

WIDESPREAD RUINS BETWEEN NATURE AND CITY: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES FOR THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF MIRÒBRIGA, PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

The possibility of relating the large archaeological parks to the consolidated urban context has long been at the centre of European debate, through design project experiments, which investigate a possible continuity between public and archaeological space. The great archaeological cities are configured as centralities around which the urban transformation triggers an operation of hybridization of the ruins, which contained within the flows of the city life, can change synchronously to the rhythm of the contemporary city. The history of the Mediterranean is not, however, told only through these great archaeological realities; in Portugal, Spain and Italy there is a high presence of minor archaeological emergencies, widespread in the territory and often abandoned, unexplored and unrelated to the dynamics of the city. The design research for the archaeological area of Miròbriga, a city located on the south-west of the “Roman Portugal”, is an interesting case study, in which the specificity of the Portuguese landscapes allows to rethink the relationship between ruin, nature and city and, therefore, to introduce new possible architectural intersections between widespread archaeology, invisible landscapes and inclusive urban spaces. Landscape, urban setting, and archaeological elements are held together by the architectural project, which is able to give rise to a network of smaller archaeological sites, making archaeology the active subject of the city’s mutations. Archaeological remains become the centre of a widespread museum, in which space, time, body, movement, memory and emotion constitute the multiple levels of a stratified narration of the city, an open-air theatre in which the ruins are intended as the main narrative and architectural devices.

Keywords: widespread ruins, archaeology, design, open-air museum, narrative paths, unveiled strategies, architectural grafts, nature, urban space, Miròbriga.

1 INTRODUCTION

The contribution wants to address the theme of the archaeological park in its non-traditional meaning, intended as a diffuse open-air museum that operates on the landscape, inhabiting and transforming it. The archaeological site, the architectures, the naturalistic systems are reintegrated in a social and cultural circuit, determining a reinterpretation of the complexity of urban relations, changing the existing scenario and generating deep transformations.

“Any architectural design project for an archaeological site in city centre is a potential archaeological project and, any archaeological excavation campaign is an urban project, since, sooner or later, the question of the integration of the site within the city and how to deal with the different limits, that is the question of the relationship of the site with the city” [1].

The possibility of relating the major archaeological parks in the consolidated urban context is already at the centre of the European debate, with several references to the city of Athens, Rome, Pompeii, where archaeological dynamics have always been investigated, highlighted by a widespread tourism that allowed these ruins not to be forgotten. The most emblematic example is, certainly, the city of Athens, where the project for the archaeological area of the Acropolis, outlines a public space that leads to the contemporary city, an unveiled archaeological path, that retraces the palimpsest of the place, making intangible the division between the space of the ruins and the public space of the contemporary city.



The two interventions for the archaeological area of Athens, designed by Pikionis (1954–1957) and Tsiomis (2009), respectively for the area of the Acropolis and the hill of Philopappus and the Agora of Athens, address the theme of fruition and integration between ruins and contemporary city. While Pikionis gives back to the city a monumental archaeological area, Tsiomis works on the theme of ruins in public spaces through a methodology in which the contemporary landscape is considered the container of the geographical, historical and social traces of contemporaneity.

Architecture becomes the ordering element through which it is possible to clearly understand the different times of the city, the diachrony and the synchrony of the traces. The architectural project, on the one hand, acts on the public space, as a physical space that holds together the most different practices through its forms; on the other, acts on the functions of space, with particular attention to the area near the archaeological site.

The major archaeological cities are configured as real centralities around which the process of urban transformation triggers a hybridization of the ruins through other components at stake: services and new functions, infrastructural and vegetational systems and public spaces. An archaeological space can change synchronically with the flow of city life, who makes alive the ancient archaeological remains, emphasizing all cities strata.

2 WIDESPREAD AND SILENT RUINS

The history of the Mediterranean is certainly not told only through these great archaeological realities; in Portugal, Spain and Italy there is a wide presence of minor archaeological emergencies, widespread in the territory, unexplored and “intermittent” [2].

It is interesting to understand all the possible architectural design actions for the minor archaeological cities, fragmented and abandoned, which are often unrelated to the dynamics of the contemporary city. The ruin, as a hidden, fragmented, silent heritage, becomes the object of a different experimentation, which aims to stitch up through the project the archaeological heritage and the space of the city.

Archaeological fragments, invisible landscapes and urban spaces, become useful elements in order to rethink a new design strategy, in which architecture becomes a narrative device able to bring archaeology to light, through the experience of the place, the exploration, the perception of ruins and the grafting of new hybrid functions, meeting the needs of the contemporary world.

The main aim is to trace new interactions between the archaeological area and the context, through actions focused on the reintegration of the remains in urban space, making them elements of everyday life. The ruins as elements of the landscape, able to absorb new readings and reveal hidden memories, are the focal point of new urban transformations and the core of metamorphosis of the landscape, through the action of the architectural design project (Fig. 1).

3 URBAN PARK OF RUINS. THE CASE OF THE MIRÓBRIGA SITE.

The case study of the archaeological city of Miróbriga, belonging to the municipality of Santiago do Cacém, in Portugal, is emblematic for investigate new possible strategies for the enhancement and for the reintegration of archaeological fragments in contemporary dynamics. The municipality of Santiago do Cacém is characterized by the presence of two different archaeological remains: the archaeological city of Miróbriga (9th century BC until the 6th century AC), once one of the biggest in “Roman Portugal” [3] and the great Arab castle (8th century AC), that dominates the skyline of the contemporary city.

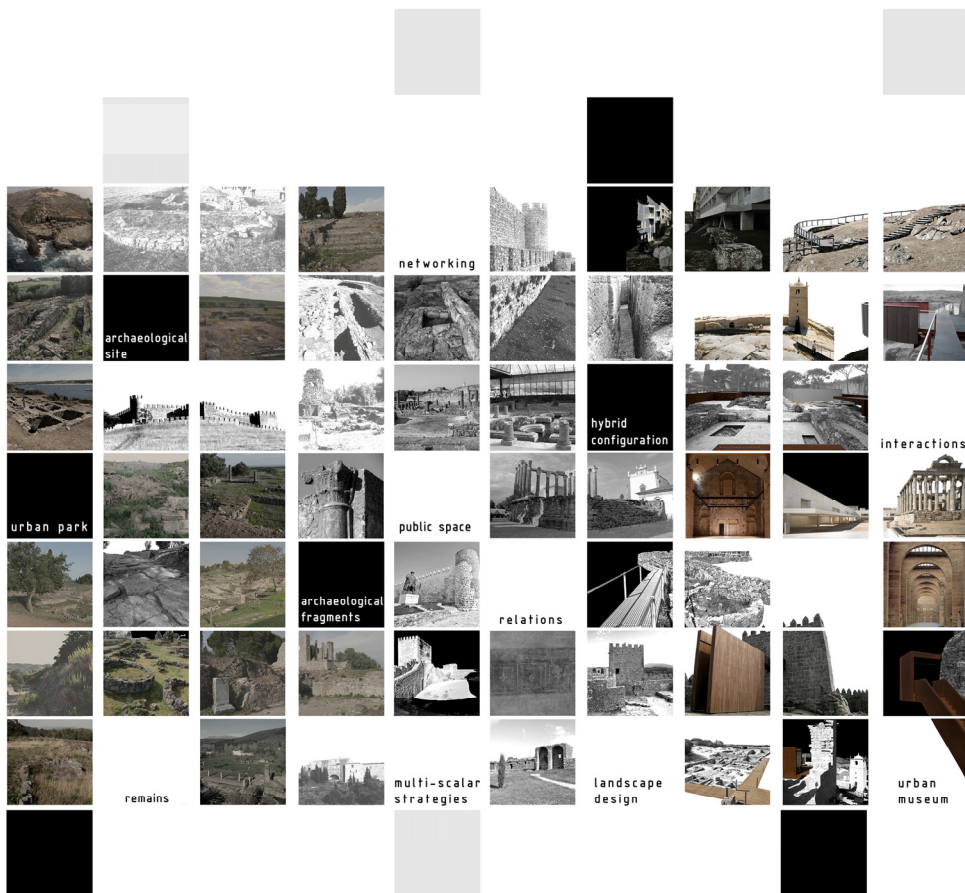


Figure 1: Architectural grafts, archaeology and nature.

Defining the origins of the archaeological city of Miròbriga is essential to understand its importance and, above all, to highlight the features that distinguish it from the large archaeological cities previously mentioned. In fact, the strategic value of the city, was not enough to stop the long process of decline that leads it to become a field of abandoned ruins, largely still underground, widespread in the naturalistic landscape of the south of Portugal (Fig. 2).

Excavations and investigations suggest that the earliest settlement began in the 9th century BC, during the Iron Age, and the defensive walls began appearing between the 4th–3rd century BC. Celtic population inhabited the area along the embankment and the area of the Castelo Velho, which corresponds to the following roman Forum site. By the second half of the 1st century Roman occupation began, expanding the site and occupying an area of 28,000 smq. The roman city of Miròbriga consists of the ancient urbs, that is the area of Castelo Velho, located in the northern part, in which there are the *forum*, *termae*, *domus* and *tabernae* and, a kilometre further south, the *hippodromus*, the largest ever found in the old Lusitania, about 250 m long [4], [5].

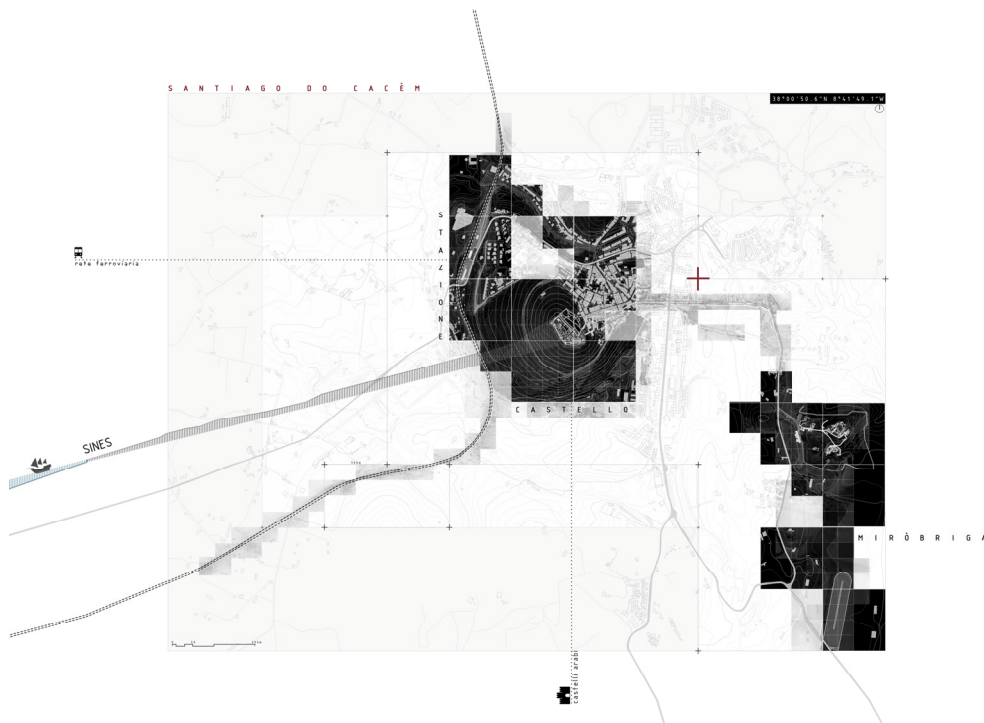


Figure 2: Two archaeological remains in the city of Santiago do Cacém.

With the arrival of the Arabs in the territory, the Roman city was completely disfigured and reused as a quarry for the construction of the Arab castle of Santiago do Cacém.

The arrival of the Arabs (XII century) in the territory marks, from a temporal point of view, the beginning of the abandonment of the archaeological city of Miròbriga since the new city begins to develop around the Arab castle [6], on the hill opposite the archaeological city. The area of the city of Miròbriga, from this moment on, remains alien to the dynamics of the new city, leaving to nature the work of bringing to completion the architecture.

4 RUINS AND NARRATIONS: DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL URBAN SPACE.

“The form no longer responds to a human purpose but emerges from the accidental and absurd intertwining of nature and spirit, finality and imponderability, past and present, in a tension that is no longer resolved in the harmonious artifice of the architectural form, but it emerges from the continuous becoming generated by the constantly ongoing conflict between opposites” [7].

Nature and architecture are considered the founding elements of the project, elements through which it is possible to re-establish the role of the ruins in the urban space.

The project, developed from a very deep theoretical-cognitive phase, aims to make the archaeological area a large urban park, in which the widespread ruins become part of an exhibition path, as the devices to narrate and to promote the history of the place.

The role of the architectural project emerges as an element of union between the archaeological site and the contemporary city, to generate interference for the reintroduction

of the ruins in the urban scenario [8]. The contact point between the ancient city and the contemporary city, physically traceable in the limit, is understood as the space in which, starting from the voids, the intersections, the fractures, which have been determined, inevitably create a new layer [9].

The research work for the archaeological area of Miròbriga develops from the articulation of three different strategies, which operate on the territory through different scales, intertwining each other to create a network of multiscale connections.

The first one is a territorial strategy, which aims to re-establish an “archaeological network” between the different cities of the ancient Lusitania, recovering heritage and memories, taking advantage of touristic and panoramic trails, physically interconnected by the railway line. The latter makes possible the connection between several cities in the south of Portugal, retracing the route of the ancient Roman cities of Lusitania. The proposed territorial strategy allows the networking of minor urban systems, which only when connected to each other can become a solid system able to recall the memory of the ancient empire (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Network of roman cities in the ancient Lusitania.

The second strategy, instead, acts on an urban scale, aiming at reconnection of the two archaeological remains present within the city of Santiago dõ Cacém: the archaeological site of Mirõbriga and the Arab castle.

The main aim of this strategy is to outline a continuous practicability, able to enhance the most important elements of the urban scenario from the Arab castle to the archaeological area. A project action that from the outside towards the inside, means the city of Mirõbriga as the end point of a much more extensive and branched tourist-narrative path. More specifically, starting from the current historical centre, where the Arab castle is located, the visitor is accompanied, by a pedestrian and cycling path, to the “estradas das cumeadas”, historical road located on the top of the hill, which runs along the cork and the mills typical of the territory. Through various secondary archaeological routes, natural paths, which emphasize the rurality of the place, panoramic views and privileged rest points, the visitor arrives to the archaeological park of Mirõbriga, already aware of the historical, anthropic, and cultural features that characterize that territory (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: From the archaeological site of Mirõbriga to the Arab castle.

Finally, a third strategic plot, more minute, accompanies the visitor in the rediscovery of the ruins of Mirõbriga, bringing back to the light the memory and making the stratification of the place understandable. Starting from the expansion of the natural green edge, it is proposed to create a large open-air museum of ruins, an urban park that holds together the three main elements: the new access from the road, the museum for the narration of the place and the archaeological path, which crosses the whole site and that, through architectural grafts, is able to narrate the spatiality and the uses of the ancient city.

Currently the accessibility to the archaeological area is possible only through the existing road, built in 2000, together with the construction of the interpretative centre, designed by the architect Paula Santos. The interpretative centre is now closed and abandoned, which is why the proposal of the demolition of the same and the realization of a new access to the area, through a building that stands in continuity with the *decumanus*, allowing a physical and visual connection between the road and the most naturalistic and intimate part of the archaeological site.

A long walkway accompanies the visitor, first through the info-point, then, at the beginning of *decumanus*, where a public terrace allows to observe all the archaeological area.

This walkway also leads to the starting point of the exhibition path marked by the museum. The museum is no longer understood as a building that makes it possible to preserve and to visit its contents, but the architecture and spaces are the object of the visit [10].

The building-museum is only the starting point of a widespread museum, which combines the variables “landscape” and “archaeology” together with that of “tourism”, transforming the archaeological site from a point of cultural interest located in a given landscape, to a pole of dissemination and tourist attraction, in a wider network in which every intervention is a strategic node, able to organize other nodes and other terminations that will be the places of the archaeological culture of importance touched by the cultural network (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: From the archaeological site of Miròbriga to the Arab castle.

In this sense, the first strategic node is the underground museum, which incorporates the existing underground *domus*, found in the past excavation campaign, making it an integral part of the open-air exhibition. The excavation front becomes itself the pretext [11] to narrate the stratigraphy of the territory; the front surrounds the underground *domus*, narrating what has escaped the work of destroying time [12] making clear the stratigraphic units of the soil, allowing the possibility to continue the excavation over time, in the definition of an open and in progress museum, that changes depending on the continuation of the excavations (Fig. 6).

The stratigraphic excavation, preparatory to any kind of cognitive investigation, presupposes “the change of the landscape configuration of a place, for the architect, it determines an immediate problem of *forma urbis* of the place itself. This is true for an area such as the one investigated, in which archaeology is brought to light again, breaking the continuity of the landscape and highlighting the discontinuity and apparent incompatibility of two contexts that come into contact: in this case, the discontinuity automatically becomes an architectural problem and the project becomes the motive of the intervention” [13].



Figure 6: Museum for underground ruins.

In this way, architecture orients its intellectual approach to the reorganization of realities likely to be transformed, making the project the practical device to transfer it from the figurative world to the contemporary of the architect. What derives from this, in the specific case, is a widespread archaeological park, an exploded museum [14], in which the archaeological deposit is no longer the only pole of attraction of the territory but becomes an integral part of a more extensive landscape system. The edge of the archaeological park becomes porous in two directions; horizontally, allowing access in several points from the road; vertically, by introducing a study of views between the different levels of the archaeological park: the level of the underground ruins, the level of the exhibition path and the level of naturalistic park that occupies the embankment next to the road.

To hold together the natural landscape, the urban scenery, the exhibition path and archaeological ruins is, precisely, the architectural design, which through the grafting of recognizable elements scattered in the territory, allows you to enjoy nature, admiring, at the

same time, the archaeological landscape that develops below. The archaeological stratigraphy, thus, becomes an integral part of the landscape, an active subject of its continuous transformations and mutations.

The archaeological park re-establishes new relationships between the signs of the past and the environment with its natural and anthropogenic forms, laying the foundations for a new dialogue between archaeology and landscape, based on a mutual and continuous influence.

What holds together the two concepts of park as a cultural asset and park as an environmental asset is precisely the idea that it contains the double requirement inherent to the item itself, of the conservation and of the public fruition.

The archaeological park creates, in fact, a connective fabric between the various pre-existing and the different historical stratifications, integrating the fruitive necessities to the cognitive investigations, through the excavation campaigns and in-situ research; the archaeology becomes, probably more here than in the urban context, the pretext for a “global” approach to knowledge of the territory in which a process of disciplinary integration between architecture, archaeology and naturalness of the place is experienced.

Of great importance for the narrative museum of ruins is the architectural design of the visitor route, which holds together the fruitive needs and the will to reconstruct the history of the site. Starting from the two pre-existing axes that cross the old city of Miròbriga, the *cardus* and the *decumanus*, the project follows these traces, proposing a recommended main route, which is added to other secondary routes.

Along these routes the grafting of small steel structures, scattered in the archaeological park, accompany the tourist in the visit and knowledge of the site. A significant point of the path consists of the *forum*, in which the grafting of a metal frame redefines the three-dimensional ancient spatiality of the three existing temples; a frame, which overlapping the historical palimpsest of the forum, allows the understanding, respecting the pre-existence (Fig. 7).

Another emblematic point of the path is the area of the new excavations, in which there is the will to accompany the excavation campaigns in progress; in this sense the excavation area, intended as a transformative tool of intermediate time, constitutes the image that most suspends the imagination in a dimension of the elsewhere, a place where time comes short-circuited with itself. The beginning and the end are the same from the point of view of the *time*.

The excavation area, as an open and a temporary work, is an instrument of *securing* certain parts to allow them to cross and immediately reactivate physical and *staging* of its narrative contents and historical-artistic meanings.

Modular structures cover the excavation area, but they're also a covered walkway, from which tourists can safely observe the excavations. Finally, the last point of the narrative path, is marked by a tower, which, although ideally, holds together the *hippodromus*, located a kilometre further south, with the *forum*. A tower that, like a sculpture, opens to certain views, emphasizing and remarking the ancient visual connection, which otherwise would be invisible.

The intertwining of territorial and urban plots, which acts at different scales, and the grafting of structures scattered in the archaeological site, makes it possible to integrate new uses for hybrid configurations.

The “archaeological fragments” are the core of the open-air urban museum, which, in a continuous process, is destined to change simultaneously, in time and space, with nature and city. The ruin, no longer seen as an isolated element from the point of view of space-time, becomes part of the landscape that surrounds it.

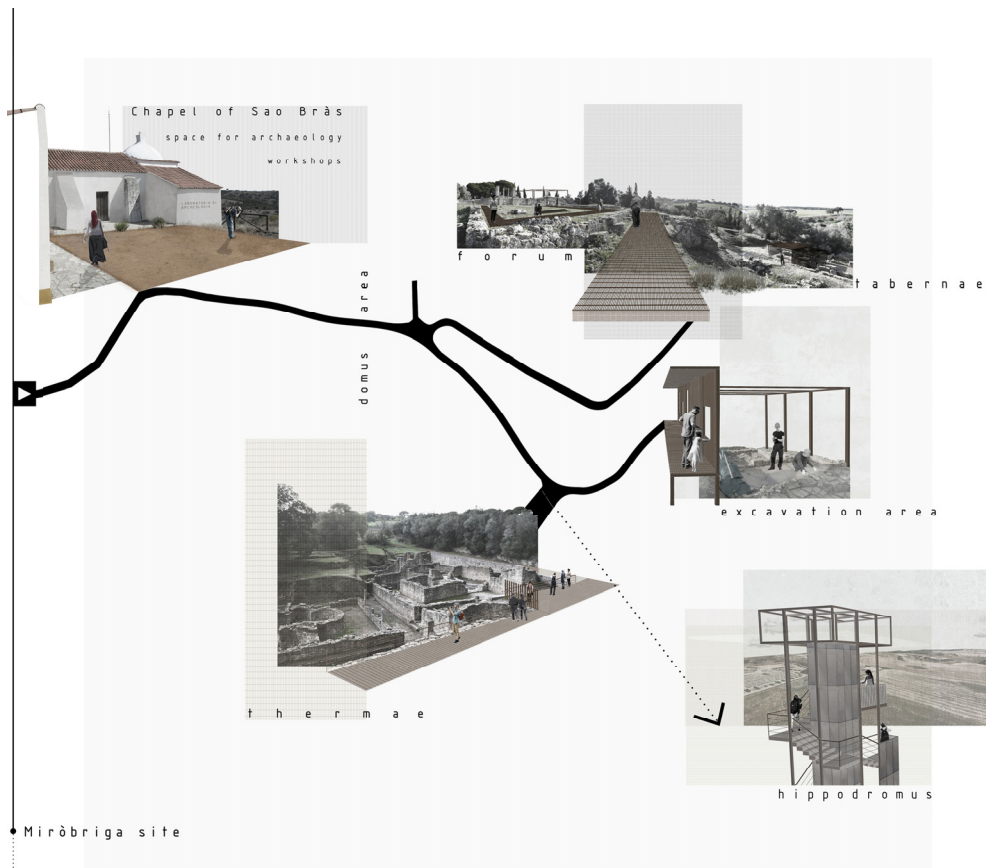


Figure 7: A new archaeological path.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The topics, expressed in this essay, highlight the intersections that can be generated by combining different elements, which can converge in a common direction: find new project design strategies for smaller archaeological site.

The main aim is to give rise to original perspectives for the architectural design, defining possible architectural devices for invisible ruins in nature and cities strata. Ruins – of ancient and recent time – can be intended as places of urban, physical and cultural re-appropriation.

The re-appropriation works on an editing of historical and ideological narratives, incorporating the elements that make them into alternative scenarios. Finally, we can deduce that it's possible to realize new contemporary spaces, where the ruin is the narrative device, and the architectural project is the link between the urban scenario and the naturalness of the landscape. The specificity of the Portuguese landscapes makes it possible to focus on the relationship between ruin, nature and cities and, therefore, on the possibility of weaving new relationships between widespread archaeology, invisible landscapes and inclusive urban spaces of new conception.

The aim is to define design strategies to take care of archaeological heritage, giving reference to actions related to the narration of the site, the fragments, the spatial and

perceptive exploration of the ruins and emphasizing the stitching of the edges between archaeological area and contemporary city.

The presence in the European city of multiple smaller archaeological sites and large quantities of archaeological fragments, widespread and stratified in the landscape, which often face conditions of abandonment or isolation, makes it necessary to rethink and to reinterpret these ancient places, where the relationship between archaeology, urban space and natural landscape is inseparable.

If the past does not constitute an extinct heritage, but on the contrary, it is intended as a precious source of new possible contemporary meanings, architecture, in the state of ruin, can represent the point of graft for new possible urban relationships.

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