

OTHER SUBJECTS, SAME APPROACHES

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Contemporary architectural practice often privileges new construction, risking the loss of architecture's socio-cultural dimension in favour of standardized, market-oriented production.

This paper argues for the re-emergence of reuse as a fundamental design strategy, rooted in historical building practices that emphasized adaptation and material continuity.

The contemporary evolution of people's identities and the fragmentation of cultures developed in the modern age, supported by current geopolitical ideologies, define a highly urgent landscape. Today's conception of architecture tends to consider the boundary of the territory as a rigid and defined category, fixing languages, methods and materials within coherent but obligatory design models. We are faced with a form of engineering of design thinking that could lead to the loss of the socio-cultural component of architecture

in favour of a consumerist application of the activity of building. The danger is that architecture will become more of a product to be consumed than a cultural act, transforming itself into something standardised, fast, productive and market oriented. Although much of contemporary practice concerns existing heritage, the imagery of today's architecture continues to emphasise new construction as the prevailing model of innovation. Technological progress and the demand for low-impact buildings have led to architectural works being conceived as a set of new components, created or assembled at the same time as the building itself.

This approach to design reached its peak in the second half of the XIX century and continues today as the correct and canonical method, defining architectural design as the use of "the new" as the only strategy for resolving a project. Looking at the history of architecture and construction, particularly before the industrial revolutions, and more markedly in the former but subsequently also in the civil/popular sphere of the latter, the act of building (adapting and reconstructing) has always been associated with strategies for reusing and adapting architectural components and building materials. By its very nature, reuse, both as a practice of stripping and

as recovery from rubble, is not subject to a codifiable method or a defined proportional measure, and constitutes an essential element of design identity. The rhetoric of the new introduced by industrial society and amplified in the twentieth century by the shift away from the rural world has gradually marginalized this dimension. However, in contemporary times, reuse must re-emerge as an integral part of the act of building. A mindset oriented towards reuse can facilitate the search for design solutions capable of minimising the impact of new works on the environment and, at the same time, attributing a higher identity and historical value to the building. Looking back at history, where the use of non-contemporary architectural fragments in new constructions is a recurring practice, it is possible to recognise in these grafts the strongest elements of cultural continuity and memory of the built environment. Furthermore, the presence of such elements helps us to understand the evolution of the property and adds to the architectural object's response to living a method of archiving, not only of the artefact but also of the historical events that took place during its construction. The interpretation described above has matured in our contemporary age thanks to cultural movements and dialogues that emerged at the dawn of the



Fig. 01 - Rendering of the current state inside the Basilica Cistern.

modern world. structuring the interpretation of architecture from a historical perspective. It is easy to accept that the design philosophy of the past was not guided by this awareness but rather by a functionalist approach that led to the choice of existing components because they were more advantageous both in economic terms and in terms of optimising processing times. This outlines a basic structure more consistent with the functionalist perspective of post-industrial modernist thinking, which finds accuracy in the statement “architecture is an image of its time because it is the fruit of that time”. So, what is the architecture of this time? Can our contemporary world still conceive of building as a form of writing with characters and methods generated entirely from scratch, or, learning from the past, evolve into a more reasoned form that allows for reuse and goes beyond the functionalism for which it was created, arriving at a more culturally evolved and useful profile?. This line of reasoning aims to open up a possible interpretation of the design structure without providing a final summary. The input of interest is to describe cases addressed in past research and work that define a useful set of elements to justify the reasoning profile. A case study particularly relevant to this theoretical framework is represented by the Medusa protomes preserved in the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul. These are two stone blocks carved with the head of Gorgon, most likely belonging to previous monumental contexts and reused during the construction of the great cistern

commissioned by Justinian in 535 AD (Önlü, 2010; Kaldellis, 2016). Their current location, used as bases for two columns, is an eloquent example of the transition from spolia in se to spolia in re (Settis, 1984): the elements, created with a specific symbolic and apotropaic function, lose their original meaning and take on an entirely pragmatic and structural role within the new architectural structure.

Their reuse, devoid of iconographic intent and determined by considerations of material availability and constructional functionality, has nevertheless produced a paradoxical effect: it is precisely this practical reinterpretation that has ensured the preservation of the artefacts to the present day. The protomes, which survived because they were transformed into simple supporting elements, are therefore an emblematic example of how reuse can alter, suspend or overwrite the original cultural value while ensuring the material survival of the object.

Survival that is perpetuated over time thanks to recent technologies for the digitisation of architectural heritage, which allow specific means and methodologies to be used to collect data (Guidi, 2013), produce material and bring to light faded morphologies of ancient ruins, giving them new life in the digital age. A new dimension of usability is created for the asset, and the reused fragment becomes a cognitive artefact, capable of inhabiting digital, virtual and immersive scenarios, inaugurating a third life in the present.

One of the further potentials of digitisation lies in its ability to restore context to fragments

that, for various reasons, have found themselves without a background capable of enhancing them. A representative case is that of the Tetrarchs of St. Mark's Square in Venice (Verdiani, 2019), a double group of statues in Egyptian red porphyry depicting four figures in high relief, located at the corner of St. Mark's Treasury. During their removal, one of the statues lost a foot, but the fragment, now preserved in Istanbul, is nevertheless deprived of its original context and displayed in a secondary position. This creates the risk of a lack of knowledge and requires an interpretative awareness about the artefact. Digitisation can help to remedy through virtual reconstruction and a new narrative of its historical and material value, promoting its dissemination to the masses (Verdiani et al., 2022). In light of these considerations, the issue of reuse takes on a dual significance. On the one hand, it constitutes a current and necessary design approach, capable of reducing the impact of new works and restoring meaning and identity to buildings. On the other hand, it is precisely the reuse adopted in past centuries that has allowed the survival of numerous architectural elements which, reinserted into subsequent structures, have survived the passage of time to the present day. It is thanks to this material continuity, the result of layered grafts and reuses, that we now have a rich heritage, ideal for digitisation, documentation and accessibility through contemporary digital survey technologies.

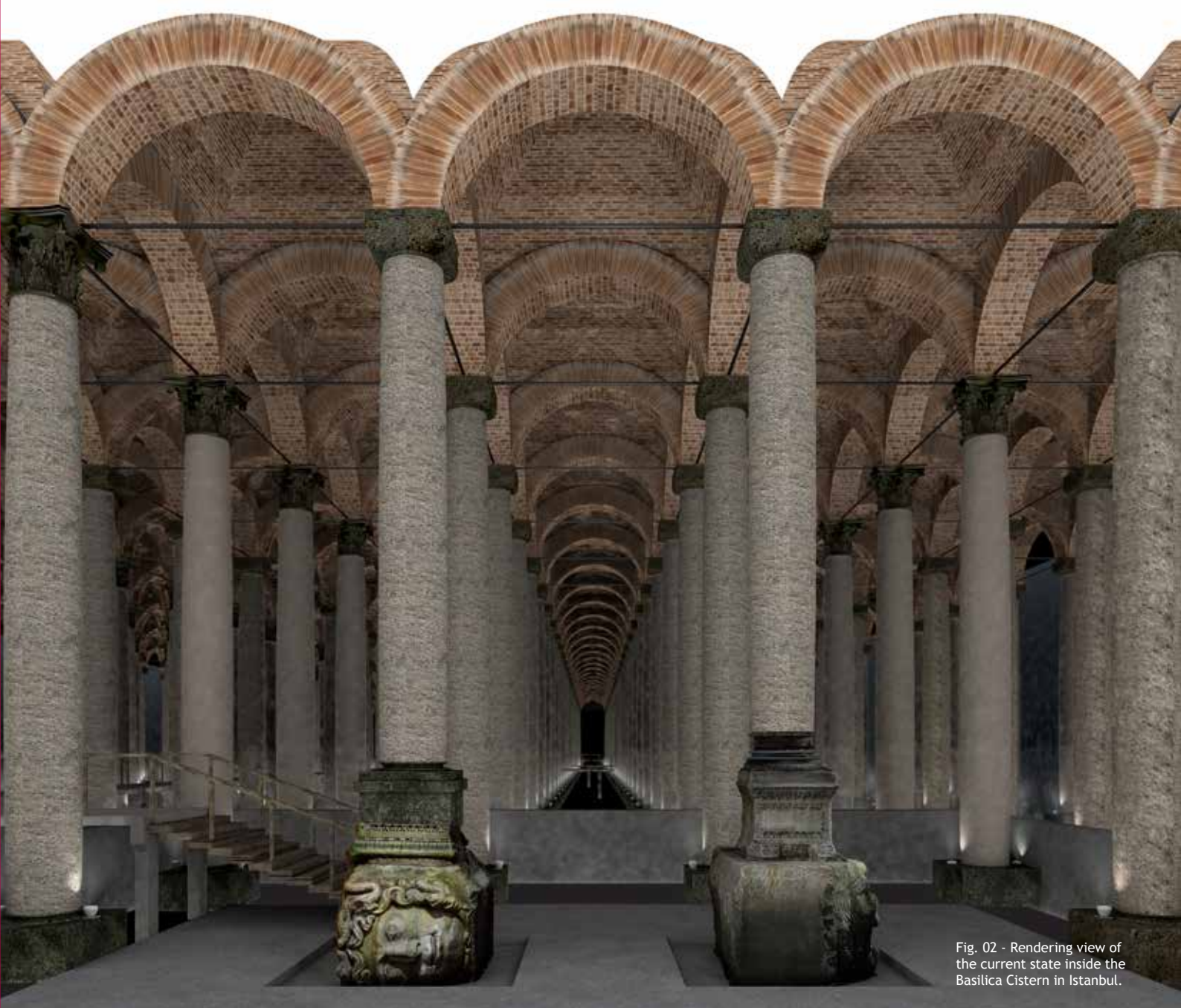


Fig. 02 - Rendering view of the current state inside the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul.

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary architectural practice often privileges new construction, risking the loss of architecture's socio-cultural dimension in favour of standardized, market-oriented production. This paper argues for the re-emergence of reuse as a fundamental design strategy, rooted in historical building practices that emphasized adaptation and material continuity. Through the lens of architectural spolia, reuse is interpreted as both a pragmatic and cultural act, capable of preserving memory while transforming meaning. Case studies such as the Medusa protomes in

Istanbul and the Tetrarchs in Venice illustrate how reuse has ensured material survival. Digital technologies further extend this process, enabling contextual reconstruction and inaugurating new cognitive lives for reused architectural fragments.

KEYWORDS

3D MODEL; RENDERING; DIGITAL HERITAGE

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