

## **Taranto. The Convent Complex of San Domenico Maggiore. Redesigning and Museological Project.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The research, scientifically coordinated by Professor Giorgio Rocco of the Department ICAR of the Polytechnic University of Bari, starts with the analysis of the archeological findings in the area of San Domenico Convent in Taranto (Apulia, Italy), defining the different historical development stages of the city.

The study focused on the analysis of the temple foundations under the Church of San Domenico. The structures, brought to light by an archeological excavation during the late 60s and early 70s, possibly date back to the period between the late 6<sup>th</sup> and the early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The museological project includes the choice of archeological artifacts that describe the historical and cultural context until the 5<sup>th</sup> century, following the gradual process of consolidation of the colonial *polis*. The archaeological collection includes finds drawn from the catalogue of the National Archeological Museum of Taranto (MARTA) and from the catalogue of the Civic Museum of History and Art of Trieste. In the exhibition design special attention is given to emphasize the visit to the temple foundation structures.

The project's challenge is to strike a balance between the convent historical spaces and the exigencies of continuity in the exhibition of the archeological artifacts. Indeed, to define the exhibition tour we have attempted, on one side, to create an itinerary that allows a suitable display of the selected objects, and on the other, the will to allow a correct understanding of historical spaces.

**KEYWORDS:** Taranto, San Domenico, restoration of monuments, archaeological museum, archaeological site.

## 1 INTRODUCTION (*Angela Di Paola*)

The Master Thesis laboratory “TARAS III” of the Faculty of Architecture of the Polytechnical University of Bari gave us the possibility to study the site of the former convent of San Domenico Maggiore (in Taranto, Italy) and to plan an archaeological museum inside its spaces; the archaeological artifacts for the museum were selected both according to the historical and cultural context of the first period of the city’s development and in relation with the characteristics of the ancient structures *in situ*.

The detailed analysis of the area represented the preliminary operation for the following planning and required an in-depth consultation of historical documents and drawings; it went on with a metric survey, a critical consideration of the convent’s architectural elements in its temporal context and through a comparison with similar monuments.

The project of the museum concerns a complex area, rich of historical stratifications: the archaeological data discovered in the convent show the many events that have similarly changed the urban structure of Taranto. Therefore, the area plays an important role in the historical study of the city, that was transformed by many destructions and later rebuilding in different periods and under various kingdoms.

The convent, as it appears today, results from a series of demolitions and additions made between X and XXI century A.D. to the first housing cluster of Byzantine monks. Their community reused the ancient structures, between IV and IX century A.D., following the tradition of converting a preexisting temple to a Christian building: the *naos* of the temple was so transformed into a church.

The structures of the Greek period stand above an area that was already occupied, as the discoveries of Japigi’s ceramic clearly indicate (Lo Porto 1970). These structures were discovered during the restoration of the convent’s courtyard, directed by the Superintendence Responsible for Monuments between 1968 and 1973: they mostly consist of an isodomic wall surface in local stone, put under the north side of the courtyard and of some elements incorporated or linked to the wall. The first one has been recognized as part of the foundations of the *naos* of the temple whereas the elements on the top are the bottom parts of the wall and some plates of *stylobate*. There are also drums of column inserted in another section of foundations nearby.



Figure 1: Overall view of the isodomic wall; section and plan of the archaeological structures.

During the study two theories about the reconstruction of the temple were proposed, being inspired by a successful interpretation: the building has two phases. At the end of the VI century B.C., the temple was probably an *oikos*, i.e. composed only by the *naos*; the *peristasis* was added to the *oikos* probably during the first half of the V century B.C. (Lippolis 1995; Mertens 2006; Lippolis, Livadiotti, Rocco 2007).

The overhead position of the temple in the Tarantine acropolis also became a characteristic element of the convent. The abbey also represented a garrison at the entrance from the west-side of the city since the X century A.D., when the urban center was concentrated in the island and was provided by walls partially built on the ancient track.

The planimetric configuration church-courtyard was created by the Benedictine community between the X and the XIII century and maintained the same plan when the convent was entrusted to the Dominican monks, in the XVI century; in the XVII century the courtyard was rebuilt, as it had happened in most convents of Taranto. A second smaller courtyard was shaped during the XVIII century by the change of the road height around the convent: because of this, it was also necessary to build a staircase to the church.

Thus, the complex is composed by the church and a system of two courtyards, built on the southern side of the church. While the main courtyard is rich of decorative elements, as the cross vaults, traces of a fresco, double lancet windows in the eastern wall, the smaller one is an incoherent aggregation of spaces without an unique architectonic characterization. All the complex was built in local stone, as the archaeological structures under the church, but both the second floor of the main courtyard and the church are covered by a wooden roof.



Figure 2: Plan and sections of the convent.

Both the walls and the roofs of the complex were restored many times during the lifetime of the convent as the different wall techniques and shapes of windows prove. The principal interventions were realized in the XX century: after the occupation of the building by the Italian Finance Police, in 1861, and when it was used as a daycare, since 1938 to 1967. The main restoration of the convent took place in the period 1968-1973: the church lost the baroque decorations and the temple was found under its foundations. Another restoration was realized in the period 1986-1990, with the organization of the temple's archaeological excavations in their present form: the Superintendence projected a series of fissures on the floor of the cloister to let the visitors admire the temple's structures. This portion of the courtyard's floor was made of concrete because the original one had already been demolished for the archaeological survey. Similarly, the floor of the second courtyard was removed and rebuilt during the second half of the XX century.



Figure 3: Archaeological excavations and actual situation of the cloister...

Because of the richness of influences and historical meanings of this area, both the artifacts' selection and of the exhibition itinerary were planned following a common criterion: the dialogue with the preexisting structures, as it is explained in following sections.

## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXHIBITION FEATURES (*Annachiara Fiore*)

The primary aim of the archeological artifacts selection proposed in the exhibition tour is to describe the historical and cultural context of *Taras* showing the development of the settlement in an autonomous colonial *polis* from VIII to V century B.C.

The phases of scientific cataloguing and editing captions of the material to be exhibited were supported by consulting catalogues, when existing, and publications on individual archaeological contexts of the necropolis of Taranto.

Table 1 Sections of the materials in the exhibition tour

Section I –Indigenous population	Section II –Mother-city	Section III - The <i>Polis</i>
I .1 The <i>chora</i> I .2 The <i>Japigi</i>	II .1 The <i>polis</i> foundation II .2 Pottery imported from mother-city II .3 The Acropolis cults	III .1 Pottery imported from motherland III .1.1 Proto-Corinthian pottery III .1.2 Corinthian pottery III .1.3 Attic pottery III .1.4 Ionian pottery III .1.5 Chalcidian pottery III .2 Local production

		III.2.1 Proto-Corinthian pottery III .2.2 Corinthian pottery III .2.3 Attic pottery III .2.4 Ionian pottery III .2.5 Coroplastic crafts III .2.6 Carparo production III .2.7 Marble production III .2.8 Terracotta roofs
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The museum's sections are exhibited in chronological sequence, every section including a group of archeological artifacts arranged in typological, formal and figurative classes.

The first section displays the colonization's phenomenon and describes the context in the pre-colonial era; here there are potteries made by indigenous people.

The second section displays relationships between the colony and Sparta, the mother-city. At the beginning of the exhibition there's the coin with Taras riding a dolphin, one of the oldest images of city's eponymous hero. In the lower section "Pottery imported from mother-city" there's a collection of Greek potteries found in the archeological areas around Taranto, proving the deep connection between Sparta and Taranto, soon after the colony's foundation. In the end "The Acropolis cults" displays artifacts connected with cults imported from Sparta to the colony: two marble heads of Athena, and the altar of Aphrodite. These masterpieces are apart from others artefacts made of marble because they are the evidence of Sparta's influences. Although the altar, dated to the I century B.C., is not compatible with the time span from VIII to V century B.C, it's the only relevant evidence associated with a cult of Aphrodite in the Taranto's acropolis. Furthermore, the existence of the altar confirms that Aphrodite was worshipped under the epithet Basilis and it also suggests the connection with Sparta.

The third section is the richest: it introduces artifacts imported from Greece and the local productions. In Taranto there are not traces of coroplastic and marble artifacts imported from Greece, so in this section only pottery is presented. The "Local production" starts with ceramic and coroplastic artifacts. The choice to exhibit at the end of the tour the architectural materials, in connection with the historical and cultural context, is motivated by the need to introduce the visit to the temple foundation structures. So the "Terracotta roofs" is placed at the end of the tour and it comes after the "Marble Production", that displays as last object an architectural sculpture. Therefore the chronologic sequence is abandoned to collocate "Carparo production" (early V century) before "Marble production".

## 2.1 Artifacts: about the historical and artistic context

The art of western Greeks shows influences from motherland and original features. Lenormant was the first one who recognized "un certaine point de goût propre" in the local production. The art production in Magna Graecia is still interpreted as a complex phenomenon, so it's not easy to give a complete interpretation (Langlotz 1968; Orlandini 1983; Belli Pasqua 1995).

Pottery production in Magna Graecia imitates examples imported from Greece. In Taranto, in the earliest stages of colonization, the most diffuse imported pottery was the laconic one. Imported from the mother-city Sparta, this one showed simple linear and geometric decorations. The Proto-Corinthian pottery is dated to late VIII - early VII century. It's a widespread production in Taranto and it's made in pale clay. The decoration's technique depicts outlines, black figures and polychromy. The Corinthian pottery is a production of late Geometric and Orientalising period and its finds were copious in Taranto. It's made in yellow clay, with new kind of eclectic and plastic decorations, often showing representation of animals. In the local production the imitation of Corinthian pottery distinguished itself from Greek models for the use of local clay, less pure and compact. In Taranto

artifacts imitating Ionian pottery can be found mainly in necropolis, it's possible to distinguish them from the Greek ones thanks to the different clay: pinkish with yellow or orange shading.

In Taranto, in the XIX century, the archeological findings of coroplastic artifacts (terracotta figurines), were fortuitous and localized in funerary and votive pits (stipi). The study of terracotta figurines should help to specify researches in identification of cults practice. Earlier the artifacts were shaped with a lathe, later they were made with molds. In Taranto about a thousand of molds with singular signs were found, probably connected with different workshops (Orlandini 1983; Iacobone 1988; Lippolis 1995; Abruzzese Calabrese 1996; Barra Bagnasco 1996).

In the lower city of Taranto numerous archeological finds (antefixes, acroteria, fragments of geison) indicate that there were an extensive necropolis with lot of funerary buildings (Rocco 2012). First roofs in Greece and Magna Graecia were made in terracotta, in Magna Graecia especially there were different solutions for different cults context (Viola 1996; Hellmann 2002; Mertens 2006).

In the past, a very common opinion was that the sculptural marbles finds in Magna Graecia were imported directly from Greece, or made in loco by Greek artisans. However it is truly difficult to tell whether the sculptures found in Magna Graecia are local products or imports from motherland, especially because it's not easy to find marble in southern Italy. Recent researches suggest that the local marble production is characterized by a lot of architectural elements, it is easier sculpting blocks in situ, so it seems reasonable or presumable that marble blocks were sent by motherland and then shaped in Magna Graecia. The studies of marble finds support this theory because, although they are often out of archeological context, allow to recognize in the Taranto's local production a peculiar figurative style (Orlandini 1983, Belli Pasqua 1995; Belli Pasqua 1996; Belli Pasqua 2008).

### 3 MUSEUM PROJECT: EXHIBITION PATH AND SETTING-UP OF THE CONVENT OF SAN DOMENICO MAGGIORE (Emanuella Lionetti)

The project proposal for the preparation of the convent's rooms has, as a reference, an accurate analysis of the main Italian experience in this field, from the beginning of the twentieth century to nowadays. The analysis ranges from the incisive Scarpa's and Albini's experiences of "inside museum" to the "active conservation" of the monument and of the mobile document hosted, through Minissi's experiences: the works on display are in such a way as to facilitate a historical-criticism, taking care of the perceptual and spatial relationship between container and contents (Minissi 1983; Huber 1997; Murphy 2007).

The first phase of the project was conceived through the definition of the exhibition path and, subsequently, with design of descriptive panels and supports for spaces fitting.

The aims of the exhibition path were basically two: the research for a route that would have allowed for an adequate exposure of selected objects and the desire to achieve a reading of the space currently unused—linking the courtyard, born in the eighteenth century, with the surrounding annexed rooms and also the main cloister with its spaces.

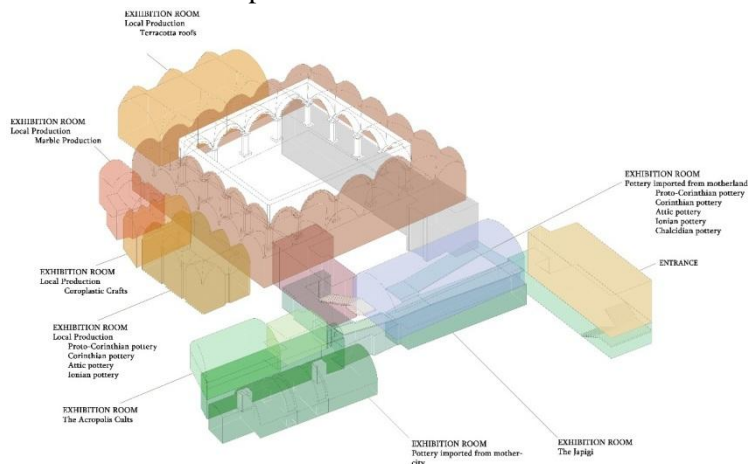


Figure 4: Exhibition path and rooms

The design challenged the will to reconcile the physical conformation of the complex with the demand of continuity imposed by archaeological artifacts' selection and other, different, exhibition needs. The defining process of the path has gone hand in hand with the choices of archaeological artifacts' selection and the final order of various sections into which it is divided, with mutual adjustments and changes. First, it was decided to propose a distinction between the spaces of the exhibition area and the offices of the Superintendence for Archaeological Heritage of Apulia, whose current headquarters is located into the rooms of the convent, and in order to avoid the "overlap" of two different functions, it was decided to separate the two entries and to allocate all the offices of the first level space.

The proposed design provides a minimally invasive intervention for existing structures; architectural changes made to the building are used to alter the static vision of the complex and the distances, in favour of the exploration of those "secondary" that complete the picture of architecture and provide a historical-critical reading of the entire building.

The exhibition tour was based on creation of longitudinal principal axes which allow determining main path, and transverse minor axes that allow to create relationships between path and existing spaces.

The preparation has been studied in relation to the needs of each section of the exhibition of objects, considering the close relationship that they have with the architecture that hosts them. The panels and brackets allow the visitors to freely view the continuity of the architecture, since an approach showing the hosting space was preferred to the opposite one.

Exhibition panels are used with a dual function: they are in the area which includes the historical description and in the background to highlight exposed elements; they are formed by an aluminum frame that stretches a fabric, anchored to the wall through a magnet. The supports consist in a load-bearing structure made of aluminum profiles cladding by stone plates; the supports for ceramics are equipped with a protective glass and supports for marbles are equipped with support plate.

The exhibition entrance is situated at the entrance of the courtyard adjacent to the convent, reachable from the Arco San Domenico alley: the catering spaces are located in this area.

The solution chosen to address the gap between the share of the courtyard and the exhibition areas at a lower level, provides for the creation of an environment in the longitudinal development: in this way it is created both a space of transition and connection in which to exhibit introductory panels and *Japigi* section; linking it to an existing corridor, it is created the axis that allows to relate the two barrel-vaulted rooms, at an altitude of 3.16 m, where is the expected exposure of the second order section, on *Mother-City*.

The room set-up is well-structured with panels anchored to the wall and stone of the supports that, along the entire longitudinal development, is shaped to create seats.

In the room housing the *Pottery imported from Motherland*, the linearity of panels and supports is fragmented to follow space shape and to enhance architectural elements that characterize it: the setting is integrated between spans defined by two arcs; the Laconian *kylix* decorated by a scene of Zeus and an eagle is placed into the niche inside the thickness of the wall, near the entrance, thus emphasizing one of the most interesting selected pieces.

Moving on, parallel to previous axis, the second principal axis relates the vaulted room at 3.16 m altitude, which is expected to show the subsection "*The acropolis cults*", and the double height room that hosts ceramics of the subsection "*Pottery imported from Motherland*". In the first of the two mentioned rooms, objects are located in space in order to create visual fulcrums perceptible even out of the room through the openings; panels form the background to clearly outline shape of the two marble heads of Athena and votive *Ara* (Argan 1955). To reconcile the height's difference in height between the floor of the "*Marble hall*" and the "*Hall of imported ceramics*" a ramp has been designed, which is modeled according to the space and itself becomes a support for objects, creating a "ring" route and giving the possibility to combine the exposure with the reading of the double height environment.



Figure 5: Exhibition space on the section *Japigi*, with collection, panel and supports.

The sequence of parallel longitudinal axes, defined for the path at 3.16 m, is interrupted by the need to continue exhibition to the higher level, namely the proportion of the cloister: considering the physical conformation of the complex and requirements of archaeological artifacts' selection, a third axis was established, perpendicular to the previous ones, by linking the south-west rooms that define the cloister; in this *enfilade* of rooms, the objects of local ceramic production, marble and coroplastic, are situated. The succession of supports and panels is fragmented in favor of a revelation of architectural elements that characterize these rooms: they enhanced large splayed openings and the verticality of the spaces.

Finally, the vaulted room, on northwest side of the cloister, hosts the subsection "*terracotta roofs*" and it is an introduction to the temple foundation structures, whose explanatory panels are exposed in the last room of the exhibition path: the room on the southeast side of the cloister, adjacent to current sacristy.

#### 4 CONCLUSION (*Deborah Giachetti*)

The ultimate aim of this research is the creation of an organic exhibition, as well as respectful of the context in which it is located. An exhibition that induces the visitor to retrace the history through the understanding and vision of many objects, arranged in a very complex "shell", the continuation of that historical period analysed previously. Hence the decision to reveal the hosting space, rather than denying it: the visitor has the perception of being in that particular place and nowhere else. A perfect balance between the physical conformation of the convent and the continuity dictated by the archaeological exhibition features, means that the space for the exhibition is able to expand and shrink, to perform jumps of altitude and cross spaces beyond their margins.

Through a totally reversible operation that can prevent damage and/or alterations to the structure, it was possible to create a perfect combination of archaeological and monastic complex: in some cases, the structure has defined the modularity at the base of the exhibition - niches, windows and parastas have determined, therefore, the size of the panels - in other cases, however, the exhibition emphasized and



embellished certain peculiarities of the structure: is the case of a portion of archaic wall discovered within the current storage room, inaccessible to visitors, which becomes an integral part of the museum, a rather central element inside the room of imported ceramics.

At the end of the exhibition, having benefited from the view of the cloister and the stratifications clearly visible on the walls which delimit the space, as a further confirmation of the organic intervention, the visitor finds the exhibition hall destined to the temple and to the convent of San Domenico Maggiore. Some descriptive panels show the salient features of this monument, highlighting the reconstructive hypotheses of the temple and the next envelope of the structures in the convent.

Keeping the concept of non-invasiveness, we have withdrawn the proposal to grant visitors to benefit from the visit in the archaeological excavation: to facilitate the path and protect the excavation itself, it was decided to widen the fissures already present on the floor of the cloister, creating a wider opening to allow a complete reading of the foundation structures (the existing floor is not the original one that had already been demolished for the archaeological survey). By the application of a panel on the wall, you can see and recognize from the various architectural elements and the relative shares of the laying surface. At the end of the course, therefore, after realizing of the historical importance of the building in which it is located and better understood the policy that generated the space which is the object of the exhibition, the visitor is led into the courtyard, as a space of transition between history and the contemporary world of outer space.

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