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XV to XVIII Centuries

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The Renaissance Fortress at Civitella del Tronto: A Hypothesis for its Adaptive Reuse.

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Abstract
The first documentation of the village of Civitella dates back to the Angevin period, made by Charles I who decided the new defense of the Kingdom of Naples through the strengthening of some castles. Developed on the southern flank of the hill Camplì, the village is defended by a walled fortress located on the rocky ridge.
The ancient castle were largely destroyed in 1557 by the reconstruction of the Spanish fort observance of the new functional principles of military architecture.
Since 1861, the year of his capitulation, the fortress lies dormant as a museum of itself in the open, sporadically visited by scholars and curious travelers who can enjoy a unique view and a few remains concerning some military buildings. This huge architectural good, which belongs to the community of all time, will not last forever if you continue to feel the ghost of famous events. Its functional revitalization, necessary and appropriate in the adequate allocation of the use of current needs, can help make living, shared the whole chorus of the medieval village, as well as a portion of the north eastern region. So, there is an idea of compatible enhancement that aims disclosure of its past through new fruition.

Keywords: Civitella del Tronto, fortress, graphic representation.

1. Introduction
Majestic, austere, imperturbable. The fortress at Civitella del Tronto bears witness to the silence of the Teramo landscape, to a precious past invariably wrapped in obscurity. Its stone walls, chipped and consumed by time, chronicle the events in which it played a leading role during particular moments in the history of the Kingdom of Naples. Held together by the laws of construction and skilful design, they tend to irreversibly return to the earth from which they were removed. While still strong and massive, they cannot long withstand the neglect triggered by a lack of use, sanctioned by the annulment of the fortress’s defensive role, some 140 years ago.
To those viewing this Abruzzese fortress from afar, while travelling along narrow and winding provincial and municipal roads, it resembles a wall of granite perched atop the crest of a steep hillside, impregnable, and as unyielding as a knight’s shield deflecting every blow. Its presence elicits a sense of apprehension, for its high position above the countryside, guarding a territory that appears almost without boundaries. Boundless space and enclosure confront one another. This sense of juxtaposition is emphasised by the limit of a wall running along the rock ledge below, wrapping a portion of land once assigned a specific character, diverse and antithetical to the open and limitless natural countryside. A limit that expressed the political
motivations of a lengthy period in history, and of a particular territory. It is an indicator of the difference between what is inside and what is outside, where what counts is an awareness of relations.

2. Historical note

The iconographic and topographic elements of technical drawings from the 1700s, and those produced the following century, explicitly document the fortress’s important role as a stronghold within the territorial structure of the Kingdom of Naples, marking the impassable edge shared with the Papal terrains in the Marche. The area was once a key point along the northern frontier, an emblem of central unity. For six centuries its enclosure symbolically contained the entire Kingdom, to the same degree that the characteristics of the site ideally embraced those of a much vaster territory, the largest in the entire Italian Peninsula.

The sense of this duality is a powerful presence when visiting the fortress, which offers the possibility to contemplate an immense and magnificent 360° panorama, whose undisturbed view clearly justifies such an imposing defensive construction. From the north-west to the south-east it is possible to admire the ridges of the Laga Mountains (the Montagna dei Fiori, Monte Tignose, Monte Foltrone), the small villages perched atop the modest heights and nestled in the plains, and the Adriatic sea. In 1453 the humanist Flavio Biondo da Forlì wrote a detailed historic, geographic and anthropological report on this amenable zone in Roma Ristaurata, listing all of the small villages situated between the Tronto and the Tordino Rivers.

Nonetheless, the ecstasy produced by a visit to this landscape is soon overshadowed by the view afforded when arriving at the Bourbon construction. The most immediate sensations to strike the visitor are the advanced state of decay that plagues the building, the forced solitude in which it is now forced to exist and its detachment from the frenetic pace of contemporary life. The sensation is that of observing its ghost, hovering in a space that no longer belongs to it, deteriorated, and lost to other interests. The absence of an equilibrium between nature and artifice generates a sense of discomfort, of estrangement. The countryside has been modernised many times, its morphology transformed by new methods of production, while the fortress has remained indifferent to events around it. Despite having been subjected, during its lengthy service as a defensive outpost, to repeated interventions of “repairs and improvements” – demonstrated in primis by a number of notarised acts from 1639, by successive measured surveys made in 1732, known as the carte di Montemar, and by the drawings produced by Major Gestorf in 1821, to mention only a few – the fortress was not modified in either its appearance or physiognomy. Reconstructed in 1559, it nobly fulfilled its role until, in March 1861, it was forced to surrender to the armies of the House of Savoy. From this moment, an endless pillaging of materials caused serious problems of geological instability, owing to infiltrations of water that not even a massive consolidation and restoration project begun in 1973 by the Soprintendenza Beni Ambientali Architettonici Storici of L’Aquila, assisted by the Municipal Government and the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, was able to fully arrest.

Fig. 1- M. Tramezzino, Con il vero disegno di Civitella, (Venezia 1560)
Today, the fortification displays intermittent signs of inadequate or insufficient restorations and partial evocative reconstructions. Above all, it shows an undervalued utilisation of its spaces, in need of a form of revitalization able to bring it back to life, and permit it to perform other functions.

3. The Organization of the Fortress

Arranged along the east-west axis, following the contour lines of its sloping site, the fortress stands at 645 meters A.S.L., alongside the ancient village that once occupied the southern face of a hill approximately 20 km from Teramo and 30 meters from the sea. The fortress features a total area of roughly 25,000 sq. m. Its position dominates the Salinello valley to the north (in front of the Val Vibrata) and the valley of Sant’Omero to the south. Access is gained through the thirteenth century Porta Napoli, situated to the east, between the incipient walls of the bastion and the first homes of the village. A long ramp leads up to the first outpost, the lanceolate shaped bastion of St. Peter. From here, a short covered walkway leads into the Piazza del Cavaliere, reinforced by the small points of the ramparts of St. Paul to the east and St. Andrew to the north. Another ramp leads into the Piazza Maggiore, reinforced to the south by the square bastion of St. John and limited to the west by what was once the guards’ quarters, now little more than a ruin. Behind them is the Gran Piazza, situated at a higher level, defended to the north by the pentagonal bastion of San Giacomo, to the south of which are the warehouses (also ruins) and the remains of the Governor’s Palace, with the recovered church of San Giacomo to the west.

The current layout of the fortress, owing to its reconstruction under the Spanish and begun in the mid-1500s (coeval with the piazzaforte in Pescara and the castle in L’Aquila), hinges around the reorganisation of a space strongly conditioned by the morphology of the site, delimited by a mixtilinear wall, averaging 10 meters in height, reinforced by small advancing elements at the points where it folds and changes direction. Its tapered, slender and elongated plan runs for some 480 meters in length. It is slightly convex toward the south where it welcomes and protects the ancient village. The internal divisions respect two orders of spatial organisation: to the east of the first places is an enfilade of three open squares, differing in size and shape (each approximately 1,700 sq. m) and...
terraced (Piazza Cavaliere, Maggiore, Gran Piazza). The second is preceded by the Governor’s Palace, inserted like a hinge between the squares and a series of minor buildings aligned in two parallel rows to the west, with a very narrow width (the maximum width varies from 30 m to 15 at the extremity of the baluardo del Carmine). Thus arranged, the fortress was clearly provided with a representative area able to contain troops on training manoeuvres and parades, and a smaller area, though suitable to meeting the logistic needs of the fortress (warehouses, barracks, armouries, hospital, mess hall and kitchen, stalls and storage).

A precise description of the interior layout of the entire structure was provided in 1821 by Major Mario Gestor of the Austrian Military Engineering Corp to the General of the Cavalry Baron di Trimont, in a lengthy report attached to three drawings that graphically provide clear indications regarding the physical components of the entire military complex adjacent to the walled village. After a few brief historic references, with extreme precision Major Gestor describes all of the works in masonry and the relations between them, justifying their form and position and indicating their functions. Thus we learn that in addition to the outdoor level, accessible via corridors, stairs, ramps and bridges, there was also an underground space for defensive purposes, storage, prisons, and no less than five cisterns, passages and sorties.

4. A Revitalising Proposal

The defining characteristics of the identity and uniqueness of this building, linked to the ancient village of Civitella del Tronto, and tied to its position dominating the agricultural landscape of the “aprtuine” hills, situated between the Apennines of Teramo and the Adriatic Sea, represent important resources atop which to found a policy of development and reorganisation. In particular, the imposing mass of the fortress offers occasions for new uses based on the specific needs of local citizens and the inhabitants of the hinterland.

A brief investigation made in situ revealed the possibilities to improve the aforementioned functions provided in minimum part by the fortress, currently housing a small museum of arms, and visited by an average of 80 people per day, and the spaces alongside the public garden. Studies of varying types, conducted primarily within the university, examining a number of areas near Teramo and involving the entire region, have revealed interesting socio-economic conditions in need of verification through possible further in-depth investigations. Furthermore, the observation of examples of analogous typologies proved useful to understanding the object of this specific study. The proposal advanced here is the fruit of a research experience conducted as part of the course in Architectural Surveying at the “G.
d’Annunzio” University of Pescara. It evaluates the opportunity of employing analytical procedures relative to the conservation and reuse of historic constructions. Similar to the means by which the layered methodology adopted in archaeology pursues documentary objectives, in the study of historic heritage, utilising drawing, surveying operations, including, but not limited to, the taking of measurements, serve to visually represent the various aspects of an existing condition, and eventually advance a possible approach to intervention. Proposals must begin with a consideration of the characteristics of what exists, making comparisons it solely in terms of the compatibility suggested by analysis, to skilfully unite innovation with tradition. All of this pushes toward an interpretation of the fortress, as it stands today, as the sum of possible different uses, some discarded for their apparent incompatibility, some fully efficient and others yet to be recovered. Uses that, taken together, cannot help but stimulate an organic vision of the diverse moments in the building’s history, related above all to issues of layout-function, but also to the technological options characteristic of any new use, materials, aesthetic preferences, the attitudes expressed by particular environments and conditions imposed by the client. An attentive site survey, examining more than dimensions and volumes, pursued the intention to propose a hypothesis for the recovery of this former defensive construction, prompted by the results of specific investigations in this field. The intention was to juxtapose against the stability and immortality of the fortress the lightness of new structures for ludic, recreational, ephemeral and quiet functions, in other words relaxing activities enjoyed in spaces with shifting confines. Our intention is to oppose the rigidity of the building with a series of diverse and interrelated functions, to avoid relegating the museum of arms to rooms separated from spaces used for rest and dining, option instead to integrate these functions. The first step is to dedicate the various open spaces to activities that benefit from the summer climate. The first square could be used as a small cinema-theatre, with a pseudo-Greek plan built from mobile structures. The second square could make an ideal discotheque, and the third could be used as a restaurant-piano bar and for meetings, similar to an urban plaza. These spaces could be surrounded, for the most part, by largely open areas, corners and environments hosting the various objects from the museum’s collection (arms, uniforms, accessories, ornaments, medals, etc.), accompanied by large prints of maps, drawings and historic photographs, as well as projections of images of the fortress captured from particular internal and external viewpoints. The area of the discotheque could be used to project short films and documentaries recounting the historic events involving the fortress at Civitella and its village. Covered spaces could be used for a wide range of functions, accessible also during the winter. The Governor’s Palace (to be refurbished) and the church of S. Giacomo could become home to a library of military culture, and an archive containing documents about the fortress, currently conserved elsewhere, enhanced by the creation of an on-line platform for consulting this material. The former warehouses (to be recovered) could host a restaurant-bar and gym, while the former barracks could be converted to host the various services tied to the activities to be managed, for example, by the current "Progetto Fortezza e Territorio" Cooperative. Other spaces could host a children’s play area to satisfy the needs of even the youngest visitors. Of course there remains a great deal of space to be used for pleasurable walks or to be appreciated during pauses, enjoying temporary thematic exhibitions, in addition to using the faussebraye as a landscaped play area for children.

5. Conclusions
The fortress is today the antithesis of the city, where this latter is no longer circumscribed by precise and defined limits. It is composed, instead, of adjacent units lacking any precise logic governing their expansion. Its continual modification reveals the static nature of the fortress – irremovable and archaic – that sacrifices nothing in the name of its “inhospitality”. The two are unable to enter into
any harmony, yet both share the complexity of diverse spaces, of different activities, of multiple organisations that must function and in some cases interact.

There is a need to give a new meaning to the historic heritage of this city, together with diverse environmental and functional qualities that differ from its built and open spaces. We must imagine modifications to these spaces and uses that, at the regional level, will allow Civitella to once again exercise its power to attract people and activities, extending its ancient role as a nodal point in the network of minor centres and flows of traffic, economics and culture, across the central hilly regions of the Adriatic.

The road toward renewal, in our case, began with a complex survey that, fully aware that what we know is never all there is to know, considers not only the walls of the fortress, with all of their layers, but expanding its horizons, pushes toward exposing possible components of another nature, strictly related to the building itself. This means considering not only material information, applied techniques and the various interventions to which the building has been subjected, but also the observation of the surrounding territory, the vaster territory of the province. There is also a temporal dimension that looks at past situations that have been documented, as sources from which to draw information, in order to more organically relate a ‘layered’ investigation with a possible programme of interventions.

Note

1 “Vien poi ne Precutini il fiume Librata, chiamato dagli antichi Abbula da la bianchezza dell'acque; & è cinque miglia dal Tronto: & e man dritta have alcune terre, e castella non troppo belle, come Corropoli, Neretio; & a man manca è Tortoreto, Santo Mero, e S. Egidio, presso dove il fiume Librata nasce; viene poi Salino fiume, che pur nasce ne lo Appenino, e nò è più che duo miglia lunge di Librata: & have a man dritta per terra su ne monti un castello chiamato Rocchetta; e Civitella, ch'è una terra con una fortezza così forte, quanto habbia quella contrada tutta, si per loco, dove la è edificata, si anco per esser bene munita di mura, & a man manca ha queste castella, Montorio, e più sopra, Poggio Morello e più su Troia ...”. Roma Ristaurata, et Italia illustrata di Biondo da Forli. Translated into proper Italian for Lucio Fauno. In Venetia MDXLIII Col privilegio del sommo Pontefice Paulo III, p. 207 v e r.

2 Some years ago an escalator was placed just outside Porta Naples to connect the round tower directly with the interior of the fortress, avoiding the tiring though fascinating climb on foot, still available to those travelling back downhill, at the end of a visit.

3 Works carried out between 1639 and '60 involved the reconstruction of the rastrello, the renovation of the church of S. Giacomo, the castellan’s house, the soldiers’ barracks and the grain loft and reparations to doors and windows. Between 1681 and '83 modifications were made to the parapets of the bastion of St. John and the rastrello in front of the drawbridge, other minor works were undertaken in 1711. Cf. notary public G. P. Procaccini, n.178, 6 June 1681; n. 201, 12 March 1682; n. 246, 24 July 1683; notary public F. A. Sebastiani, n. 3332, 24 September 1711, Teramo State Archives.

4 The restoration was made possible thanks also the support of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno and the Municipal Government and completed in 1986.

5 The first documentation of the fortress and the village of Civitella dates back to the rule of the House of Anjou, when Charles I decided to reorganise the Kingdom’s defences by improving a number of castles and suppressing others. On 28 November 1269, Civitella was placed on the list fortress to be refurbished owing to their strategic position. It remained on subsequent lists until 1280, when the fortifications were inspected by the Protomagister Operum Curie the architect Pierre d’Angicourt.

6 The engraving by Tramezzino, realised in Venice in 1560 to document the assault by the Duke of Guisa in 1557, features an oblique view of a wholly different condition in which it is possible to note a fortified enclosure with an elongated form, whose interior, on the north-east side, contains the citadel, a small castle featuring a quadrangular plan with three circular towers and a bastion at each corner. Completed in 1450 at the request of Alfonso I of Aragon, the castle was one of the first examples of the Aragonese typology in Abruzzo, with analogous examples in its close successor in Ortona and the
illustrious Castelnuovo. The famous engraving was reprinted and bound by Giulio Ballino in De disegni delle più illustri città e fortezze del mondo, Venice, 1568.

7 Observing the functional principles of military architecture, the lower ring of masonry constructions relative to the village was maintained, intact since 1770, the year of its first restoration, followed by other interventions in 1801 and '47, prior to Italian Unification in 1861. The original document is conserved at the State Archives in Vienna.

8 It must be noted that the nature of a stratigraphic investigation inherently requires destructive works to eliminate any uncertainty or interpretation of the state-of-the-art and to expose eventual connections not revealed by the conditions of excavation. This means that a proper set of classifying documents is indispensable when similar verifications will not be possible in the future.

9 A complete survey must also take into account social, political, economic and, in this case, military inferences, together with any other factors that, during a useful period of time, may have had a strong effect on the building, in order to define the most complete framework for understanding its current state.

References


Fig. 3- Sketching the longitudinal profile; Hypothesis for the recovery of Fortress (Tunzi)