 cm if she becomes the dividing wall between the two environments, enabling the exposure on two fronts. The volume of the case, in addition to hosting the space for the exhibition, consists of rectangular wooden closed, which serve to accommodate findings that would otherwise remain locked up in warehouses, as is currently the case.

The archaeological material is very diversified partially exposed in the glass case in which structures are part of the podiums are also made of wood. If the middle of the case and divided up the space through the severity of his volumes, the base puts the object as a reference node of the path and vision.

The cognitive experience of the show ends with the educational system, which, through the panels, and video projections, leads the visitor along its path, according to the geographical and chronological ordering principles. Most popular general objective is combined with the need to preserve the character of the museum to be a place of learning, attended by archaeologists, scholars, researchers and students.

The didactic aims to provide the visitor with a degree of information differentiated according to the type of space: distribution take place in the galleries of educational courses that provide general background information, and include: themes of the museum floor plans, maps of synthesis, as well as cards of most important archaeological sites in Albania.

In the five rooms that house the five sections of the path is introduced by a map indicating the locations described in the hall and continues with in-depth information engraved on the caskets themselves.

Each shrine has, outside, large writing distributed throughout the horizontal plane at the window, refer to the archaeological sites and panels illustrating the specific issue addressed in the theca, while inside the case, are engraved captions specific findings concerning typology, chronology, material and context of origin of the material exposed. The exhibits showcase off are descriptions applied to the support.

The project construction as described in pursuing the goal of the interaction of the original text and context of application develops a dense system of relations conditional on each other. Each part establishes a relationship with the other parties, such that a change is reflected on the other, changing images and meanings of each part and the whole. The process, properties, parts of its exposure through the process, as evidenced by our wealth of knowledge we are now able to identify and communicate. Knowledge and its representative objects, the exhibition aims to restore such images, contexts and relationships, providing through its power of persuasion the cross-section of an era and a culture.

3 THE SORTING PROJECT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM¹

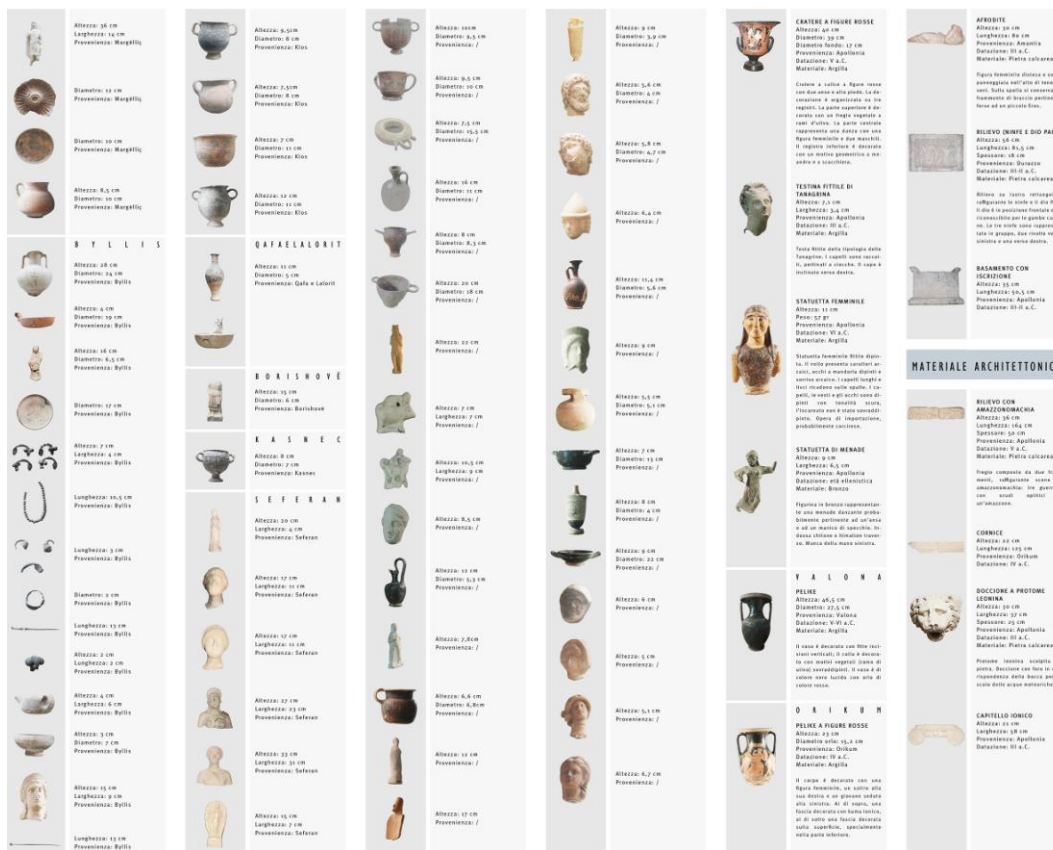


Figure 8: Scheme of a section

The materials housed in the Archaeological Museum come from a great number of archaeological sites in Albania and develops chronologically in a very extensive period, beginning from the Prehistoric era until the Byzantine period.

The exhibition is highly complex and develops through chronological macro-sections, in which the materials are divided, when possible, according to the original context or functional ambits (fig. 8); it

starts with the Pre-historic periods, then the Greek colonization and subsequently the phenomenon of extensive urbanization, which affects the Albanian country from the IV century BC on and that develops along with the acquisition of identity by the Illyrian populations, traditionally divided into territorial areas; finally it ends with the Roman and Late Antiquity.

The total number of exposed objects is very high, comprising almost two thousand pieces, which appear diversified, in terms of range, types and sizes; in particular, there are a lot of specimens from the Pre- and Proto-history and, in part, from the Byzantine period; frequently they are small-sized and often consist of pottery which, although important for the researcher, are not always meaningful for the visitors of the museum.

Concerning the set up project a lot of requirements must be taken into account: the small objects must be housed in showcases, moreover iron or bronze objects needs to be housed in showcases with special microclimates to be preserved. Although less numerous than pottery or metallic objects, there are many marble or stone sculptures and architectural elements; they are very different in shape and form and belong to different fields: statuary, portraits, funerary reliefs and so on. As to the set up the statues require space so as to be observed from each side, whereas the funerary reliefs require appropriate supports, which have to be invisible as much as possible; the portraits also require specific supports, fitting to the heads without their bodies; other than that, it must show clearly the relationships between objects from the same context, which are in and out of the showcases.

In order to make the new project, the existing exhibition has been analyzed to find strengths and weaknesses; this analysis has demonstrated the effectiveness of the existing sorting project, apart from a large amount of objects in the sections concerning the cities of the Illyrians and the Roman and Byzantine period, which are now exhibited out of the showcases in the galleries. The project focused, therefore, on the acquisition of adequate space for exhibits in these sections and on a new ordering of the objects for the new set up, creating a circular path that goes in and out the atrium of the building, whereas the exhibition takes place in the rooms. Other rooms has been obtained by transforming the offices now used for the gym and the underground floor.

The wall thickness in the rooms has been increased by the construction of a wooden structure which acts as a showcase; it has different depths for grouping the objects in order to make more direct the original context for the visitors. As an experiment the not-glazed surface of exhibitors was used to house a "second selection" of objects, which would otherwise have been kept in repositories (Figure 9). Thanks to this, it could get more space for deposits and an easier retrieval, in the event of study, since the objects would be placed in relation to the sections of the exhibition.

Finally, special attention has been paid to the educational apparatus, which should be enhanced on account of the cultural tourism that is spreading throughout the country; two requirements coexist in the museum and both must be taken into account: the former is a detailed presentation for those visiting the museum for study and research, the latter is a more popularization for occasional visitors.

For this reason, different levels of elaboration have been proposed and graphically marked according to the type of information (Figure 10), assigning the basic information on the archaeological heritage along the galleries and reserving specific issues in individual rooms, in relation to the geographical and historical objects on display; its distribution suggests, therefore, different routes which visitors can choose in accordance with their own needs and interests.



Figure 9: Details of the showcases

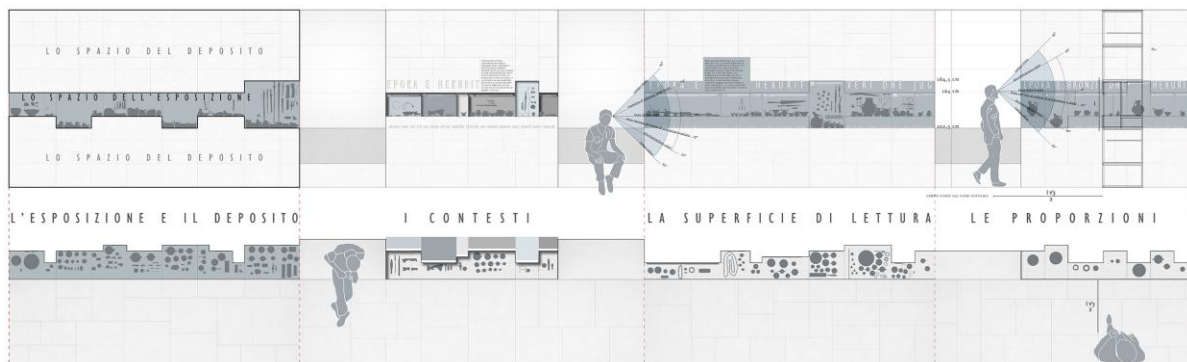


Figure 10: Proportion and educational apparatus of the showcases

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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