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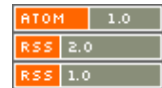


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*Modernity dealing with the past. Giovanni Amico and the late-baroque transformation of the Santissima Annunziata church in Trapani*



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# Volume 14, Issue 1 (2024)

Issue edited by Editors-in-Chief V. Valzano and I. Trizio

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## CASTLE ARCHITECTURES BETWEEN ANCIENT SIGNS AND NEW MEANINGS. CASTELLO GRANDE IN THE ANCIENT CENTRE OF BRINDISI

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### Abstract

The study of Brindisi's Castello Grande is a further addition to the census, cataloguing and documentation activity aimed at gaining knowledge of the fortified architecture scattered throughout the Apulian territory. This is a heritage that is little understood perhaps because it has not been sufficiently investigated and therefore deserves special attention. They are multi-layered organisms, endangered by neglect, or tormented by demolitions, replacements and manipulations of various kinds. This is why knowledge becomes the central moment in the formulation of a conservation and valorisation project, on which the fate of the pre-existence depends.

### Keywords

Castello Grande of Brindisi, knowledge, interpretative framework, conservation, valorisation

### 1. Preliminary remarks

The research carried out on the Castello Grande of Brindisi, also known as "di Terra" to distinguish it from the Alfonsino castle, is a further element added to the census, cataloguing and documentation activity aimed at gaining knowledge of the fortified architecture scattered throughout the Apulian territory, which began in the 1970s and is still in progress (Willemsen, 1972, 1977; De Vita, 1974; Willemsen & Odenthal, 1978; Fuzio, 1979; Licinio, 1991, 2001, 2010; Santoro, 1982; Gelao & Giacobotti, 1999; de Cadilhac, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2023).

The Brindisi case invites us to reflect on the more general theme of conservation, hence on the fate to be reserved for a heritage, the fortified one, little understood perhaps because it has not been sufficiently investigated. There are many issues at stake: under-use; lack of maintenance from which derive diversified forms of degradation; abandonment; lack of attention to a testimony that is not adequately considered, often offended by superfetations, demolitions, replacements, transformations of various kinds.

The study of this specific case, based on careful historical investigation and direct knowledge conducted through surveying, addresses complex issues that are strongly interconnected: the urgency to safeguard a testimony of undoubted

historical-artistic value; the need to resolve certain structural weaknesses; the need to restore the lost unity to the castle, often reduced to a sum of parts; the need to open the site to public use, without thereby interfering with the activities of the Italian Navy, which has been the custodian of the property since the beginning of the 20th century and which carries out its representation, administrative management and training activities there; finally, the desire to enhance an indisputable symbol of collective memory.

These are requirements that highlight a number of critical issues involving as many design nodes that revolve around the conservation of the ancient material and the preservation of the signs of the historical stratifications, stability and structural safety, the revitalisation of the entire castle and its recovery aimed at a conscious use, preferably public, thus overturning the paradigm of the original functional vocation that wanted the castle impregnable, therefore impenetrable. In fact, that of accessibility is a delicate issue that not only poses the problem of giving renewed meaning to the pre-existence, but also responds to the need for a renewed fruition to be pursued with the active involvement of the community.

This requires the overcoming of architectural barriers to be resolved with the insertion of devices that ensure a harmonious relationship

between old and new, while still respecting the pre-existence.

## 2. Preliminary remarks



**Fig. 1:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Situation, urban context (a) and view from above (b) (photos and graphic processing by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

In restoration, the knowledge project is central because the fate of the built heritage depends on it. It is a path of progressive approach to the object of study, based on a historical-critical approach, which guides the restorer throughout the entire project process, from the analytical study, to the construction of an interpretative framework, to the elaboration of the project idea, up to the realisation phase. In the process of acquiring and interpreting the data, various aspects must be taken into account, so that the degree and scale of detailing will vary according to the size, complexity and specificity of the case under investigation, which is unique and unrepeatable due to its origin, its singular evolutionary cycle of spatial, distributive, structural and figurative modifications, and its indissoluble relationship with the environmental context, in some cases profoundly changed as in the example of the Castello Grande in Brindisi (Fig. 1).

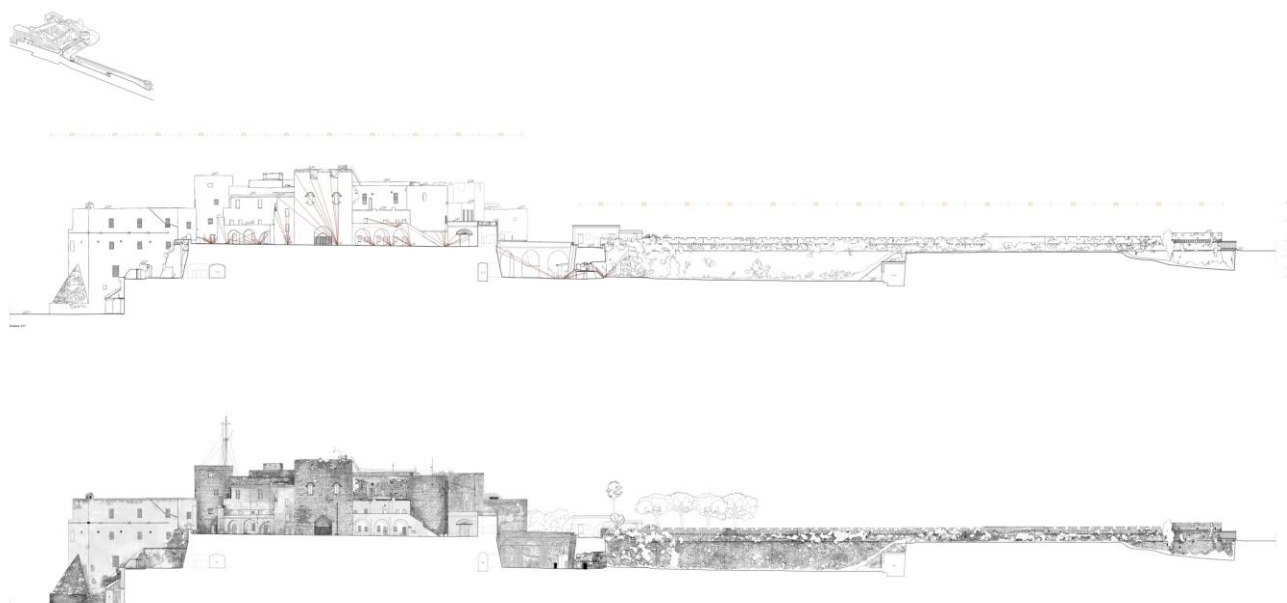
It is these peculiarities that will guide the cognitive process that will help to compose a useful frame of reference to clarify and support design choices that have conservation purposes and appropriate proposals for valorisation. The research conducted on the Terra Castle offered an opportunity to confirm the importance of knowledge understood as the construction of an appropriate data system, from which every design process aimed at conservation and valorisation cannot disregard in view of the enjoyment of the cultural value expressed by this extraordinary heritage. The study of the fortified body made use of historical investigation based on circumstantial documentary research and direct analysis conducted through an integrated survey (celerimetric, aero-photogrammetric, digital terrestrial photogrammetric) (Aterini & Giuricin, 2020; Leserri & Rossi, 2023)(Figs. 2-3).

The next step, from data acquisition to knowledge, made it possible to construct a scientifically founded interpretative framework that was able to relate the data from the archival survey with that coming from the mapping of wall types supported by careful wall sampling and the stratigraphic study of the elevations (Figs. 4-5).

The objective was to formulate well-founded hypotheses regarding the castle's constructive evolution, never disjointed from the concomitant urban phenomena, and to create the premises for the development of the design theme that must respond to the various questions posed by the case study.



**Fig. 2:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Plan at elevation + 2.50 m, metric survey (a) and architectural survey (b) (survey and graphic restitution by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)



**Fig. 3:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Section AA', metric survey (a) and architectural survey (b) (survey and graphic restitution by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

The cognitive framework has not only allowed us to understand the architectural organism as a whole, but also to highlight the various critical aspects affecting the conservative aspects of traditional materials and building techniques, as well as the weave of relations with the context,

compromised by coarse urban planning and a misunderstood sense of modernity.

### 3 The reconstruction of the evolutionary process

Because of its strong symbolic charge, the Castle is the emblem of the city, the place of

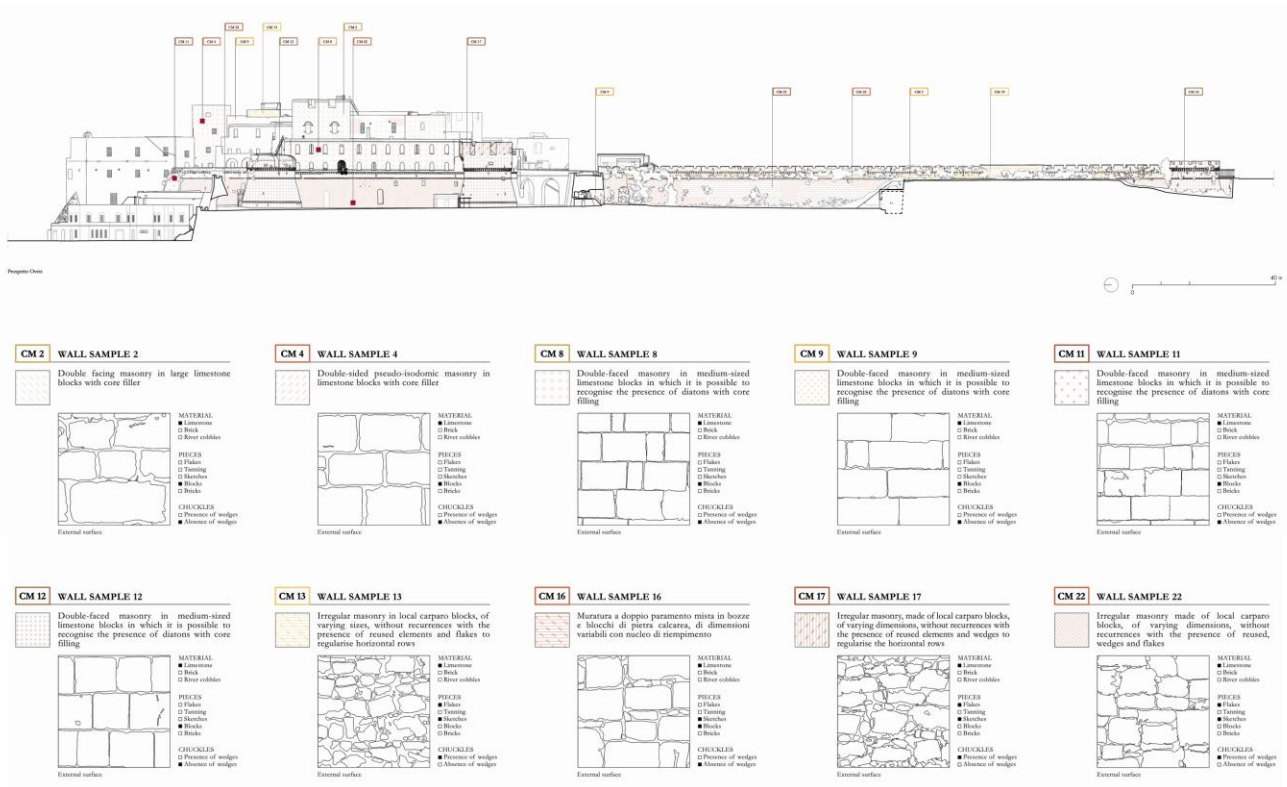


Fig. 4: The Great Castle of Brindisi. West elevation, survey of wall types and samples (survey and graphic rendering by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

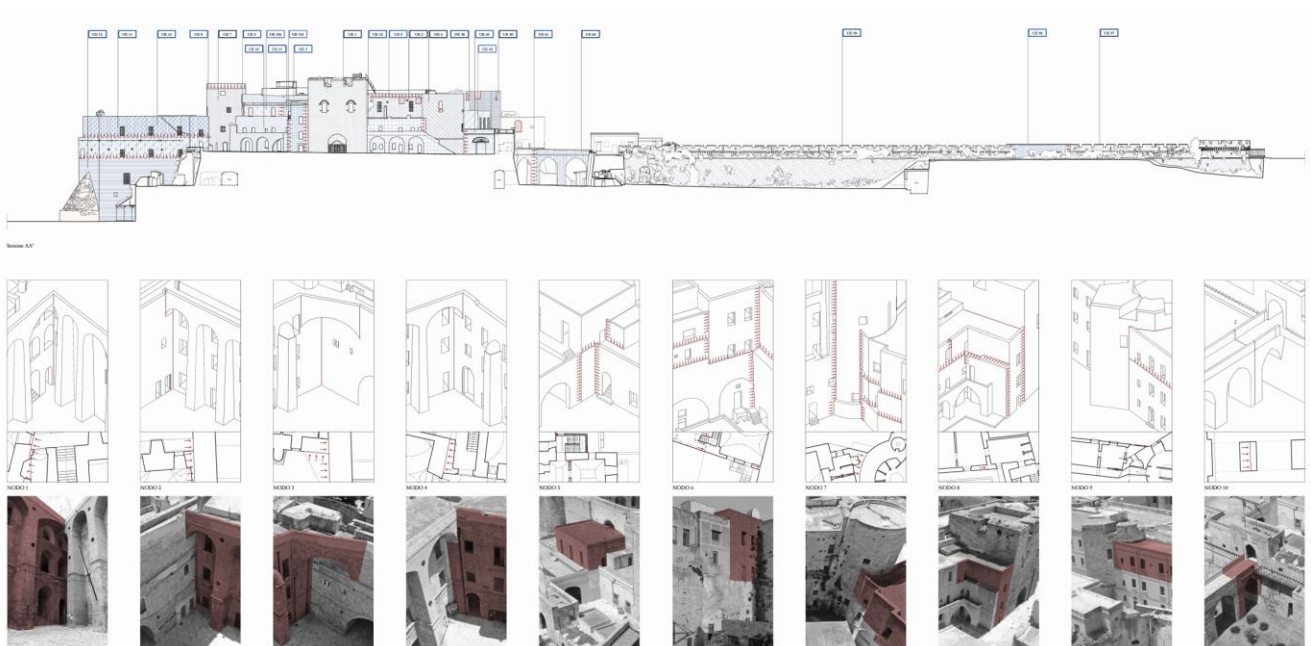
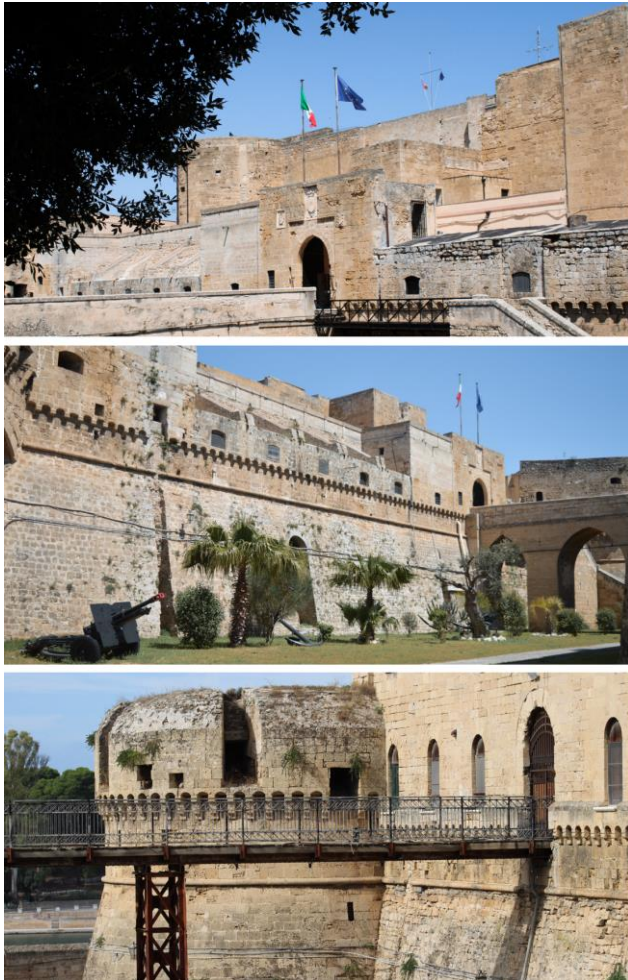


Fig. 5: The Great Castle of Brindisi. Section AA', stratigraphic analysis of the elevations (graphic elaborations by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

the Brindisi community recognises itself (Fig. 6).

It was built by Frederick II on a strategic point, at the end of the western sinus on the site of the church of Santa Maria dei Teutonici and its hospital (Alaggio, 2009), it was born as a military garrison to defend the urban core, but also as a place of representation of imperial power.



**Fig. 6:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Entrance portal to the Castle (a); Southern elevation (b); Western elevation with iron access bridge (c) (photos by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

The original core consisting of a trapezoidal plan enclosure with a portico leaning against the inner side of the south curtain (Agnello, 1960; Chiarello, Ferrante, Lamorgese, Liddo & Strippoli, 2021-2022), seven towers, an entrance on the west side at the base of the donjon and a ring moat, underwent continuous transformations (Fig. 7a). The original core consisting of a trapezoidal plan enclosure with a portico leaning against the inner side of the south curtain (Agnello, 1960; Chiarello, Ferrante, Lamorgese, Liddo & Strippoli, 2021-

2022), seven towers, an entrance on the west side at the base of the donjon and a ring moat, underwent continuous transformations over time as it had to respond to changing needs (Fig. 7a).

The first enlargement dates back to the Angevin period with the addition of the Palatium, which was built against the inner side of the north wing (Licinio, 1994), when it was decided to reinforce the curtain walls with scarp walls by raising the towers (Chiarello, Ferrante, Lamorgese, Liddo & Strippoli, 2021-2022) (Fig. 7b).

A substantial transformation is documented in the Aragonese period, when the Swabian moat was closed with the construction of vaulted rooms (Della Monaca, 1967), two corner towers of the Swabian nucleus were topped, an outer curtain wall was built concentric to the first one (Carito G., 1993-94), equipping it with corner towers with a circular section, a new moat was dug protected by an antemurale, the entrance was moved to the southern curtain wall, which could be reached by a stone bridge, and the city wall was extended, also with battlements and a masonry counterscarp (Fig. 7c).

During the Spanish viceroyalty, it was decided to strengthen the front facing the sea with the construction of two crenellated bastions (the Baluardo della Campanella to the west, and the Baluardo di Levante to the east) (Della Monaca, 1967; Tarantino, 1980), raise the Aragonese towers (Carito, 1993-94) and curtain walls (Tarantino, 1980; Carito, 1993-94), re-circularise the circular towers of the Swabian nucleus, reconfigure the parade ground with the volumetric increase of three arms (Chiarello, Ferrante, Lamorgese, Liddo & Strippoli, 2021-2022), and strengthen a section of the fortified circuit on the scale of the city (Fig. 7d).

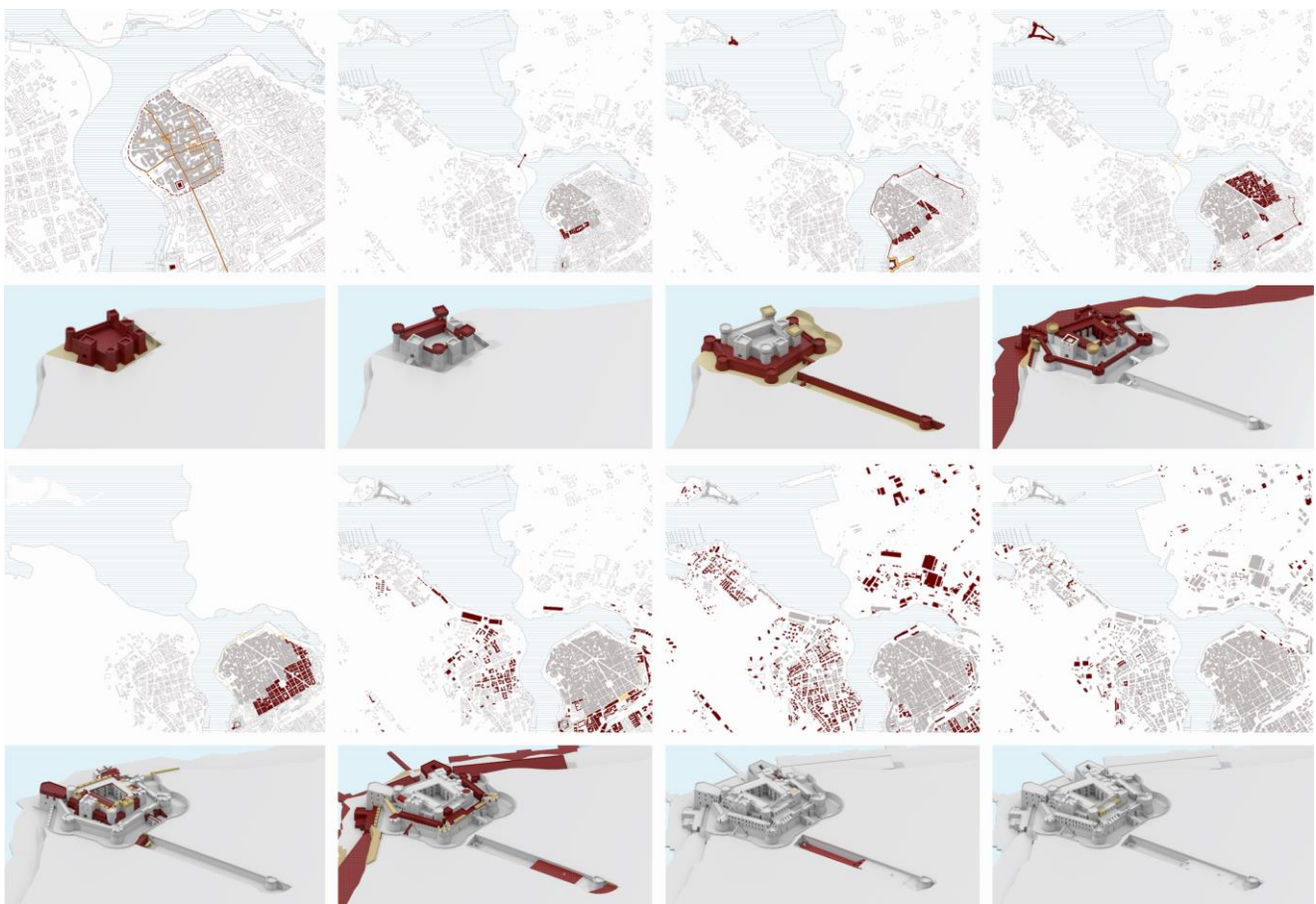
With the transformation into a penitentiary during the Napoleonic period (De Vita, 1974; Tarantino, 1980; Cristallo, 1995; D'Avino, 1998), when there was a gradual dismantling of the urban circle, the castle, which would retain this new destination until after National Unity (D'Avino, 1998) underwent adaptation works, which involved an internal redistribution, the construction of volumes that saturated the spaces between one tower and another of the Swabian nucleus, the tampering of the Magistra Tower, and the raising of the Campanella bastion (D'Avino, 1998) (Fig. 7e).

In the early 20th century, the Castle was converted into barracks when, sold by the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Defence (Tarantino, 1980; Carito, 1993-94; D’Avino, 1998), it became the headquarters of the Italian Navy (Lenzi, 1998). The arms on the land sides were raised, as was the Bastion of the Levant, the Swabian entrance was rehabilitated with the construction of a metal bridge to cross the Aragonese moat (Chiarello, Ferrante, Lamorgese, Liddo & Strippoli, 2021-2022), two volumes were built on the east and west elevations respectively, with partial demolition of the Aragonese curtain wall, the Bastion of the Levant was raised, and urgent works of military utility were carried out to coincide with the outbreak of the Great War. These included the excavation of the ring moat for the construction of a freight elevator for the transfer of torpedoes to the quay, and the construction of a volume - presumably a bunker - in the urban moat near the Inferno Tower, camouflaged with topsoil (Fig. 7f).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the internal partition of the Swabian nucleus was

modified for exclusively functional needs, to the point of altering the layout by parcelling out even considerable rooms, to the point of compromising the very meaning of some towers inside which toilets or technical rooms were inserted. In the 1980s, when the castle housed the administrative headquarters of the Italian Navy (Matitecchia, 2001) maintenance work was undertaken on the installations, the restoration of the northern façade, the structural rehabilitation of the Campanella bastion, and the removal of the two volumes adjoining the Magistra tower, which had been profoundly altered over time (Chiarello, Ferrante, Lamorgese, Liddo & Strippoli, 2021-2022) (Fig. 7g-7h).

These are all stratifications that have modified the original core, reinterpreting it continuously and contributing to defining a true architectural palimpsest that poses innumerable questions – first and foremost, the preservation and valorisation of the historical stratifications – to which we must try to provide answers.



**Fig. 7:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Reconstructive hypothesis of the evolutionary phases at the urban and architectural scales (graphic elaborations by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

#### 4. *The problematic knots, the questions, the possible directions for a conscious conservation action paragraph*

There are many unresolved issues on both the urban and architectural scales. Analysing the relationship between the castle and the old city centre, it was observed that over time the connection between the fortified organism, the city's defensive bulwark, and the fortified circuit built to defend it, of which only a few traces remain. Begun by Frederick II, continued during the Aragonese period and strengthened during the Spanish viceroyalty, the circuit took place on three sides, the fourth being naturally defended from the sea. And it is by virtue of these observations that it is possible to suggest lines of direction with the aim of reconnecting lost relationships. The issue could be addressed both from the point of view of spatial articulation and from the point of view of fruition. On the one hand, design expedients could be adopted to conserve and valorise the residual traces of the fortified walls (Fig. 8), reinterpreting the lost continuity of the defensive circle: for example, one could think of a 'basolatura' of the ring road that traces the ancient route, emphasising its sign with the planting of trees to integrate the existing greenery. On the other hand, suggesting possible thematic itineraries through which to connect significant elements and places worthy of attention.



**Fig. 8:** Remains of the fortified defensive circle of the city of Brindisi. Porta Mesagne and Bastione Carlo (a); walls of Brindisi behind the Piscine Limarie (b) (photos by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

A particularly problematic knot is the surviving portion of the urban moat, which is almost completely buried at the moment when the fortified wall loses its original function. This is a laceration located to the southwest at the point where it joins the castle moat, connected to it by a tunnel passage. It is a neglected space, over time reduced to little more than an appendage of the castle, which was manipulated during the First World War when it was decided to build a bunker disguised as fill soil near the Torrione dell'Inferno (Fig. 9).



**Fig. 9:** Remains of the fortified defensive circle of the city of Brindisi. Surviving urban moat between the Castle and the Torrione dell'Inferno (a); Northern view of the Torrione dell'Inferno (b) (photos by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

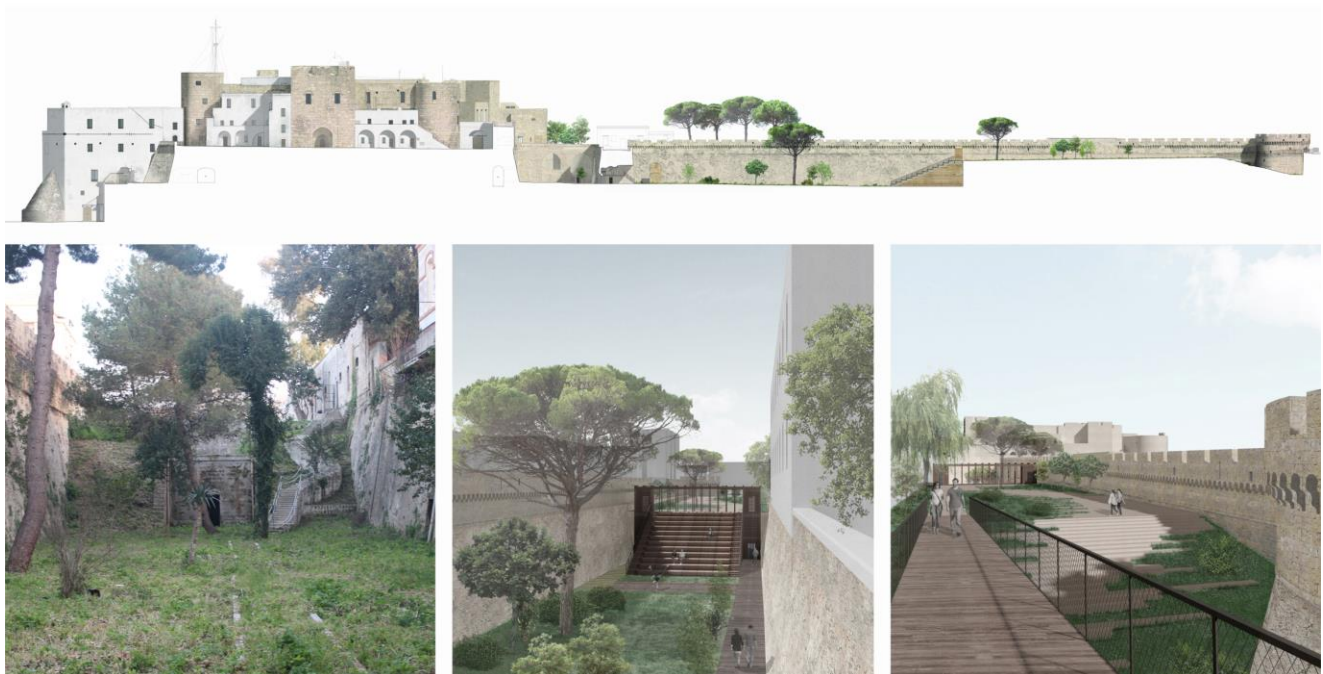
This intervention resulted in two significant unevennesses within the residual portion of the urban excavation, now separated from the city and inaccessible except by the castle moat. This portion could be redeemed from its abandoned condition if the opportunity were taken to reunite the castle with the ancient centre, for example by including what has survived of the excavation within an itinerary of public use. This could be an opportunity to restore architectural dignity to the moat by resorting to a few, discreet, compatible signs of reversibility and taking as starting points

the geometry of the site, the orographic features, the surviving wall traces of the defensive circuit. These are all components that could become part of a unified project with the objective of connecting the castle to the city. The idea could be concretely realised by resorting to a path - a promenade, if you will - which, in encompassing the residual part of the urban moat, would make it accessible with an integrated system of footbridges, stairs, and mechanical lifts (Fig. 10).

The objective is to guide a hypothetical visitor to the exploration and understanding of the articulated system built for defence against external incursions. A second problematic issue concerns the castle, which raises several questions regarding the preservation of the signs left by time, respect for the historical stratifications, the valorisation of the entire organism, a correct use and a conscious fruition. In recent times, the castle has been subjected to continuous manipulations that have altered the distributional layout with internal partitions, to the point of compromising the spatiality and jeopardising the legibility of the

whole. Therefore, special attention must be paid to the notable rooms that are recognised as having an unquestionable representative value, such as the three large halls at the level of the parade ground that have been tampered with over time, or the towers, elements of high symbolic significance, which have been casually downgraded with the introduction of toilets or technical rooms.

In the face of the complexity and multiplicity of the issues at stake, a strategic idea could be developed to aim at the conservation of the historical stratifications, a pondered revision of the distributional aspects and an overall enhancement of the castle, planning integrated and coordinated interventions that do not neglect the structural, historical-critical and aesthetic implications. The objective will be to restore organicity to the fortified complex, ready to welcome functions complementary to the existing ones, which are useful to the needs expressed by the community, as long as they respect the organism as a whole and the activities carried out by the Navy.



**Fig. 10:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Section AA', foreshadowing of the possible design outcome (a). The residual section of the urban moat, current state (b) and foreshadowing of the possible design outcome (b, c) (photos and graphic elaborations by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)



**Fig. 11:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Overall plan +2,50 m, foreshadowing of the possible design outcome (a), reception hall at the level of the parade ground, current state (b) and foreshadowing of the possible design outcome (c) and elevator project to overcome the difference in height between the moat leve and that of Piazza d'Armi (d) (photos and graphic elaborations by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)



**Fig. 12:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Access arch to Piazza d'Armi with northern façade on the back (a), North-Western façade of the Piazza d'Armi (b) south-east façade of the Piazza d'Armi with access arch (c) (photos by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)



**Fig. 13:** The Great Castle of Brindisi. Overall plan +12,5 m, foreshadowing of the possible design outcome (a), panorama visible from terraces (b), the terraces at roof level, current state (c) and foreshadowing of the possible design outcome (d) (photos and graphic elaborations by Chiarello G., Ferrante A., Lamorgese R., Liddo G., Strippoli F., 2022)

offer a credible prospect of reuse in conformity with the character of the pre-existing building (Fig. 11), which would fit in well with the idea of the route which, in continuity with the urban promenade, could help to reinterpret the unity of the whole, offering a hypothetical visitor a journey through time and space. Thus, a visit itinerary

would be envisaged that, from the level of the moat, reaches the parade ground (Fig. 12), arriving at the terraces located at the level of the roofs, where one could enjoy from above the suggestive panorama offered by the city facing the mirror of the port basin (Fig. 13).

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