

RESTORATION AND FUNCTIONAL RE-USE OF THE *CENTO CAMERELLE* IN HADRIAN'S VILLA

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SUMMARY

When starting a research work propaedeutical to the restoration, it often happens that this survey focuses - more realistically - on aspects which the historical studies had left only implied. This is the case of the restoration in progress concerning the *Cento Camerelle*; since it centers, in fact, the architects' interest on a particular, and minor aspect of the Villa, it has contributed to discover a new side, different from the widespread readings [1]. Technical research, as usually, can reveal the partial interpretations of most common readings.

INTRODUCTION

The marginal location of the *Cento Camerelle*, in comparison with the more monumental spaces of the Villa, appears today more and more definitely in its role of space organizer, determining a structural border between nature and human artifacts. This was made possible after the recent excavations and the beginning of the restorations.

«To build means to cooperate with earth, to give man's imprint to a landscape which will be thus forever modified», as Hadrian says in Yourcenar's novel. The *Cento Camerelle* built a so strict connection with the ground and the surrounding landscape, as to create an everlasting link between architecture and natural shape of the site. This is the case of the strictly articulated substructures of the large terraced platform in the Pecile, whose building structures, partly known and partly supposed and probed, are perfectly intersected with the land. They face the valley and delimit its border, thus providing a general stability, despite the frequent earthquakes.

In a few words, the building complex gives a perfect, simultaneously engineering and architectural solution to the planned gradient and its long facade, overlooking the most significant and historical access to the Villa through Via di Roccabruna. In the course of the centuries and through the presence of nature, the façade appeared less and less architectonic, increasingly identifying with the irregular natural landscape. All that contributed to the suggestion of the site, as well as to its sense of marginal location and its role of structural limit for the Villa (Fig. 1/2). This role is nevertheless essential, as already told, for a more comprehensive knowledge of the *Cento Camerelle*.

Fig. 1/2: Aerial views of the *Cento Camerelle* complex in Villa Adriana.

In such a case, aim of the restorer is the choice between the adjustment to the 'naturalistic' ruinous state of the building or the reaction to its structural deterioration. The architect has also to look for, and partly suggest, the meaning and the role of the monument, with its more communicative and still unrevealed value. This last aspect was fundamental for the restoration project. Very important is, in fact, the potential contribution to the image and the knowledge of the Villa, provided by the preservation of the *Camerelle* complex, a section mainly built for service purposes. From the beginning it was exhibited in its spectacular and articulated organization of horizontal and vertical passages, architecturally different and going from the maximum visibility to the underground concealment. This revealed the 'urban' and managerial role of a great and leading government center, sign of a sensationally architectural creativity, in the visibly monumental exploits, as well as in the underlying functional organization.

Aim of the *Cento Camerelle* restoration is therefore the rediscovery and the reproduction of the original plurality of the hadrianic complex, beyond its simple preservation. The long façade of the gradient, opened in front of the visitor coming from Via di Roccabruna, can be interpreted as a 'vertical section' of the whole area of the imperial Villa. An archaeological stratigraphical section which emphasizes the perfect mechanism connecting the industrious 'viscera' of the Villa with the triumphal appearance of the monumental area. A building volume of more than four storeys, confronting with the landscape, that, since the first project appeared almost 'natural', but that already in the past time, iconographic sources showed full of important and monumental remains. Besides, the present excavations, started by the Soprintendenza Archeologica, are finding out here important and unexpected ruins, thus witnessing that a restoration project in an archaeological area always proceeds as a *work in progress* (Fig. 3/4).

Fig. 4: Part of the *Cento Camerelle* complex, today.

Fig. 3: *Cento Camerelle* complex in a drawing by G. B. Piranesi (1775 ca.).

The excavations soon evidenced a double system of paved streets on two levels (Figg. 8/9), along the protruding architectural wall of

the *Camerelle*. While this restoration, planned by the project, considered the two lower kinematic levels of the Villa, more problematic was instead the reproduction of the wooden galleries system, connecting the 'one hundred' passages of the *Camerelle*, grouped in four storeys. It seemed more realistic to inherit from history the internal passage of the post-ancient age, rather than dealing with an adventurous and image-binding reproduction. An old passage employed in the various phases of the complex functional re-use, opening breaches on purpose in the transversal walls. An internal passage, consistent with the gradual disappearance of the galleries and with the consequent appearance of the *Cento Camerelle*, become an icon of the Villa.

Nevertheless, for demonstrative purposes, a part of the galleries should have been reproduced and the monument itself suggested where: in the gradient of the *Camerelle* series, in the south-east corner. Here the putlog holes reveal that the space was surmounted by a double series of ramps in the galleries. This gradient, after the disappearance of the external distribution system, was stepped over by a little internal wooden entrance stair (Fig. 5). Exactly here, the projecting wooden gallery will be reproduced, using the original putlog holes and restoring the first storey of brick pillars, whose traces

Fig. 5: The provisional internal wooden entrance stair, in the stamp of Agostino Penna (1831-36).

abound. Here the external ramp will be rebuilt, on similarly existing ancient patterns.

With this partial restoration and the reproduction of the existing internal original stairs in the ancient spaces, the *Cento Camerelle* complex can be walked through again. But the whole building cannot be re-used in the modern sense, without losing the already consolidated image,

with its irregularities, its partial incompleteness and gaps, the syncopated rhythm of its empty sockets. Therefore, an integral and museum oriented re-use was excluded, since it would have implied an intolerable modern reproduction of the framing arches. The ruinous character of the image has been left in the external appearance, as well as in the spaces used as Museum. Only the four *camerelle* employed as workshops, will have a glass closure, on an existing wall-course, recessed from the façade. In the *camerelle* used as museum, instead, there will be no glazed frames, but only metallic grates, recessed from the exterior arches, in order to prevent birds intrusions. In the lower *camerelle*, those of the eastern wing, employed as exhibition display store-rooms, protective grates will be placed in order to interfere only indirectly with the exterior *facies*.

Very interesting was also the planimetric connection between the above-mentioned wing and that north-south oriented, parallel to the *Pecile*. The cylindrical structure, often represented in the *Cento Camerelle* iconography, was too much important for the 'memory' restoration of the Villa and for its significant border, not to be considered and emphasized in such an integral restoration (Figg. 6/7). The above-mentioned structure lies in the obtuse angle between the two wings and is characterized by a peculiar and unspecified constructive and functional role. In such a case and with no further knowledge, the restoration should act according to the planimetry of the whole Villa. The cylindrical structure was, in fact, geometrically placed on the two main planning axes of the monumental complex: on the transversal axis of the *Pecile* and on the *Canopus* one, which is the longest walkable axis of the whole Villa. The intervention should also act according to its peculiar position, as a *belvedere*, looking towards the naturalistic and monumental side near *Via di Roccabruna*. A terrace with a view,

Figg. 6/7: Agostino Penna's stamps (1831-36). The cylindrical structure, geometrically placed on the two main planning axes of the monumental complex: on the transversal axis of the *Pecile* and on the *Canopus* one.

therefore, according to an interpretation confirmed by the railing wall oriented towards the south-east landscape, the long water basin and the wall of the *Pecile*. The empty structure (still unexplained) of the cylinder should be restored to its compositive and visual pivotal role, and

probably as a space for a stair well. With the re-establishment of a transparent walking storey, in a steel wire-netting, the most spectacular place of pause and observation of the Villa will be rebuilt.

Fig. 8/9: The double system of paved streets on two levels, along the protruding architectural wall of the *Camerelle* and (before and after the recent excavations).

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As regards the archaeological restoration and, more specifically, the wall facing, the major points pondered and those for which refinements are being made, are the following:

- spatial planning of interiors and their connection with the external space;
- how and how much overcoming the internal degradation, with minimum refacing and cleaning - preserving the traces of the wooden centerings on the concrete intrados of the vaults and maintaining the memory of the defacements and lootings of the angle parts;
- how much 'rebuilding', exhibiting, integrating or suggesting the 'gaps' of the long elevation;
- leaving or not the breach openings effected among the spaces, in the course of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the Fifties, as made Salvatore Aurigemma for the substructures, which would then become the ground floor for the Canopus museum. At that time, a part of the *Cento Camerelle* was employed as a cultivation place for the mushrooms;
- how and if gradually diminish the masonry facings, especially considering the interventions of the first two spaces near the 'Vestibule' in 1995-96, gradually connecting to them;
- employment of similar or homologous materials, in comparison with the pre-existing ones (with little differentiations), in order to guarantee a good compatibility;
- choice of traditional techniques, avoiding - apart from specific points - the employment of reinforcing drillings and poured concrete mixtures.

The emergent points are therefore of two kinds: how arresting the fading of the archaeological image and how dealing with the preceding restorations, some of which, perhaps, not completely adequate.

As regards the first one, there should be an adjustment between the ruinous character of the extremely long elevation and the necessary restoration transformations. For the whole exterior wall facing it is possible to deduce a still valid information, if the degradation is compared with Agostino Penna's descriptions after 150 years, (implying a preservation state better than the present one) and with the drawings of the French *pensionnaires* of Villa Medici. These have studied Hadrian's Villa between the middle of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the

twentieth (Daumet, Girault, Esquié, Boussois). If it is true that the area registers the change and for this reason should be preserved [2], and if the degradation signs should be considered important - besides the gaps and the superficial changes - , it is also true that the restoration of the external areas and of the internal edges (in *opus reticulatum* and *mixtum*) is connected with the structural stability. Therefore it should be recommended from the structural point of view and from that of the preservation. The attack of the atmospheric agents, the degradation of the pozzolana mortar and the brick removing in the levelling courses and the pillage of squared blocks (especially inside the Camerelle, where it was made possible because of the man's height), have obviously ruined the wall-facings and reduced the thickness of the building walls. It was therefore decided, as regards the gaps restoration in the arch rings, to give equal importance to the static and structural aspects as well as to the aesthetic ones. On one hand, it was necessary to restore the missing ones, especially in the lower storeys, in order to obtain a better connection. On the other, it was to be avoided the appearance of a ruin exceedingly restored, according to Max Dvorak aphorism [3].

It was stated (and in this direction the work proceeds) that the elevations finishing should be made only if strictly necessary, according to static reasons:

- the missing rings should not be restored;
- the arch rings can be completed, if there exists only a trace of the springing of the arches;
- if vertical damages are present, the same rings can be restored , in order to guarantee a better tooting or connection among the parts.

In any case, it is always right to suggest only a trace of the arches, limiting to a mere beginning of the arch till to the flanks. In this case, specific 'restoration codes' were used, breaking towards the elevation the new 'bipedales' bricks, since it was preferred not to restore the whole structure thickness - as recently performed for the Stadium [4] (Fig. 14).

Furthermore, it is important not to propose a too much restored wall-facing, which would disturb the long-established ruinous state of the building.

Another problem concerns the opportunity of planning any didactic 're-proposals' or partial reconstruction, even if for restricted sections, which could suggest the course of wooden galleries. This kind of didactic re-proposal, according to previous restoration works of famous archaeologists, such as Guido Calza at Ostia or Amedeo Maiuri [5] at Herculaneum (i. e. the *opus craticium* house), and according to the detailed scale-drawings by C. L. Boussois in 1913 (Fig. 10/11), was made for a small section of the gallery at the corner of the building. There, the plug-holes to fix the supporting beams still exists; this also allows an outdoor passage for the visitors.

Another problem concerns the top edge of the ruin, i.e. if create a straight line at a certain level, or protect the masonry, following its irregular shape. The second choice was made, deciding for an *opus signinum* (powdered brick mortar) cover or, in certain sections, a stone fragments mortar, in order to preserve the 'Ruinous-Fascination' of the building and to protect it from rain and humidity.

Fig. 10/11: Charles L. Boussois. Survey and re-constructive scale drawing of a *Cento Camerelle* section, with the 're-proposal' of the wooden galleries. Detail of 1913 'Envois', no. 104.05 and no. 104.06 (École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, by courtesy of Annie Jacques).

As regards the interior finishing, it will be distinguished between the rooms used as expositive space and the others, which will remain 'museum of themselves'. According to an old tradition in the management of Hadrian's Villa, other rooms will be used as restoration workshops. Not all the door jambs will therefore be restored and, in such a case, the masonry will be reinforced only if in statically precarious conditions, and where it is necessary for the planned use of certain rooms (Fig. 12/13). Outside, the façade will maintain the 'bosses' of the squared blocks, tooting an ideal continuity, according to a modern 'compositive' language which perfectly coincide with a restoration 'code', applied since a long time in Hadrian's Villa (at least since 1913 as, for example, in the wall-facing at the Stadium and at the Small Baths). Since the beginning of this century we assumed as symbol some 're-integrative languages' or 're-proposal suggestions', in accordance with the tradition of 'emphasizing' some restorations in Hadrian's Villa. It is also necessary to consider if there exist some worthwhile old interventions at the *Cento Camerelle*.

Fig. 12: The façade of two *Camerelle* after the restoration work.

We should in fact take into account that, every past alteration should also be documented and left as a trace, according to a perspective which preserves and does not obliterate past and recent interventions. Among these restorations, some of uncertain date (probably dating end of nineteenth century) show the brickwork with the triangular edges outward, almost tooting an imaginary masonry. These interventions are quite similar to other restored walls, as those in the middle wall of the Pecile, or in the Court of Libraries, which remind us of other historic examples, as the brickwork used for the bases of the honorary columns in the Roman Forum by Rodolfo Lanciani and Giacomo Boni. The same brickwork was also used by Antonio Muñoz for the podium of the hadrianic temple of Venus and Roma.

Finally, in a few parts, the idea of a 'conceptual' or 'evocative' restoration was attained as, for example, in the simple suggestion, with a 'sign on the ground', of the upper order pillars. The same idea was followed by the 'Soprintendenza' to mark the pillars position in the upper *porticus triplex* of the Hercules sanctuary in Tivoli.

Figg. 13/14: Not all the door jambs will therefore be restored and, in such a case, the masonry will be reinforced only if in statically precarious conditions, and where it is necessary for the planned use of certain rooms. On the right image, the same kind of restoration employed recently in the Stadium area, above a 1913 restoration.

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