

The Musealisation of the Baelo Claudia Archaeological Site, Cádiz, Spain

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Abstract

Contemporary architecture represents a significant instrument through which cultural heritage may be returned to society. This role becomes even more crucial in relation to archaeological heritage, as the condition of such structures—frequently reduced to ruins and comprising numerous stratigraphic phases—combined with the general public's limited understanding, often hinders proper interpretation. In Spain, since the early twenty-first century, architecture has been employed as a means of enhancing and revalorising archaeological heritage, thereby restoring it to the public for their appreciation and enjoyment. Accordingly, this study seeks to present the case of the Archaeological Ensemble of Baelo Claudia, located in *Cádiz*. Following an introduction that considers the significance of employing contemporary architecture within archaeological sites, the research will review the current state of scholarship and subsequently examine Baelo Claudia with particular attention to its typological characteristics. Finally, a series of conclusions will be drawn, reflecting upon the present condition and broader implications of the case.

Keywords: Archaeology, Contemporary Architecture, Musealisation

Introduction

Cultural heritage rests on the pillars of protection, research, conservation, and dissemination. Within the latter, a wide range of strategies emerges, two of which stand out. On one hand, there is dissemination within the professional field through scientific and academic platforms such as conferences, monographs, and articles. On the other hand, there is dissemination aimed at the general public, leveraging new technologies, media, audiovisuals, social networks, and musealisation. Specifically, in the field of archaeological heritage, musealisation becomes an essential tool due to the state of the archaeological structures and the material culture found. In this context, contemporary architecture plays a crucial role in returning cultural heritage to society. This need is particularly critical for archaeological heritage, where the ruins of structures, the presence of numerous stratigraphic phases, and the general public's initial lack of knowledge hinder full comprehension of the site. Additionally, one of the main challenges that archaeological heritage faces today is how to preserve and exhibit archaeological structures at the locations where they were discovered, whether in urban or rural environments. This issue requires the collaborative effort of specialists, political authorities, and the general public to achieve in situ valorisation. The goal of this research is to present the scientific community with an example of best practices in the musealisation of archaeological heritage, using contemporary architecture in the southeastern Iberian Peninsula.

State of the Art

Regarding the state of the art, it is worth noting that while heritage protection gained momentum in the early 20th century with theoretical foundations from figures like Alois Riegl and the work of Italian and Spanish restoration architects, the first theoretical and practical works on this topic began to emerge around the 1960s, led by figures such as Franco Minissi and Pedro Sanmartín Moro. However, it was not until the 1980s that the real development of architectural proposals occurred, coinciding with the evolution of heritage legislation and the proliferation of excavations. Despite important theoretical works emerging toward the end of the 20th century (e.g., Smith), it was not until the 21st century that a true theoretical, practical, and professional boom occurred. However, this did not unfold uniformly. In Spain, for example, a peculiar situation arose where there was a high volume of projects in this field, despite relatively low theoretical interest (Pérez Juez-Gil, Zelli, López-Menchero Bendicho, García González). Additionally, it is essential to mention the publications that disseminate the history of archaeological sites, where the process of musealisation is regarded as an integral phase (e.g., the Cartagena theatre). Lastly, it is important to highlight the organisation of congresses such as the International Congress on the Musealisation of Archaeological Sites and Legatum: International Congress on the Musealisation and Valorisation of Cultural Heritage, which serve as platforms for debate on different approaches to the valorisation of archaeological sites, while underscoring the significance of contemporary architecture in this process.



Fig. 1. View of the Museum of the Archaeological Site of Baelo Claudia from the archaeological site (Julia García González, 2017)

The Headquarters of the Baelo Claudia Archaeological Complex

While there are numerous examples of the musealisation of archaeological sites, we will focus here on an intervention in which contemporary architecture has served — and continues to serve — as a tool for adapting an archaeological site. In this case, architecture is employed to support an open-air site through an annexed building, which facilitates the improvement of circulation routes. The province of Cádiz is home to numerous archaeological sites that require protection through conservation, restoration, research, and dissemination. In cases such as *La Casa del Obispo* or Baelo Claudia, contemporary architecture has been used as a tool for enhancement. Located in the Bay of Bolonia, near

the hamlet of Bolonia, the natural setting of the site compels us to view the headquarters as the gateway to both the Roman city and the broader cultural assets of the bay. Its location requires us to analyse it from a wider perspective, as it is an anthropised area rich in ecological, geological, and other forms of value. The Roman city of Baelo Claudia has Carthaginian origins and became a Roman city in 206 BCE, undergoing political and social transformations through urbanism. The city's economic development was primarily driven by the fish salting industry. The first studies on the city began in 1663 when Macario Fariñas del Corral investigated the origins of the remains and mistakenly associated them with the Roman settlement of Mellaria, a coastal city in the Bay of Valdevaqueros, Tarifa. In 1719, John Conduitt correctly identified the remains at Bolonia as Baelo Claudia. In 1907,



Fig. 2. View of the Forum of Baelo Claudia (Julia García González, 2017)

scientific investigations were initiated by Jules Furgus, and in 1917, they continued under the direction of Pierre Paris. This led to the site being declared a National Artistic Monument in 1925. However, activities were halted until 1964, when Manuel Pellicer initiated archaeological surveys and excavations. Two years later, work began on the *Casa Velázquez*, which continues today, alongside projects from the University of Alicante and the University of Cádiz. As an archaeological complex, one of the primary objectives has been to enhance and bring the site closer to the public, as expressed in Decree 129/1989 of June 6, which stipulates that the site must guarantee access and facilitate the enjoyment and knowledge of visitors while promoting research. This goal was realised with the creation of the headquarters, designed by Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra. The architect responsible for the design of the headquarters, commissioned by the Junta de Andalucía, was Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra. His project, presented in 1998, began to take shape in 2003, and after considerable controversy, was completed in 2007. In 2004, the archaeological site's directors began developing a study of the site's needs for its valorisation. They determined that an architectural volume was essential to serve as the headquarters of the complex, unifying all the different areas within the site. Vázquez Consuegra, an architect with extensive experience and sensitivity to archaeology, museal architecture, and landscape, particularly maritime landscapes, designed the building. This sensitivity is evident in other projects such as the

redesign of the Vigo Seafront, the National Museum of Underwater Archaeology in Cartagena, and the Cultural Centre of Atarazanas in Seville. Before describing the architectural proposal, it is important to mention that the complex already had two buildings that, although they did not meet the required standards, served as reception spaces for visitors and administrative and storage areas. One was a farmhouse expropriated by the state and transferred to the Junta de Andalucía. The second was an abandoned Civil Guard barracks ceded to the Ministry of Culture, which served as a visitor reception area but lacked essential facilities such as restrooms. This hindered the site's dissemination efforts, as it stalled further development due to the lack of appropriate facilities to accommodate visitors and provide signage. As a result, there was a clear need for a new structure to support the visit, leading the archaeological site's directors to approach Vázquez Consuegra for a new headquarters design. The architect proposed a building adapted to the topography of the land, distributed over two floors. It takes the form of a rectangular volume with no unnecessary flamboyance, opting instead for a design that blends into the surrounding environment. The building's low height and horizontal development cause it to "disappear" within the landscape, referencing the environment in a subtle yet constant manner. The chosen site for construction was systematically surveyed to avoid damaging archaeological remains. In 2001, excavation work was carried out in the area designated for the building to ensure the protection of the aqueduct's location and confirm that no tomb remains were present on the land to be built upon (Álvarez 2004, 27). Upon entering the complex, visitors are first led to a parking area arranged in a row, with designated spaces for vehicles and buses, enclosed by small dry-stone walls. From this point, one enters the contemporary building, which is aligned along an east-west axis, serving as a link between the road and the archaeological site, while also concealing the view of the parking area from both the beach and the Roman ruins. Furthermore, as noted by Jesús Granada, this arrangement offers the advantage of shielding the building's façade from the prevailing winds from the east and west, and it is more natural and cost-effective on land with a 10% slope (Granada 2010: online). Upon entering the building, one encounters a large open space featuring a ticket office and a shop. The entrance hall is structured and spatially organized in a way that echoes other areas, standing out for its transparency and the views it offers, particularly those of the bay and the Sierra de la Plata. The architect has designed a pergola roof that acts as a wide overhang. The clear view of the bay is achieved through a window, the lower part of which consists of a continuous glass balustrade, further amplifying the panoramic view. Through a longitudinal corridor, passing by the administrative area, visitors enter a second open space with similar characteristics to the first, featuring a built-in iron bench along the east wall. This area provides access, either by stairs or lift, to the archaeological site, where a route with explanatory panels has been created, returning the visitor to the starting point. This route leads down to the ground floor, where the museum is located, consisting of three distinct spaces. The central one, accessed via a small entrance, is filled with zigzagging information panels that explain the history of the site. To its left are the only public restrooms in the building, and to the right is an exhibition space with display cabinets and objects arranged along the sides and in the center of the rectangular room. This space features powerful overhead lighting and has open stairs on one side, which lead up to the first floor, designated for temporary exhibitions. The first floor, which is quite spacious, consists of an open corridor and a room housing a model of the Baelo city. After



Fig. 3. Visitor reception area (Julia García González, 2017)

the model, one exits onto a hallway leading to the lobby, where there is a small but spacious shop, thanks to a curtain wall of glass that opens into the lobby. The administrative, conservation, and research areas are composed of an open office space and a corridor that leads to the restroom area, a break room, library, and meeting room. On the ground floor, the storage room and material study area for the archaeological site are located. The materials used in construction include exposed concrete in ochre and undulating tones, blending seamlessly with the golden sand of the bay. The design of the furniture was carried out by the studio and is notable for its economy of gestures, incorporating built-in benches and eliminating unnecessary elements, thus once again allowing the site and its surroundings to take center stage. The museographic project was developed by the company Empty and directed by María Fraile, in close collaboration with the site's management team, who, being familiar with the needs of the site, made several modifications to the initial design. Despite the many positive aspects mentioned earlier, the project has some drawbacks. One issue is that there is no direct exit from the museum to the archaeological site for people with disabilities, which led the maintenance team to create a wooden ramp to address this oversight. The distribution of restrooms across the floors also poses functional problems, as the first floor, which houses the ticket office, visitor reception area, library, and administrative and research zones, does not have public restrooms, only staff facilities. This forces visitors, especially the elderly or those tired after an extensive tour of the site, to return to the lower floor, either at the start or after completing the visit. The final issue observed concerns the climate and the building's structural layout. Specifically, the open corridor on the first floor, which connects the reception area to the archaeological site, opens to the north with a large horizontal window that provides views of the natural park of the Bay of Bolonia on all sides. To the east, there is a square window with views of the Sierra de la Plata, and to the west is the building's entrance. Given that this area is windy, the corridor becomes uncomfortable to use in winter, and no alternative route exists.

The new infrastructure has allowed the archaeological site to establish a central hub from which a public-interest project can be developed. Based on this idea, the Andalusian Institute of Historical Heritage, in collaboration with the archaeological site's management, has devised four cultural itineraries in the Bay of Bolonia, an area with a strong human presence since the Paleolithic and in excellent condition in terms of natural environment preservation. These include: a visit to the Phoenician anthropomorphic tombs at Bolonia Harbour, the enhancement of the Baelo archaeological site, a cultural itinerary to the Algarbes necropolis in Punta Paloma, and the landscaping of the area surrounding the Baelo Claudia archaeological complex. We consider this project a positive step for both the natural environment and the archaeological site within it, as the transformations, economy, and ultimately the history of the Roman city owe much of their development to the location, as demonstrated by the appearance of other types of sites, such as the necropolises. Although not developed by Vázquez Consuegra, in parallel with his intervention, the archaeological site has been musealized by creating a route through it, which led to the construction of a corten steel bridge spanning the valley between the headquarters and the archaeological site. This bridge offers views of one of the three aqueducts that supplied water to the city on the left. Within the route, there is also a concrete platform leading to the bridge. While concrete is an affordable and low-maintenance material that allows easy transit, its presence does affect the landscape in which it is set. Within the route, a replica of the Trajan sculpture has also been placed in the area where the Roman city's basilica would have stood. The placing of replicas in the spaces where they were found, or where it is believed they stood, seems excellent, as it gives meaning to the space and establishes a strong connection between the museum, where the original piece should be located (the sculpture is currently housed in the Archaeological Museum of Cádiz), and the archaeological site. Unfortunately, the museographic project was not developed in parallel with the construction of the headquarters. The lack of connection between the museographic project and the architectural design is evident when closely examining the space dedicated to temporary exhibitions. Although the design may be aesthetically pleasing from an architectural standpoint, it hinders not only the work of the museographic team but, more importantly, the type of exhibitions that can be created. The fact that it is a rectangular room with a central area that cannot be used due to the presence of stairs for access limits the diversity of potential uses. Despite all these flaws, the space fulfills its primary function of being a place for exhibitions, and over time, the necessary adjustments will likely be made.

Conclusions

The intervention presents a tone and aesthetic that is respectful and aims to give maximum prominence to the Roman city and the natural surroundings. This is evident in small details such as the materials used and the building's placement at a height of 20 meters to avoid obstructing the visibility of the Sierra de la Plata, the El Alcón dune, and Punta Camarinal, among others. We can observe how the building is fully integrated into the territory, helping to revitalize and enhance the area, acting as a catalyst for the region's territorial resources. Additionally, it contributes to shaping the collective imagination by establishing the site as an archaeological space of significance, which, in turn, requires conservation efforts that should involve everyone. This includes halting private construction in the lower part of the



Fig. 4. Temporary exhibition hall (Julia García González, 2017)

site, preventing livestock access through fencing, and hiring a security team. The landscape is not merely a backdrop but an integral part of the archaeological site, essential for its understanding, with the building helping to illustrate this by offering a continuous view of it. The new infrastructure has enabled the site to become an archaeological laboratory by providing the necessary facilities to continue ongoing excavations and encouraging visits to these works. Through this reprogramming, the intervention extends the life and function of the site, allowing its historical layers to be reinterpreted and activated for contemporary research, education, and public engagement. Finally, the study concludes that the enhancement of an archaeological site promotes its excavation, both through the expansion of the area and the excavation of adjacent sites. It also raises public awareness of the importance of preserving and understanding cultural heritage, highlighting the benefits that such knowledge can bring at multiple levels. Thus, adaptive reuse emerges not only as a conservation strategy, but as a critical framework for integrating heritage, landscape, and contemporary architectural practice into a sustainable and meaningful whole.

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