

The Hidden Heritage of Ankara Citadel: Ambiguous Future between Conservation and Transformation

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# Hidden Heritage of Ankara Citadel: Ambiguous Future between Conservation and Transformation

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## Introduction

While addressing the subject of preservation and enhancement of the Turkish building heritage, the need to relate with a complex system of assets reveals to be extremely interesting. Such a variety of building typologies and potential dating allows for the cultural heritage of Asia Minor to be included among the most complex ones, under a histo-

riographic as well as typological point of view, to a point that each scientific research on the issue necessarily requires a preliminary methodological consideration. If the complexity of this overview is easily comprehensible in relation to a heterogeneous group of cases, however, the same wealth of information can be found in one single architectural structure too. This is possible due to the peculiarity shared by many buildings of the Turkish archaeological heritage to vouch for centuries of demolitions, stratifications, transformations and reconstructions, which are still visible up to date and well acknowledgeable through an in-depth analysis of those architectures (Romeo, Rudiero 2014). The fortress of Ankara represents, perhaps, one of the most authentic examples of this particular feature. Erected during the byzantine period (upon a previous layer, dating back to the classical period), the building has been subject to alternated phases that contributed to its modifications and its promotion among the most representative assets of the urban center. Nowadays, the building displays a precarious conservation state; its full readability and fruition are threatened by some development plans of neighboring areas and by questionable management policies (Romeo, Morezzi, Rudiero 2017). The current analysis aims to identify the symbolic and cultural values of the building, stu-

Ankara's Castle.



dying the urban transformation policies underway and suggesting suitable intervention strategies, able to conjugate the necessary development of the area with the conservation requirements of the cultural heritage.

### Ankara Citadel over time

All sources regarding the Citadel emphasize how it should be considered one of the prime architectural examples of the Byzantine period, even though the structure keeps the traces of many previous historical phases as well as subsequent transformations. As scholars indeed recall (Serin 1998), the construction of the fortress in its current shape is ascribed to the half of the VII century, regarding the first internal enclosing wall, while the construction of the second and external wall seems to date back to the IX century. If such dating is confirmed by many scholars, who dealt with the asset (Foss 1977), it is likewise true that the structure has developed its morphology in the following centuries, by changing and adapting over the Seljuk and Ottoman periods (Gunay 2012). Therefore, the shape of the asset, although exemplary of a specific historical time, displays a first extremely interesting dichotomy in its planimetric and volumetric development: on the one hand, a specific architectural shape has consolidated over time, by preserving itself through partial removal of the previous phases; on the other, the castle is particularly appealing not only due to its current appearance, but also thanks to the numerous attestations that it bears (Serin 2006).

Planimetric and architectural analysis of the asset draws attention to an incredibly effective defensive structure, thanks to a double level of enclosing

wall and a series of defensive and sighting towers that entirely surround the structure. It is equally fascinating pointing out how the fortress declares its own past through the presence of inscriptions and *spolia* (Romeo, Rudiero 2014). The structure is indeed distinguished by the presence of a great quantity of counting material in the defensive stonework and of inscriptions reporting the restoration date of the Seljuk period. Even more, captivating within the analysis of the building are the numerous examples of reuse of classical elements. Very widespread across Asia Minor and not only, but this practice is also particularly relevant for the specific case of Ankara and constitutes a precise feature of the castle, which strengthens the link with the past and the urban heritage. Also, thanks to the contribution of the archaeological missions that took place on the territory in recent years, the city of Ankara is home to a remarkable heritage of the classical era and pre-

The main square inside the Citadel structure.



serves some excellent sites of extraordinary historical and documentary relevance (such as the Roman thermal baths, or the *Monumentum Ancyranum*, or the temple of Augustus) (Serin 2008). At the same time, though, the transformations of the city and the dominations that followed to the classical period, brought destruction and oblivion to many other structures, which nowadays either appear in the state of ruin or have been completely demolished. All this considered, the *spolia* of the Citadel add further value to the constructive one: they become the only trace of the buildings belonging to the classical past, such as the Roman theatre, still visible today, but lying in a state of utter decay, or the pagan temples, whose mention appears only in bibliographic studies (Foss 1977).

Therefore, besides the architectural, defensive and volumetric characteristics of the Citadel, it is possible to identify a narration of the city's past in

Main Gate with evident signs of reconstruction.



the building itself, which deserves promotion and communication. The reuse, in fact, does not seem a phenomenon focusing on a specific area of the building only; rather, it represents a feature shared by the asset as a whole, developing in different areas of the building and through different modalities. For example, it is to underline how the practice of reuse of classical elements is widespread in the wall's masonry of the castle's Main Gate and how it constitutes not only a constructive weave but also a historical one. Moreover, besides the reuse of blocks presumably belonging to Roman era buildings, in the masonry development of the defensive wall, some marble columns' drums, arranged in vertical within the defensive wall, are noteworthy. If this first typology of reuse regards the constructive aspect only, as the integrated elements do not feature any decorative or symbolic trait, a different reuse strategy can be spotted in other areas of the fortress, where the blocks are modelled and decorated instead.

Within the asset, in fact, the reuse does not concern the construction elements only. It involves blocks revealing a different configuration too, aimed for instance at decoration or communication purposes. It is the case of many inscriptions still visible nowadays in the wall's masonry of the fortress, which most likely belonged to friezes of classical buildings are included, at present, within the walls of the defensive architecture in question (Serin 1998). In the same way, many Latin inscriptions have been included within the asset's weave and, today, they bear witness of the city's past. In the case of the Ankara fortress, besides the practice of reuse, already widespread in many areas of Asia Minor, the methodology adopted to place older buildings' blocks in the new asset and the motivation to be ascribed to this operation is extremely



captivating. In fact, it is worth observing that many constructive elements from reuse, if not all of them, have been incorporated with the intention of making the inscriptions hardly readable – by placing the block opposite to the reading direction, or by cancelling the figurative components of the frieze, in the case of appropriately modelled blocks. Moreover, those elements portraying human shapes, as in the case of the blocks utilized in the internal side of the second defensive wall, have been subject to *damnatio memoriae*, considering the detection of the statues' faces destruction, in line with what had occurred in many other cases in Asia Minor and not only. Consequently, it is important to underline that, besides the architectural and volumetric features of the asset, today, the fortress of Ankara bears an unexpressed value linked to the memory of the place and owns the rare characteristic to potentially become an instrument to the memory of an urban past prior to the construction of the asset itself (Maris, Uckac, Uslu 2009). The reuse elements still present within the structure represent a wealth of proves that should be appropriately included in a restoration and promotion project, able to communicate each and every shade of the asset's value.

### The current state of conservation

In order to set up guidelines for the definition of a preservation and promotion project for the asset, it is fundamental to provide a panoramic about of the current state of the area and, subsequently, about the strategies adopted by the municipality in the last years to renew the area. The Citadel nowadays appears in a mediocre state of preservation and instruments apt to the promotion of the asset are not available on site. Although the building is cen-

tral to the touristic routes of the city, as of today the visit to the asset are merely functional to the panoramic view of the urban centre, thus disregarding any understanding of the fortress architecture (Serin 2005). As further confirmation of the inadequacy of the communication system of the asset's value, no promotional tool is available in the area (e.g. visiting tours, information boards, points of interest, etc.) and that the fruition of the fortress is accessible without meeting any instrument for the comprehension and a more in-depth analysis of the building. Moreover, the area included in the Citadel has been subject, over the years, to a number of transformation interventions aimed at bringing the existent buildings (that until few years ago lied in a state of ruins) back to the historic confirmation dating to the first half of the 20th century, by restoring or reconstructing building systems or volumetrics destroyed by subsequent modifications. Such a

In this and in the following page.  
Reuses of roman *spolia* as new bricks of construction.  
Reuses of roman *spolia* as new bricks of construction.





phenomenon, very close to the stylistic restoration, brings back today a complex scenario, where the historic elements of greatest value (i.e. the fortress itself, with its original components and the reuse practice already described) result as secondary factors, almost unrelated to the fruition of the asset. Such a negative approach, that involves not only the fortress area but also the neighbouring quarters, has been subject to some urban interventions in the last decades by the municipality, whose aim was to restore some neighbourhoods experiencing awful housing conditions until the '90s. The analysis of such a transformation (Yardimci 2008), partially already implemented and partially programmed, is very relevant to understanding how a potential restoration and promotion intervention should be integrated into a wider scale project of major impact.



### Renovation plans

The 1/5000 plan related to the renovation of the old city centre area of Ankara, and 1/1000 Scale for Protection & Development of Ankara Renovation Area, were Approved on May 17th, 2007, by the Regional Council for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage. Soon, these plans became a matter of litigation against the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, filed by various non-governmental organizations, universities, the Union of Chambers of Turkish Architects and Engineers (TMMOB) and public institutions. They have received a lot of criticism in terms of the environment, transportation and traffic, as regards the entirety of the planned location, and the integrity of the plan, based on public interest (Tuncer 2013). Firstly, the historical city centre of Ankara currently approved within the

renovation area is already in conflict with three zoning plans for protection in effect. These plans are “Ulus Historical City Center Conservation, maintenance & Reconstruction Plan” (Ulus Project), “Ankara Castle and Its Surroundings Conservation Plan” and “Ankara Central Old City Fabric Planning, Rehabilitation and Protection Project”. These ongoing projects for about 18 years were cancelled by the municipality of Ankara Metropolitan City decision, putting in effect the newest approved plans. These actions were in complying many national laws related to the conservation and protection of historic areas. Those projects were not finished yet, and even not considered or cancelled by the new Project Plans (Osmançavusoglu 2006).

Secondly, in the Project notes, it says that « for the properties owned, or will be obtained through other legal means by public institutions, primarily renewal projects and applications will be realized by the public institutions themselves» (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, 2008). In the project area there are 10 big regions owned by different public institutions. However, because of this very special feature of public ownership, the Project Plan has disregarded the social and economic aspects of the private shop tenants and employees in the workplace area (Onur 2018).

Thirdly, although the announced objective of the Project is to develop solutions to the problems in the planning approach used in previous projects.

In this context, the commercial, tourist and cultural regions enhanced in accordance with the development objectives through restoration and building of housing, trade, culture, tourism and social areas with opening new transportation roads in line with these objectives. This meant to destroy a part of the historic tissue to give place for the new construction of buildings and streets instead of de-

veloping smart solutions which secure the preservation of the urban structure of the area, not only individual buildings and monumental areas.

Another big criticism the Project received was by DO.CO.MO.MO. (Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement) Turkey’s National Working Group, which considered that the plans do not respect an important era of the architectural history of Turkey, especially the projects in 1950, representing a successful and characteristic example of Turkey post-modern architecture and urban design applications. The destruction of these complex is a disrespect of the Republic architecture of Turkey.

Finally, the Plan requires the destruction of several buildings and structures which became prominent in the economic and social life of Ankara citizens and replace them with touristic, first-class restaurants and shops, which redefine the identity

Reuse of roman decorated parts. Sculptures and inscriptions are used to reconstruct the Medieval architecture.





of the area in particular, and Ankara in general.

For all the above reasons, many architectural and engineering chambers with different NGOs decided to sew the municipality of Ankara in the high administrative court, in order to stop the application of the Project and suggested Plans, since the preservation of the Citadel area, Ulus Square and the surrounding structures and of the city, as historical heritage is very important. Defending this request with the following reasons:

- The structures in the question of a high value of social, economic and architectural features and become prominent in city image.
- Ulus Square and surrounding buildings, starting from the Ottoman period until the present with various stages shows the history and architecture of the city.

Although the Plan provides, however, the awareness of protecting Ottoman and the beginning of

Reuse of roman parts in the Medieval structures.



the Early Republican Period, this process should not be limited to periods, it should include in the same scope. Architecture and symbolic usage values of other buildings, as a step that will prevent the forgetting of a part of the past, thus, buildings built after the Second World War must also be protected.

- These buildings in and around the Citadel, defining the story of modernization of the capital Ankara. For example, the first escalator, new building materials and first structural systems, and such properties should be preserved.

- These structures were obtained as a result of the development of architectural characteristics and formed the identity of the region.

- Structures were obtained through competitions, judged by a jury of famous architects of the period. They feature aesthetic tendencies and reveals tastes of the period

- The functional values of the structures, as business and trade centre, should be preserved

- The Citadel, Ulus Square and its surrounding buildings formed the memories of those who lived or visited Ankara in their life. which has a place in urban memory.

- Moreover, those buildings, have taken place in cultural and social life, are a novel subject that features only Ankara, not the scale of Turkey as a common cultural heritage It should be evaluated as the local identity of the city.

The trial took place for nine long years, in the end, the court decided in 2016 to reject the Project and force the Ankara metropolitan municipality to seize the application of the plans. But this happened after many parts of the Project were implemented, different buildings were destroyed or lost. And for the last three years, the work stopped in remaining parts of the Project, leaving different areas suffering neglect and facing degradation and



collapse as the case of the Roman amphitheatre on the feet of the Citadel's hill. The future of the area now is ambiguous, and many initiatives were done by different stakeholders but mainly they were for local or partial solutions, and with the last local elections and the change of the ruling party in the municipality of Ankara, new plans of conservation seem more complex to be issued and implemented.

Additionally, because of the court resolutions, different experts consider any intervention performed in the area as illegal and should be reversed by the municipality, which can expose the whole area for bigger damage than the intervention itself.

Some voices were calling for announcing a planning competition to provide new plans for the future preservation and conservation of the historic centre of Ankara, but these calls are not applicable since the law does not allow to give the planning projects of city municipalities to the private sector, it should be performed by public institutions in Turkey.

For all the aforementioned reasons, the future of the area, and the protection of its heritage is not clear until now.

### **Hypotetical guidelines for the preservation and promotion of the fortress**

On the basis of what has been examined, it seems necessary to reaffirm the need for a global restoration plan of the asset, capable to put the historical testimony of the structure at the centre of any transformation strategy (Araoz 2011). Referring to the touristic and visual relevance of the building, due to its location, and linking it to the several renovation plans and projects of the surrounding areas might constitute a significant opportunity for the city of

Ankara and the promotion of its heritage (Günay 2010). In this direction, it is recommendable not only to provide the structure with an adequate promotion and communication project but also to develop such a project around the millenary history of the city. Nowadays, as already mentioned, the Citadel of Ankara is one of the rare buildings that preserves traces from the different historical ages of the urban centre (Özçakır, Bilgin Altınöz, Mignosa 2017), without privileging any period but, on the contrary, succeeding in providing important testimonies of each era of the past. Thus, the implementation of a communication project able to build upon the history of the city, by managing to inclu-



Roman ancient parts inside the construction of the minaret of the recent mosque near the citadel area.

de the defensive architecture not only to communicate the relevance of the asset itself but also of the transformation phases of the urban centre, is highly desirable (Romeo, Morezzi, Rudiero 2015). For this reason, a promotion system, able to communicate the dating of the different phenomena that still nowadays can be seen in the defensive architecture, by linking them to the historical period that issued them, should be design. Promotion systems based upon the use of the light, or multi-sensory, or linked to the emerging media; immersive itineraries could transform the Citadel into an open space museum, not only dedicated to the defensive architectures of the area but to the city's history as a whole.

### Conclusions

The above-mentioned hypothesis should be reasonably integrated into the development plans of the surrounding and neighbouring areas, thus creating a proper synergy between the existing housing renovation, as well as the urban decor renewal, and the promotion strategies of the fortress linked to the touristic flows, coupled with a comprehension path of the architectonic reality. From such a synergy, the two-fold benefit of thinking of a Citadel of Ankara more integrated into the urban transformation dynamics of the city and that could become a real symbol of the historical past of the city could arise.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paragraphs n. 2, 3, 4 has been written by Emanuele Morezzi, while paragraph 5 by Salah Haj Ismail. The paragraphs n. 1, 6 has been written by both the authors.