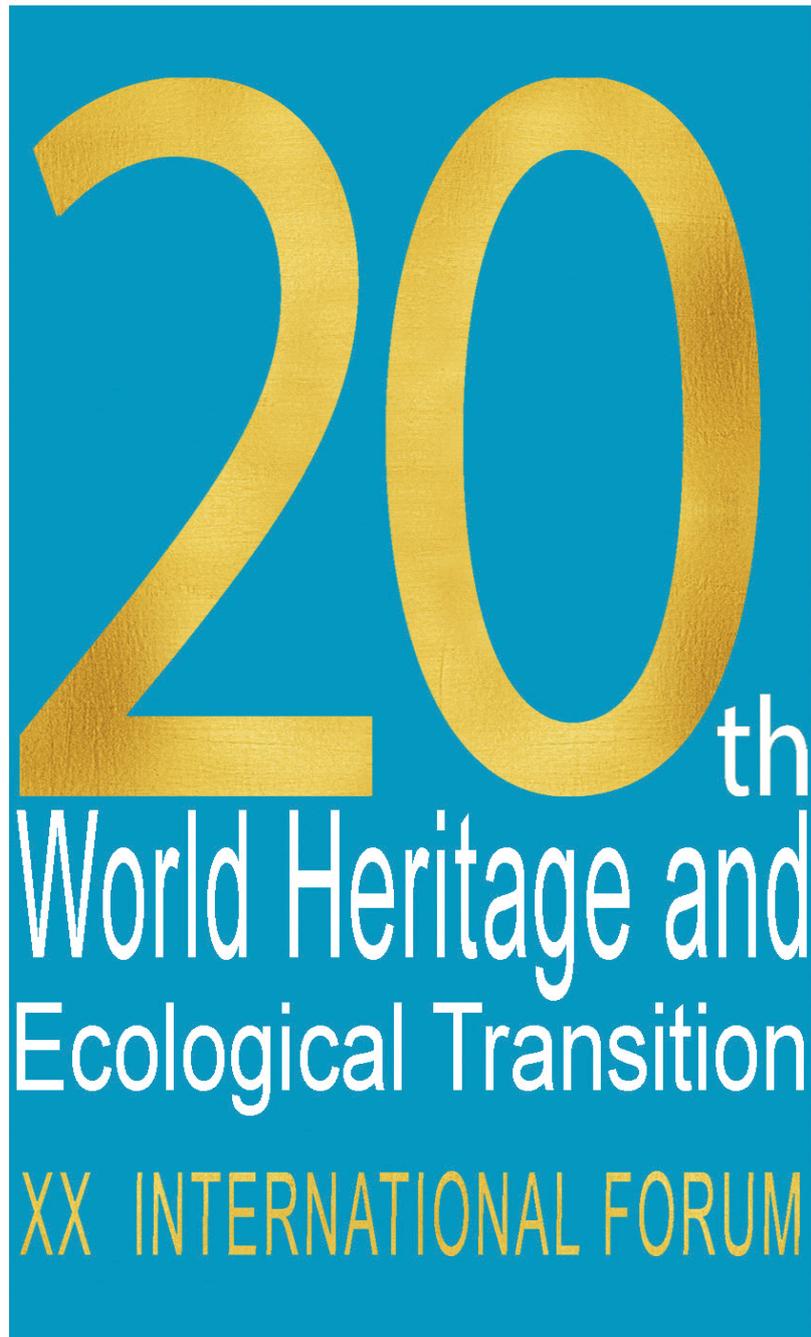


ARCHITECTURE HERITAGE and DESIGN

Carmine Gambardella

XX INTERNATIONAL FORUM

Le Vie dei  
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## **“*Sub specie æternitatis*”: the role of the ruin and the ancient in the process of architectural renewal between metamorphosis and resurgence**

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### **Abstract**

Composing new works of architecture inspired by vestiges from antiquity or archaeology. The reflections and the case study which will be proposed, pertaining to a recent design experiment for the archaeological area and *Antiquarium* of Tyndaris, are dedicated to this theme.

Over and above any charm exerted by such places, by landscapes in which the ruins appear identical in substance and which sometimes manifest themselves as “*sub specie æternitatis*”, there are reasons linked to the very profession of architect and to the gashes in the crucible of controversies around the role of history in its contentious relationship with architectural design.

That apart, the aporias revealed by Michel Foucault, in questioning what he proposed as a global history project, laid emphasis on discontinuity, fractures, and thresholds; in short, transformations that counted as the basis and renewal of the very foundations themselves. Within this conception of history, or rather a methodology for history that “leans towards archaeology as an intrinsic description of the monument”, architectural works and projects appear protagonists of a dramatic action centred on the opposition between the permanence of a ‘structure’ and the thrill of change.

That thrill which, in the Humanist age, animated the minds of architects, treating the fields of philology and architecture identically, studying ancient monuments as texts in order to “generate new forms and thereby bring a new classical tradition to life”.

**Keywords:** ruin, architecture, Tyndaris, metamorphosis, resurgence

### **1. Section “*Sub specie æternitatis*”**

Over and above any charm exerted by such places, by landscapes in which the ruins appear identical in substance and which sometimes manifest themselves as “*sub specie æternitatis*”, there are reasons linked to the very profession of architect and to the gashes in the crucible of controversies around the role of history in its contentious relationship with architectural design.

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That thrill which, in the Humanist age, animated the minds of architects, treating the fields of philology and architecture identically, studying ancient monuments as texts in order to “generate new forms and thereby bring a new classical tradition to life”.

In this regard, it is enlightening to reflect on the extraordinary effect produced in Milan, in 1481, by the engraving of a goldsmith, Bernardo Prevedari, after a drawing by Donato Bramante. This interior of a mysterious temple, an ancient ruin and, at the same time, an image of the invention of original

architectural forms, assumed, with great clamour, the role of a manifesto of a new, modern architecture, brimming with references unknown to the dominant guilds of the Gothic masons.

Bramante himself, asked in 1488 to give his opinion on some doubts which had arisen on how to complete the lantern tower of Milan Cathedral [3], established and corroborated the criterion of “conformity”; a criterion which was not merely stylistic, but, on the contrary, affirmed the continuity of a monument over time, according to its own “constitution”, which the architect must identify with, must take possession of.

Such a “constitution” is a principle of an internal economy, according to which new forms also originate materially from preceding ones: a “*metamorphosis*”.

In this perspective, the time of works is not reduced to that of the chronology of their dates; it is not the time of the past, but that of memory, which proceeds backwards, not descending from time, but returning to it [4].

## **2. Architecture – The ruin and the cyclic nature of life**

Architecture has always featured a twin component: one, current and contingent, belonging to the present time of any epoch, and another universal one which generates a profound, symbiotic, and osmotic bond between present and past, also and especially when far apart, in a continuous, cyclical *palingenesis*.

Francesco Venezia has stated, with impeccable reasoning, that when it comes to architecture we should not be discussing archaeology, but “ruins”, that is, the main object of the passionate activity of those ingenious predators, the authors of those countless cyclical Renaissance events from the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that constituted the palingenetic rhythmic form of the construction of Western civilization.

Into the bargain, “the ruin” plays a fundamental role in man’s psychic and sensory experience, since it projects us into a mental journey accompanied by a synaesthetic and bodily journey if the ruin is ‘inhabited’ in an existential sense. It lets us lose ourselves in a deep temporal perspective which feeds our innate need for infinity. The same congenital need for infinity and continuity which had Francesco Venezia state that the birth of archaeology, understood as an autonomous discipline, conventionally dated to 1810, was to determine that fatal separation between architecture and the ruin (that is, its generating germ), which marked “the self-same decline of architecture” [5]

Consequently, archaeology, or – to use a more appropriate term – “the ruin”, must necessarily be seen as an unforgettable deposit of beauty and architectural knowledge and must be adopted as an inexhaustible and unexhausted deposit of history, outside any chronological limit, any temporal categorization, which are often an ideological-disciplinary garb not suitable to be worn by architecture. Against this background, the project is based on the intention to offer a different key to reading and experiential knowledge in the field.

Only in this way can an attitude of renewed attention arise towards the great Italian archaeological heritage along with a greater awareness aimed at preventing the processes of “commercialization” to which many cultural sites have been subjected with the onslaught of mass tourism. These days, it is possible to generate a conception of cultural heritage in which the archaeological heritage is the original testimony, as a tool of identity-building awareness and a primary factor of social advancement, by carrying out a semantic and cultural conversion.

It is no coincidence that the inseparable relationship which must necessarily be forged between architectural design, archaeology and restoration, can still be affirmed notwithstanding the seamlessness instituted between archaeology and architecture.

In the present, more than in other epochs, the need has emerged to overcome the habitual standardized point of view of the subordinate role – that of “service” – which contemporary architecture generally plays at an archaeological site, through solutions often invalidated by their hypersensitive nature. Hence, an inevitable renewal of architecture, between metamorphosis and palingenetic resurgences, must lead us to explore to the very end the tendencies of contemporaneity to weave renewed relationships with the physical substance of haunting testimonies of a remote past (“ruins”), often destined to manifest nothing but their own inexorable decay.

In short, if it is inevitable to rebuild the link between architecture and archaeology, it is time to move on, to urge a new beginning.

By abandoning the presumptions of objectivity, as well as the stereotypes and disciplinary barriers, the project must resume its task which lies precisely in the depth of its experience, welding itself to the richness and multiple meanings of ancient artefacts [6].

## **3. The design experiment for the archaeological area and *Antiquarium* of Tyndaris**

The recent design experiment for the archaeological area and *Antiquarium* of Tyndaris<sup>1</sup>, was based on the idea of composing some “new architecture” in a rapport with the vestiges of antiquity at one of the most significant archaeological areas of Messina, the object of several studies and excavations since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century [7]. Founded in 396 B.C. by Dionysius of Syracuse, Tyndaris rose

on top of a rocky bluff overlooking the large Gulf of Patti, offering a marvellous, wide-angle panoramic view of the Tyrrhenian Sea towards the distant Aeolian islands and the landscape of the hinterland of eastern Sicily [8].

Ancient Tyndaris, like any other archaeological site, is a playbook for architectural design of every age and it is for this reason that the project was based on the essential principle of underlining and bringing out the geometric plan which regulated the layout of the ancient city as it stretched along the length of the plateau, bringing unity to the long front on the main *decumanus* – where the Theatre subsists as a protagonist – in order to underline the perspective axis whose backdrop is the Basilica.

In the area between the Theatre and the Basilica, the new buildings are to be erected on the foundations of the existing ones, adjusting the imposts and heights to suit, while connecting terraces and plinths with shallow flights of steps, integrating and completing the existing ground plan in formal terms.

To the north-west of the Theatre, the area dedicated to new services echoes the dimensions of the *insulae* with a re-proposal of the quoins which delimit them. The new builds follow these measurements and the rule of building on sloping terraces, and are also connected to each other by flights of steps, as the bones of an overall landscaping design which includes green roofs.

First and foremost, the planned buildings define the morphological blueprint, in adherence with the city's geometric layout and in conformity with the principles which established its relationship with the ground and its views of the sea.

The architectural part is simple and exacting, to avoid introducing incoherent connotations foreign to the dominant theme of the rhythm of the *insulae* arranged on and in the ground.

A single spectacular accent is given by the arcade-gallery of the *Antiquarium*, where the reconstructed fragments of the Theatre's *scænæ frons* are offered to the sight of the visitor as a protrusion from the wall from inside the Museum, proposing a virtual image of the same *scænæ frons* on a large scale against the background of the sea, with its smaller-scale model incorporated.

The roofs over the archaeological remains evoke the spaciousness of the original environments without seeking to mimic them, but instead entrusting a decisive task to the zenithal light, screened by beams arranged in a dense sequence which act as a *brise-soleil*.

The construction system developed allows the volumes to remain clearly defined, even where they impact the ground or ancient walls, abiding by criteria to safeguard the latter's integrity.

Similar modalities preside over the constructive definition of the walkway with amenities, whose design yet again underlines the course of the *decumanus* and the dimensions of the *insulae* which it flanks.

The new builds are positioned on sloping ground, using the extant foundations and rising according to cross-sectional conformations which match the lines of the terracing, connected via itineraries consisting of flights of steps and stairs.

The green or gravel roofs blend into the surrounding land without introducing dissonant elements with respect to the old and new walls, their colour hues mirrored thanks to the limestone slab cladding. Consequently, the character of the buildings resumes and updates the plastic/masonry conception of the ancient ones, accentuating their thermal inertia and implementing appropriate measures for best habitability, such as the environments' bilateral ventilation.

Both the outdoor and indoor spaces conform to connections and sequences in which all the itineraries adhere to the salient features of the site as well as the proposed new additions.

A kind of centrality is attributed to the circular open-air atrium, as a sort of stopping place and an introduction to the *Antiquarium*, whose entrance it embraces.

In turn, the layout of the *Antiquarium* conforms to its interior spaces, at a different scale in coherence with the objects displayed therein, but at the same time linked in sequences which enhance the relationship between the museum finds and the landscape which constitutes their backdrop and reinforces their identity.

The *Antiquarium* museum layout project is part and parcel of the specific archaeological museum framework, in which it is necessary to harmonize, in terms of the displays, the heterogeneous, fragmentary and multiple presence of various sets of grave goods, furnishings, figured ceramics and terracotta, fragments of painted plaster and ancient coins, with the imposing and striking sculptural figures depicting winged *Nikai*, togaed male celebrities, theatrical masks, or remains of columns and capitals. The intention behind the layout, "as the art of offering; that is, to show with restraint and to offer with intelligence" [9] has led to design choices dependent on the narrative visit of the *Antiquarium*, but at the same time able to exalt the peculiar qualities of the spaces, imagined not as a sequence of individual rooms, but as a single spatiality consisting of different spaces on several levels, effectively interconnected and immediately visible from the museum entrance. Consistent with these design choices, the shapes of the display cases vary constantly, thus achieving the impression of stage sets. In this way, each space is presented as a fragment of an "interior landscape" which has been recomposed within the unity of the layout.

With respect to this museum logic, based on the continuity of the exhibits, there is one exception, namely, the "Elliptical Projection Room" which introduces, albeit sporadically, the dimension of an

“integrated layout” based on a union between the predominant display of archaeological finds and advanced technological tools, and the art and interactivity of systems to explain the museological contents [10].

The services building is the part built from scratch. For this reason it has been positioned according to the rules which preside over the original foundation plan of Tyndaris, with a design which proposes a continuation of the conformation; in particular, making evident and recognizable the urban nature of the architecture in which the buildings are bricks which build the city.

The layout of the rooms dedicated to the various activities extends over three levels/terraces discernible from the green roofs which include gravel strips above the corridors.

The limestone walls feature ends left windowless to be covered by trees, or dense successions of solids and voids. The dimensions of the *insula*, which the building espouses, are determined by the quoins alongside which steps follow the slope of the ground and are connected, via some level stopping areas, with shallow flights of steps that outline the triangular portion of the adjacent *insula*, crossed diagonally by the road.

The deposit for the archaeological remains does not come into play as a separate building, but it too adopts the transverse measurements of an *insula*, nestling in the slope of the ground and opening onto air and light wells which allow access from the *decumanus*.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The goal of the proposed project – aimed at the redevelopment of a quite extraordinary cultural, historical and landscape heritage – is, above all, to respond to the urgent need to enhance its rediscovery by eliminating certain physical barriers, but most of all those “ideological” protective barriers which, in addition to necessary, indispensable and incontestable conservation protection, determine unnatural processes of isolation and decontextualization with respect to the archaeological area’s place of origin, which paradoxically ends up becoming almost a “foreign” body.

Instead, a targeted and informed design, with a keen sense of being rooted in the morphological character and specific qualities of the site, still expressed by the archaeological area, can lead to a real enjoyment of it, in terms of an experiential dimension based substantially on structural synaesthetic cognition, in turn founded on visual, tactile, auditory, and therefore multisensory stimulation. The only form of enticement that can allow us to understand the profound “physiological breath” of this place. For this reason, the project’s construction strategy, frequently based on the principle of excavation, has unfolded starting from the objective of achieving a real melding between the architecture and the site, in the poetic character deriving from what it represents, in the recall and memory of the traces found within it.

An architecture which ‘digs to build’ verges on archaeology, which, in turn, digs to reconstruct the residual patterns of a vanishing but evocative conformation. An architecture which tends positively to self-omit, but not to be invisible, rather with the aim of being a silent work of a meditative nature; a work which “integrates” according to the meaning given to this adjective by T. S. Eliot, poet and theorist of poetry. “The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.” [11]

In the project for Tyndaris, the fundamental ambition is that of a relationship of rooting which sees the ground as a plinth, and seeks to challenge time by reaching out towards eternity and the universal. The new architectural volumes imagined emerge almost as fragments among the ruins of the ancient city of Tyndaris, now concealing, now emerging in the absolute stereotomic purity of their forms and in the assonance of the materials, among “light” elevated walkways which cross over the *insulae*, tracking the ancient vestiges of the Dionysian *polis*, immersed in the silence of space and dedicated to contemplation and meditation, skirting a naturalistic and landscape path with multiple emotional allusions.



Fig. 1: Perspective view of the Tyndaris Archaeological Park with the project interventions.

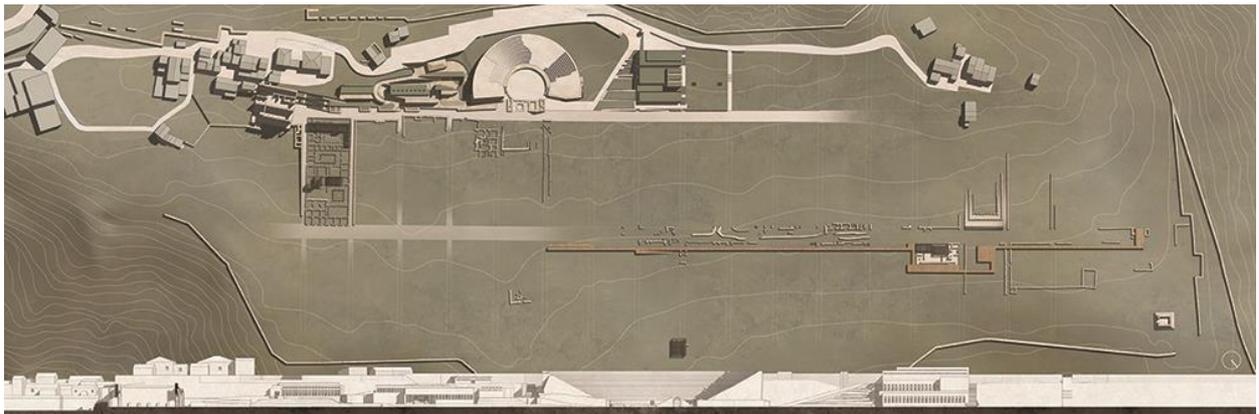


Fig. 2. Profile and general plan of the archaeological park of Tindari with the project interventions.

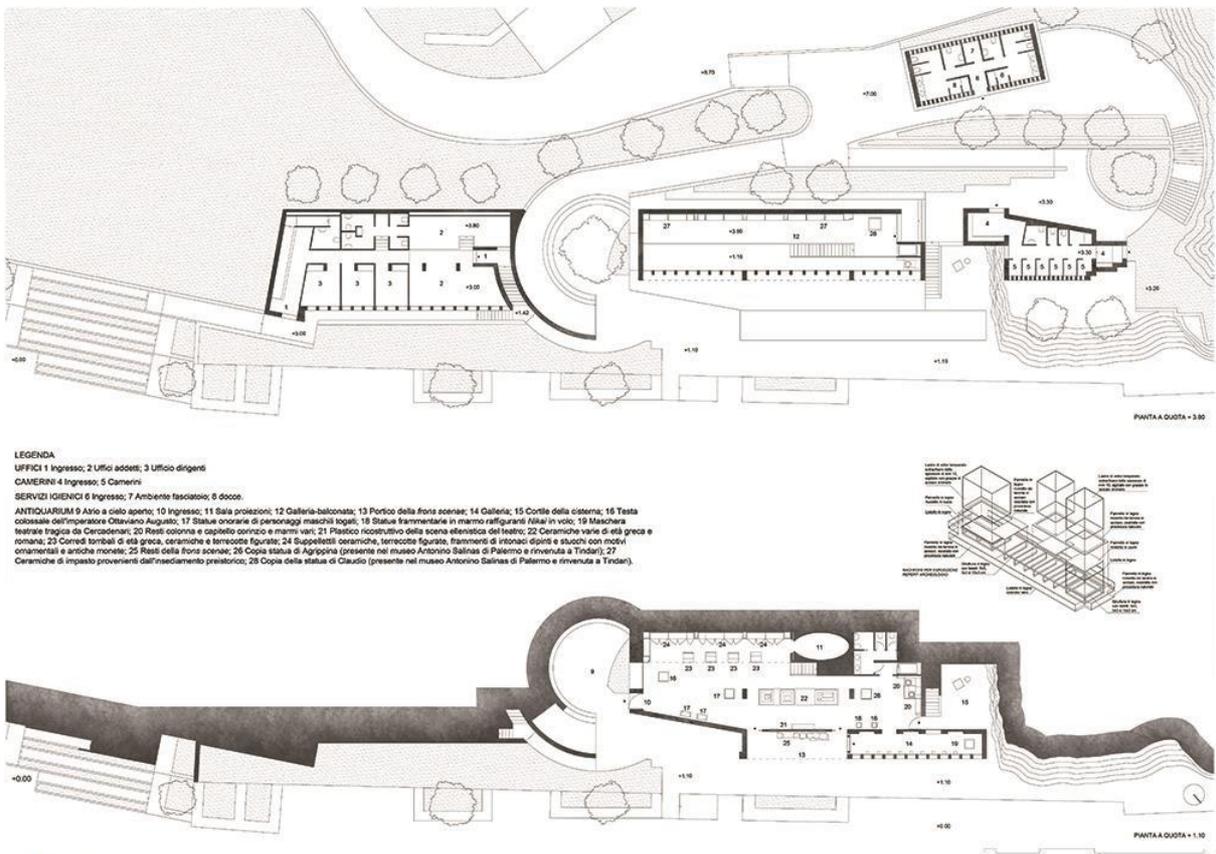


Fig. 3: Bottom, plan of the semi-basement of the *Antiquarium*. Above, plan of the mezzanine of the *Antiquarium* and, on the right, the administrative offices of the Archaeological Park.

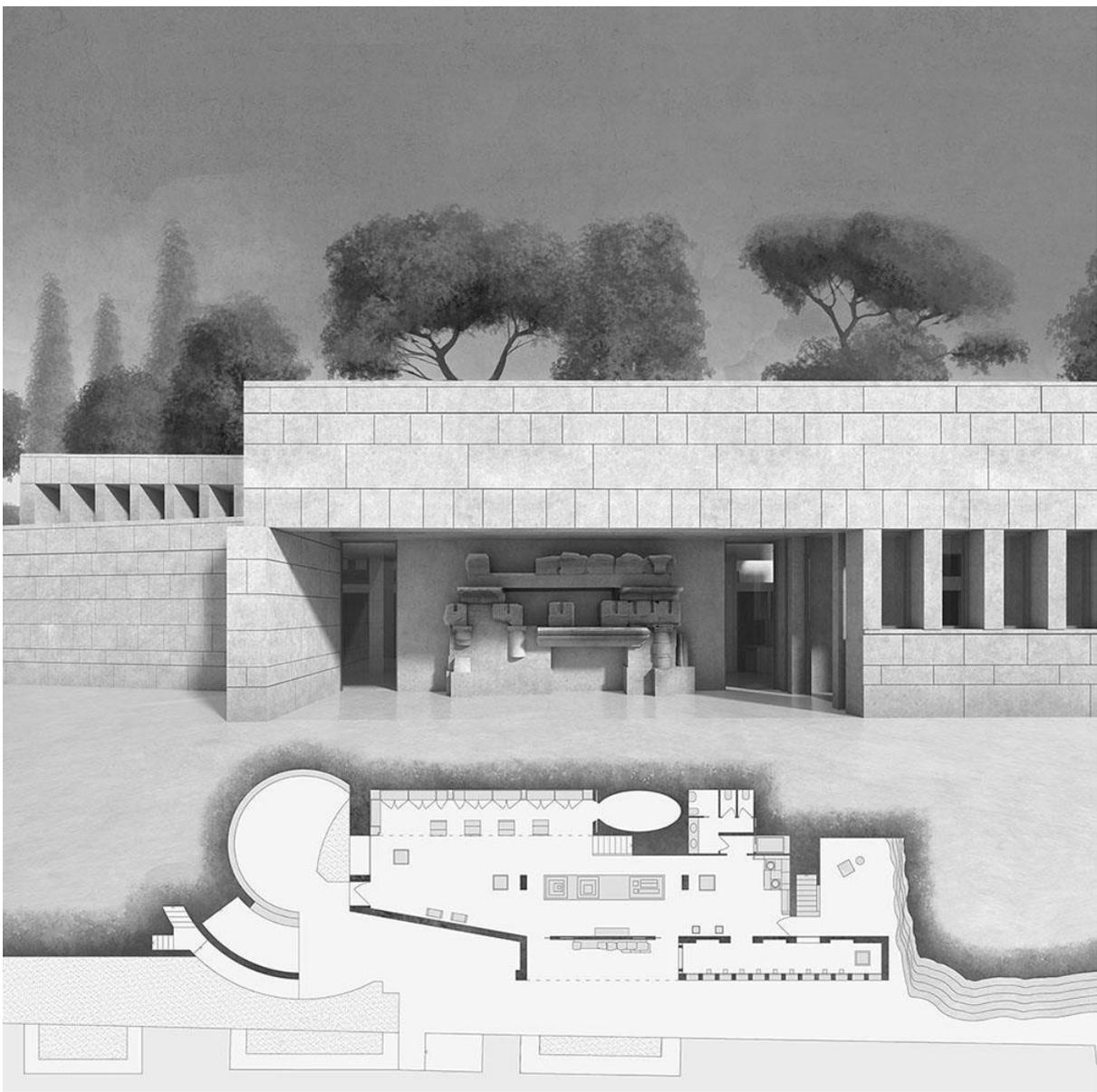


Fig. 4: Portico-gallery of the *Antiquarium* with the reassembled fragments of the *frons scaenae* of the theatre and plan of the semi-basement of the *Antiquarium* with the exhibition rooms

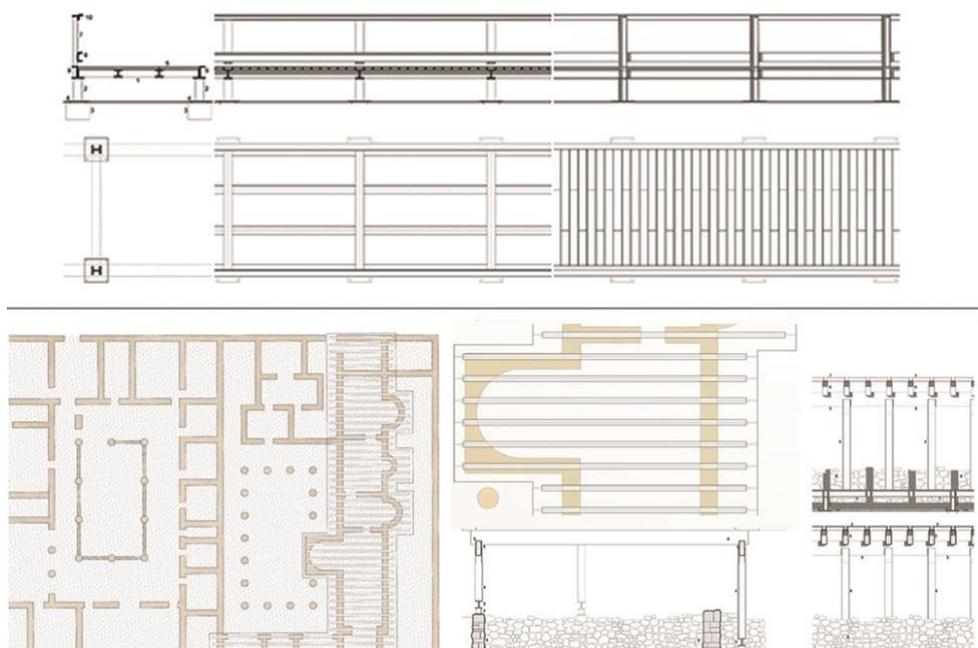


Fig. 5: Construction details of the equipped walkway crossing the *decumanus* and the *insulae*.  
 Fig. 6: Construction details of the roofs of the archaeological remains.



Fig. 7-8: Perspective sections of the administrative office building and the interior of the *Antiquarium* with the exhibition design.

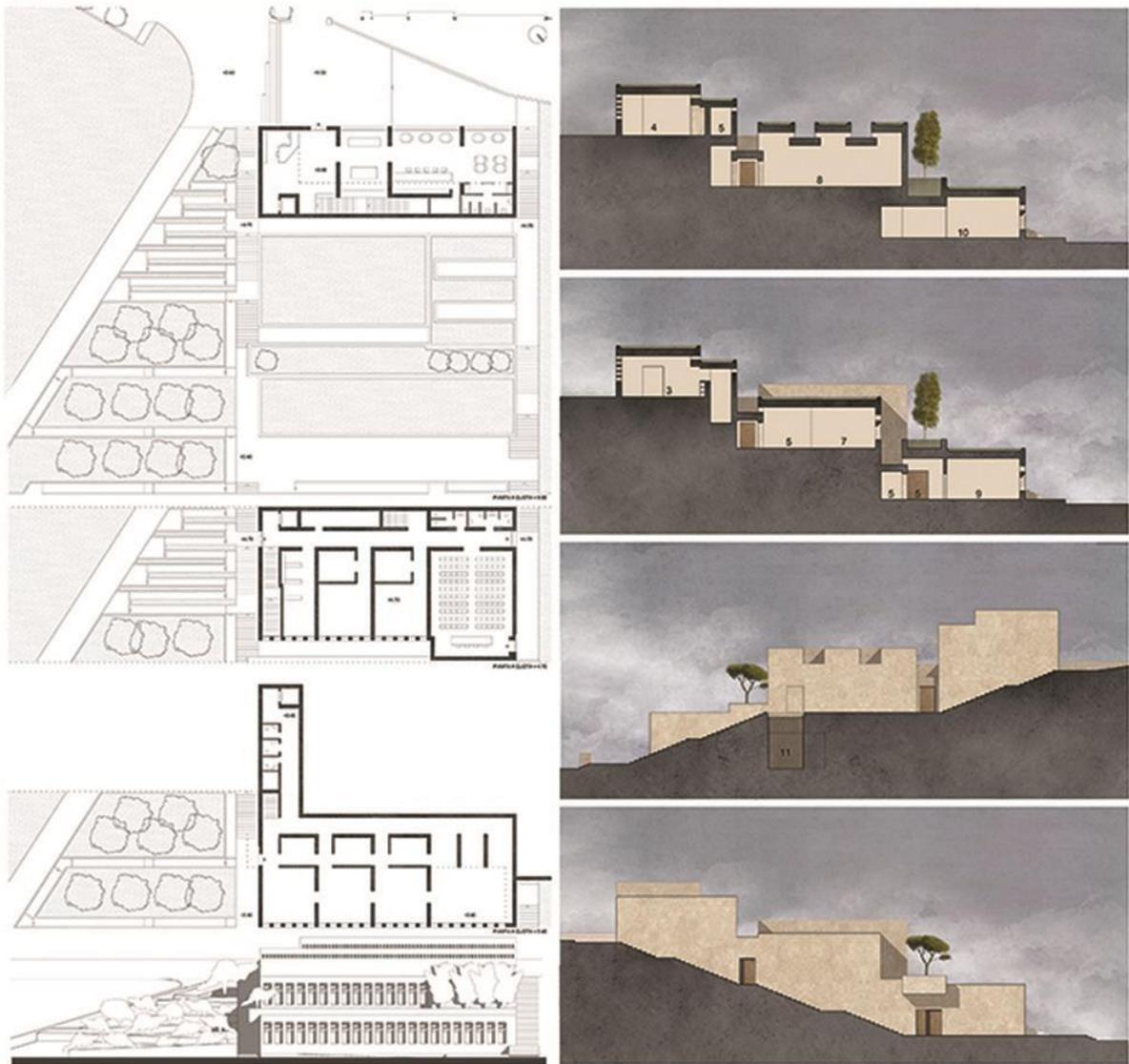


Fig. 8: Plans, elevations and sections of the reception services building for visitors to the Archaeological Park.



Fig. 9: Perspective view of the archaeological park with the visitor service building in the foreground and the Roman *Basilica* and the Sanctuary of the Madonna Nera in the background.

## Notes

1. The reference is to our November 2020 entry in the architectural design competition for the “*Redevelopment and enhancement of the Archaeological and Antiquarium Area of Tindari*” in Messina. The design group’s members were: Angelo Torricelli (group leader), Giuseppe Di Benedetto, Riccardo Catania, Marco Filippo Ferrotto (structures), Giovanni Pecorella (technical installations); consultants: Aurelio Burgio (archaeology), Calogero Cucchiara (structures); associates: Elio De Blasi, and Ambra Lofrano.

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