



QUADERNI di ARCHITETTURA e DESIGN

7|2024 Knowledge and design for heritage

a cura di Francesco Defilippis e Darío Álvarez Álvarez

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Knowledge and design for heritage

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Progetto e materialità nel paesaggio archeologico.

Esperienze di intervento nelle ville romane di Castilla y León

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Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon s.r.l., via Ajaccio 41-43, 00198 Roma (Italia)
<http://www.edizioniquasar.it/>

ISSN 2611-4437 - eISBN 978-88-5491-444-5

Tutti i diritti riservati

LAURA MARÍA LÁZARO SAN JOÉ, LARA REDONDO GONZÁLES, ANA MUÑOZ LÓPEZ,
*Progetto e materialità nel paesaggio archeologico. Esperienze di intervento
nelle ville romane di Castilla y León, QuAD, 7, 2024, pp. 127-144.*

Gli articoli pubblicati nella Rivista sono sottoposti a referee nel sistema a doppio cieco.

Progetto e materialità nel paesaggio archeologico

Esperienze di intervento nelle ville romane di Castilla y León

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Architectural intervention project in archaeological sites with an elevated heritage value requires an understanding of the complexity of the landscape it configures. Accordingly, sensitive intervention strategies are determined which, in the face of apparently similar scenarios, with parallel starting conditions, allow the project to evolve and adapt to the particularities shown in each case. In this sense, a comparative and critical analysis of three architectural actions in Roman Villas in the landscape of Castilla y León (Spain) is presented: the Roman Villa of Santa Cruz (Burgos, 1995/2015), the Roman Villa of El Vergel (Ávila, 2020) and the Roman Domus of Pedreiras de Lago (León, 2018). These cases are representative examples of how the project mechanisms and the determination of its materiality are linked to making legible and enhancing the values of the heritage asset, as well as of itself in the landscape. The aim is to protect, conserve and keep the archaeological site alive, making it physically and culturally accessible.

L'attuazione architettonica nei siti archeologici ad alto valore patrimoniale richiede la comprensione della complessità del paesaggio che configura. Di conseguenza, si determinano strategie di intervento sensibili che, a fronte di scenari apparentemente simili, con le stesse condizioni di partenza, permettono al progetto di evolversi e adattarsi alle particolarità di ciascun caso. In questo senso, presentiamo un'analisi comparativa e critica di tre interventi architettonici in ville romane nel paesaggio di Castilla y León (Spagna): la Villa Romana di Santa Cruz (Burgos, 1995/2015), la Villa Romana di El Vergel (Ávila, 2020) e la Domus Romana di Pedreiras de Lago (León, 2018). I casi proposti rappresentano un paradigma di come i meccanismi progettuali e la determinazione della sua materialità siano legati alla leggibilità e al rafforzamento dei valori del bene patrimoniale come del paesaggio. Il tutto con l'obiettivo finale di proteggere, conservare e mantenere vivo il sito archeologico, rendendolo fisicamente e culturalmente accessibile.

Key words: Roman villas, Castilla y León, landscape, archaeological heritage, architectural project

Parole chiave: Ville romane, Castilla y León, paesaggio, patrimonio archeologico, progetto architettonico

▪ *Introduction*

In every architectural intervention project on an archaeological site, reflections arise on the scale, form and materiality that the proposal must have to allow the preservation of the remains and, at the same time, to be integrated into the surrounding landscape. The maintenance of the remains is essential for the preservation of the historical and collective memory of heritage sites, but also to ensure the transmission of knowledge of past times to people external to their context. In the words of Miguel Ángel Aníbarro, «while landscape implies perception, extension and artistic mediation, place implies experience, concentration and condensation of meanings: for this reason, it tends to connect with architecture»¹. To this end, it is necessary to carry out enhancement projects that study the specific characteristics of the landscapes. The design of the new elements, considering the composition and scale of the construction, and the materials of composing it, are, in this sense, key aspects to reflect on. For example, formally, a protective structure could compete in image and scale with nearby singular pre-existences. Furthermore, an inadequate materiality could provoke an undesired impact or even cause confusion in the comprehension of the site.

The form of the new architecture is conditioned, in the first place, by the dimensions it must cover. Some interventions in this line are conceived as a large modular structure limited to protecting the integrity of the site and which could be extended to shelter the future extensions of the excavations. This approach to archaeology aligns with the perspective of Michael Foucault, where it is understood that the archaeological context can be changeable and «does not attempt to fix time and replace the flow of events by correlations that draw an immobile figure»². On the other hand, there are other interventions that go beyond this purely functional character to provide an updated reading of the remains that allows them to be understood³. The result is a symbiosis between history, contemporary architecture and the landscape where all the components dialogue with one another to construct a narrative that transmits to the visitors the antique ways of inhabiting the landscape.

Some projects undertaken by the Grupo de Investigación Reconocido LAB/PAP, Laboratorio de Paisaje arquitectónico, Patrimonial y Cultural⁴, in the Spanish region of Castilla y León, try to address this complex issue. Their actions focus both on their integration into the landscape and on the conservation of pre-existing heritage and its transmission to society. As the coordinators of the Laboratory, architects Darío Álvarez and Miguel Ángel de la Iglesia, explain, the team has always tried «to provide, through the architectural project, tools and arguments to make the barely tangible visible, building architectural landscapes that make both the remains themselves and the models that originated them more recognizable for the nowadays visitor»⁵.

All these ideas are particularly evident in three of his projects for the adequacy of Roman villas, selected as paradigms that synthesize a vast experience of action in heritage landscapes. In the Roman Villa of Santa Cruz, in Baños de Valdearados, Burgos (1993-2013), three wooden volumes are proposed that cover, by means of a permeable enclosure, the Roman remains while generating an interesting dialogue with the surroundings. Inside, there is a linear route that crosses the pavilions and allows visitors to tour the complex. The actions in the Roman Villa of “El Vergel” in San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila (2016-2018) are shown as a sequence of pavilions that protect the most significant Roman remains, linked in this case by the same itinerary. Finally, in the intervention in La Domus romana de Pedreiras del Lago, León (2018) the protection of the most vulnerable mural remains is combined with an itinerary through the site, along the perimeter of the house, which leads to the pavilion.

To show the importance of the adaptation of the design strategy and the choice of materials to offer solutions in accordance with functional requirements, without sacrificing interaction with the site, a critical and comparative analysis of these three actions is proposed. To this end, we have consulted the publications edited by the Laboratory itself on the interventions, as well as those issued by the teams of archaeologists who report on the excavation processes of the Roman remains. In addition, the full documentation of the projects elaborated by the Laboratorio de Paisaje arquitectónico, Patrimonial y Cultural has been accessed to provide complete information on the proposals. This information, comprising the preliminary documentation, the successive phases of the development of the projects and the final construction documents, enables to present a rigorous study of the three case studies developed in this document.

▪ *Roman Villa of Santa Cruz*

The first project to be brought up shows the intervention of contemporary reconfiguration of the archaeological landscape of the Roman Villa of Santa Cruz, in the town of Baños de Valdearados, Burgos (Spain). The Villa, dated to the 4th and 5th centuries AD, was partially excavated and documented in the early 1970s, when it was discovered by chance during agricultural work. Subsequently, in 1993, the Junta de Castilla y León commissioned the JMAD⁶ team of architects to carry out the project. The work, which was completed in 1995⁷, was aimed at protecting and preparing the archaeological remains for tourist visits.

Excavations brought to light many mural structures in different rooms which also contained the presence of magnificent mosaics. These representations, which are particularly important for their size and detail, need to be protected from the extreme climate of the Castilian region⁸. In this sense, architects propose the construction of independent pavilions, designed entirely in wood, re-

Fig. 1. General view of the Villa de Santa Cruz in Baños de Valdearados, Burgos (Photo by LAB/PAP, 2015).



lated in some investigations to the intervention of the Schutzbau Areal Ackerman by Peter Zumthor in Chur, Switzerland (1986)⁹. In the case of the Villa de Santa Cruz, the structure of the volumes and the access walkways is made up of laminated timber porticoes and trusses, with occasional supports on concrete footings that are compatible with the existing archaeological structures (*fig. 1*).

However, the need to conserve the mosaics goes beyond the architectural project and becomes the intentionality of a true shelter or refuge¹⁰ also linked to its own materiality. In a tectonic sense, the natural materials enclose a floor and central space - as in the most primitive examples of huts - and which, in the case of the contemporary pavilions in Santa Cruz, has evolved towards a horizontal framework to allow light to enter. The enclosure system configures a homogeneous exterior image entirely made up of wooden planks. The vertical walls are separated from the ground so as not to interfere with the archaeological structures¹¹; similarly, they do not touch the roof, forming a completely open strip in the last section. All this allows controlled interior ventilation and lighting conditions, which favours the preservation of the pre-existing structures and the mosaics. Furthermore, as opposed to the idea of a single volume as a container for the remains of the past, the architectural project is fragmented into three pieces of restrained scale, conscious of their impact on the rural landscape (*fig. 2*). Moreover, the new architecture does not seek to identify and formally define the archaeological spaces it encloses, but rather to protect and safeguard them (*fig. 3*).

Its image is composed of a succession of elements that determine the approach and the route to the “museumised” archaeological site. From the road, a row

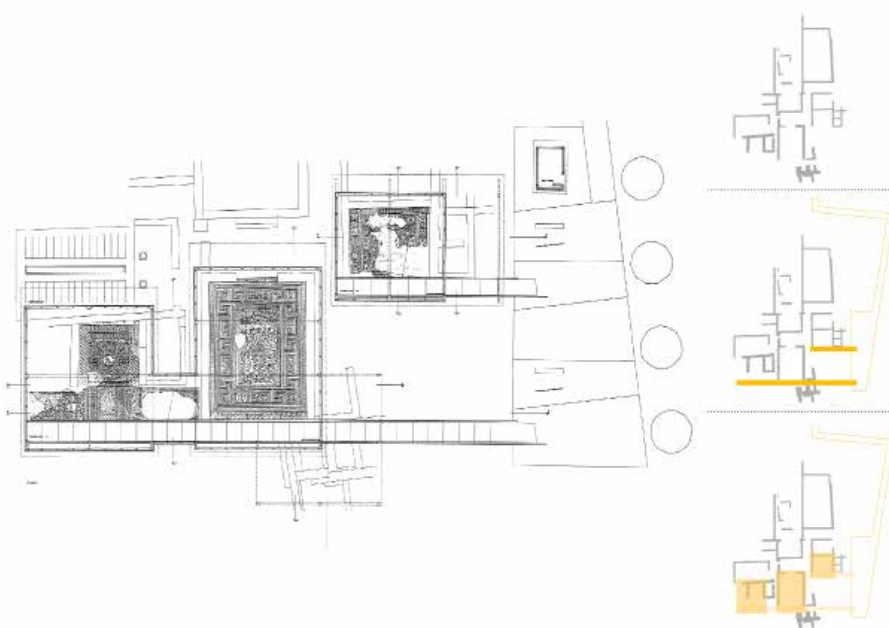


Fig. 2. Exterior view of the pavilions of the Villa de Santa Cruz in Baños de Valdearados, Burgos (Photo by LAB/PAP, 2021).

of cypress trees counteracts the prevailing horizontality of the site. The in situ concrete route accompanies the cypress trees, taking the visitor into the landscape created by this architecture. This itinerary leads to two paths that allow the visitor to enter the pavilions. In both cases, this is done by means of a system of suspended walkways that flies over the archaeological reality and crosses the volumes, allowing the contemplation and understanding of the remains of the Villa. In this way, the perception of the interior space is divided into two completely different worlds. On the one hand, the contemporary world of artifice made up of wooden walkways, ramps, tensors and steel cables. On the other hand, the archaeological and passive context interpreted only aerially from the distance of the elevated walkways and configured by the stone remains of the past as opposed to the materials and lightness of the new architecture (*fig. 4*).

Finally, current reality of the complex is the result of projects concatenated over time that meet the needs of each moment. The commission of 1995 was followed in 2013 by a project¹², in this case, carried out by the Laboratorio. What at the beginning was simply the need for a roof to protect the remains, with the design transformations it becomes a museistic entity; a reception area and a small pavilion for the caretaker's office are incorporated, where all the elements are integrated to interpret the Villa in a single action. However, beyond the basic requirements of the project, it constitutes one of the first fields of experimentation of the drafting team to understand the architecture linked to a cultural landscape¹³. This is a new design dimension, in which architecture has the vocation of configuring a new place, altering the natural space with which it coexists and endowing it with new meanings.

Fig. 3. General intervention plan and concept diagrams of the Villa de Santa Cruz in Baños de Valdearados, Burgos (LAB/PAP 2013).



▪ Roman Villa of “El Vergel”

Declared an Asset of Cultural Interest in 2016, the archaeological complex of the Villa de “El Vergel” mainly refers to the vestiges of a Roman domestic structure of important dimensions, dated between the 2nd and 5th centuries AD. The complex, compared for its relevance with sites such as Olmeda (Palencia) or Almenara-Puras (Valladolid)¹⁴, is located on the outskirts of the town of San Pedro del Arroyo, in Ávila, and its remains are partially buried under the parish church of San Pedro Apóstol and the adjacent cemetery. This Villa shows an important heritage value, firstly, due to the structure of its architectural implementation and, secondly, due to the representative mosaics it contains, most of them sufficiently complete, although in a delicate state of conservation. Among them, the Meleager mosaic (Storia Meleagri) stands out, in whose central scene the mythological hero appears killing the Calydonian boar. This artistic piece is configured as the most relevant of the group, due to the detail of its composition and its own dimensions - about 100 m² -, which is why it probably formed the central emblem of a possible triclinium.

With the aim of protecting and enhancing the entity of this Village, in 2013 the Laboratorio de Paisaje arquitectónico, Patrimonial y Cultural carried out an analytical study that resulted, two years later, in a complete project aimed at solving these main needs. The approach is based on the construction of a system of pavilions and walkways that generate a balance between architecture and ruin. As in the Baños intervention, a fragmented solution is sought to avoid the con-



Fig. 4. Interior space of the pavilion with the Mosaic of Bacchus in the Villa de Santa Cruz in Baños de Valdearados, Burgos (Photo by LAB/PAP, 2021).

struction of a large container volume that, in addition to being unsustainable, would conflict with the presence of the Villa in the landscape (*fig. 5*). In this case the purpose is not to serve as a cover for all the remains, but to focus the new volumes on the old rooms to reconstruct their missing spatiality. With this, a proportionate solution is obtained between the pre-existence and the intervention, where each pavilion provides new information to the ruin and the reading of the whole is facilitated. Likewise, the volumetric division into independent units offers an expandable response as the excavations progress over time.

The route materializes through a walkway arranged above the vestiges and has a double function in the project strategy. On the one hand, it resolves a strictly functional issue of connection between the different pavilions. On the other hand, this walkway is designed in various sections always parallel to the internal circulation of the Villa, so the original way of traveling through it is recovered. This once again contributes to a better understanding of the complex during the visit, by offering a real perception of the hierarchy, order and scale of each of the spaces.

Currently, the intervention is made up of two volumes that correspond to the Visitors Pavilion and the Meleagro Mosaic Pavilion (*fig. 6*). After a previous exterior access-space, the first one is divided into two functional parts: a reception and exhibition area, and a protection area with two mosaics. The reception area partially occupies the space where the Villa's hot springs were located, so, compositionally, a large glass opening is designed that reproduces the original width of the entrance door to the pool¹⁵. In the second volume, however, the entire

Fig. 5. Intervention in the Roman Villa of El Vergel in San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila (Photo by © Álvaro Viera, 2019).



space is dedicated to the complete protection of the mosaic and the reconfiguration of the room with a contemporary architectural language. Both pavilions are connected by the described walkway, which allows a physically and conceptually accessible itinerary through the interior of the Villa¹⁶. The introduction of this linear element that crosses the modern construction and flies over the old one, allows a continuous transition between two design situations. On the one hand, one in which the new architecture contains the ruin and delimits the limits of space. In this case, a delimited vision of the Villa is provided in which modern forms, by reinterpreting ancient ones, acquire a notable presence. On the other hand, a situation in which the intervention acts as a functional complement to the preexistence and allows its free perception in the global context. By not having the interference of new volumes, the ruin obtains total prominence and reminds the visitor of the archaeological condition of the place. It therefore alternates between two architectural scenarios that are conceptually opposite but complementary in the correct understanding of the heritage complex.

As for the design image, once again the protection volumes are integrated into the surroundings with the intention of not competing with the main landmark of the nearby landscape: the church¹⁷. For this reason, the pavilions differ materially and formally from the tower, whose visual power in the landscape is given by its verticality with respect to the extensive plain. In this case, «construction is understood as a means at the service of space, which becomes part of the discourse»¹⁸, so the image of the pavilions «is subordinated to the formation of interior spaces and, consequently, is more abstract and neutral»¹⁹ (*fig. 7*). Thus, each of the volumes has an enclosure formed by a double façade, as a volumetric reinterpretation of the ancient Roman wall. The exterior face is made with micro-perforated corrugated

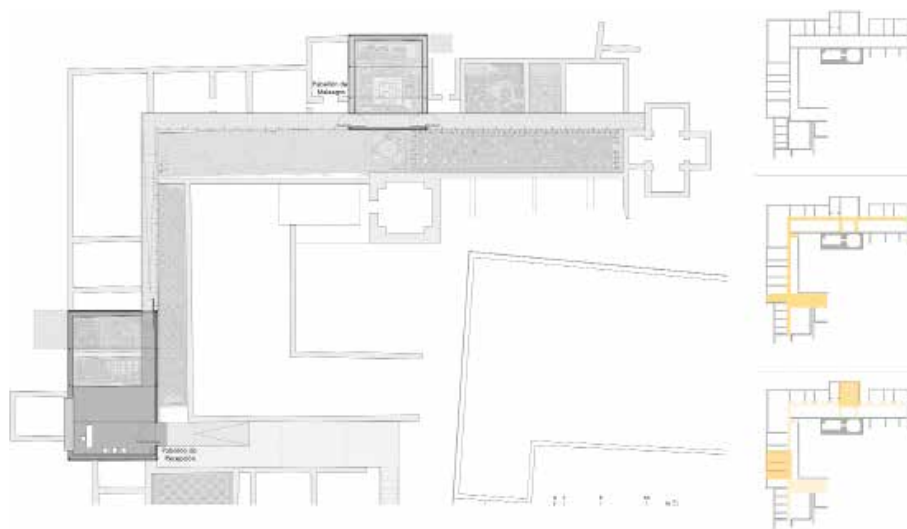


Fig. 6. General plan and concept diagrams of the intervention in the Roman Villa of El Vergel in San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila (LAB/PAP 2017).

sheet metal, as is the plot closure and the roof, while on the inside there is a continuous “u-glass” enclosure. All of this is sustained by a steel structure supported on reversible precast concrete modules²⁰. The choice of contemporary materials, close to an industrial aesthetic with standardized elements that give the volumes a certain provisional character (*fig. 8*), contrasts with the use of stone in pre-existing constructions and offers a renewed landscape image that updates the place in time.

▪ Roman domus of Pedreiras de Lago

The project of Pedreiras de Lago is in the Cultural and Natural Area of Las Médulas²¹, specifically in Lago de Carucedo (León). The surrounding landscape is anthropic; a mountainous enclave that was exploited in the 1st century AD²² by the Romans to extract the gold contained in the land. For this purpose, they employed a technique based on hydraulic power that allowed the removal of the reddish Miocene conglomerate terrain²³. The use of vast quantities of water in the mining operation sculpted the topography, generating the sharp profiles that characterise the settlement and even creating an artificial lake at Carucedo. The establishment of this gold exploitation might have implied the construction of architectures for administrative and residential use by the leaders of the exploitation, amongst which the Domus de Pedreiras del Lago could be found.

The building, which was abandoned at the end of the 2nd century BC, was organised around a quadrangular porticoed courtyard with arcades on three sides, in the middle of which was an octagonal basin, to which the rooms with mural paintings and a glazed triforium overlooked. The remains of the Roman

Fig. 7. Interior space of the visitor reception pavilion in the Roman Villa of El Vergel in San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila (Photo by © Álvaro Viera, 2019).



Fig. 8. Exterior view of the pavilions in the Roman Villa of El Vergel in San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila (Photo by © Álvaro Viera, 2019).



settlement remained under an old limekiln until its excavation at the end of the 20th century by the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas²⁴. Subsequently, in 2018, the Laboratorio de Paisaje arquitectónico, Patrimonial y Cultural team took charge of its consolidation and enhancement.

The intervention aims to adapt the site for open-air visits. The work carried out consists of the partial reconstruction of the pre-existing walls, the establishment of an appropriate drainage system, the partial repointing of the archaeological remains to guarantee their conservation and comprehension and the establishment of appropriate signage²⁵. As an informative method for the excavation itself, an accessible route has been built that allows the perimeter of the ancient Domus to be visited and the different areas that make it up to be identified (*fig. 9*). The itinerary around the walls of the building culminates in a small

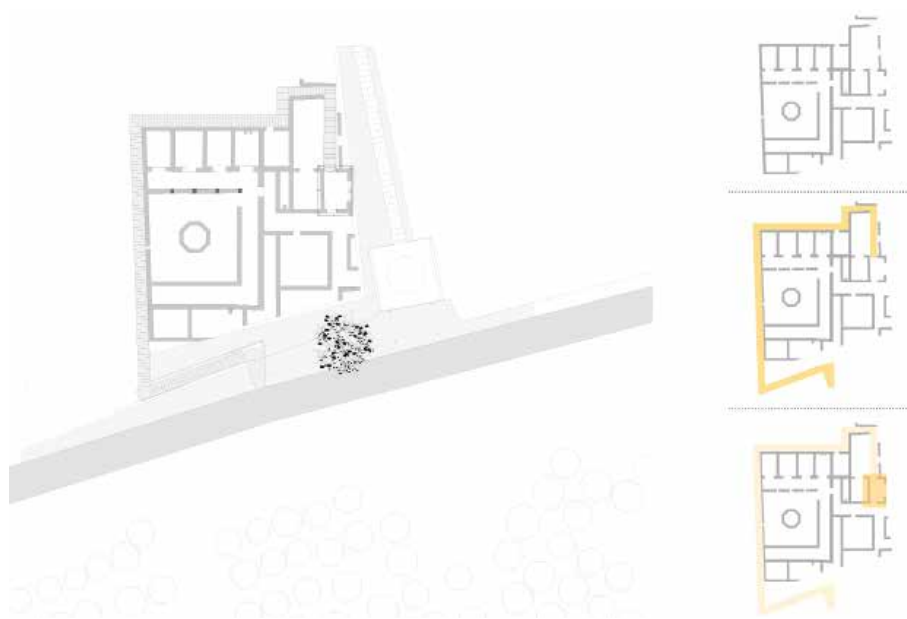


Fig. 9. General plan and concept diagrams of the intervention in the Domus Romana de Pedreiras de Lago, in Lago de Carucedo (Las Médulas, León) (LAB/PAP, 2018).

pavilion with a metal structure that protects the most delicate remains; some paintings from the Roman period (*fig. 10*).

The itinerary begins at a lower level, with a ramp access located in a ditch between a reddish stone masonry wall that lies on the old enclosure of the limekiln²⁶ complex and another interior corten steel wall (*fig. 11*). The pathway, built with prefabricated concrete slabs with a washed finish, runs mostly on the ground level up to the pavilion, where it is transformed into a platform and ends inside the metal box which contains the mural paintings (*fig. 12*).

The project proposes a minimal intervention in the landscape and only the enclosure of the indispensable elements to guarantee its preservation. Both the path and the small contemporary construction show, through their forms, their positioning and the materials used, a special attention to the integration of the architecture into the landscape. The project, in this matter, is resolved by means of materials with similar tonalities to those of the landscape. In this way, both the reddish colour of the corten steel and that of the stone of the entrance wall and the concrete slabs establish a dialogue with the historical memory and nature that allows them to blend in with their surroundings. The pavilion, which seems to be the piece of the intervention that stands out most, appears «as a metallic element, with a continuous matt finish that, owing to the micro-perforations of its sheet metal skin, shows an appearance with different degrees of transparency or opacity depending on the point of observation»²⁷. As in the El Vergel pavilions, it the micro-perforations of the enclosure allow the landscape to be observed from the inside, making the apparent external consistence of the construction vanish (*fig. 13*).

Fig.10. Aerial image of the intervention in the Domus Romana de Pedreiras de Lago, in Lago de Carucedo (Las Médulas, León) (Photo by LAB/PAP, 2019).



Fig. 11. Entrance ramp to the site of the Domus Romana de Pedreiras de Lago, in Lago de Carucedo (Las Médulas, León) (Photo by LAB/PAP, 2018).



Fig. 12. Access walkway to the pavilion of the Domus Romana de Pedreiras de Lago, in Lago de Carucedo (Las Médulas, León) (Photo by LAB/PAP, 2018).



▪ *Conclusions*

Through the critical and comparative analysis of these three projects in heritage landscapes, we observe how the design strategy evolves and adapts to favour different forms of interior-exterior and intervention-preexistence relationships. In all three cases, the archaeological landscape is superimposed by a modern intervention strategy that flies over the ruin without touching it, to give access to one, two or three pavilions or boxes for the protection of the remains. In all of them it is a versatile approach, understanding the proposals as open works with the possibility of extension and growth over time. However, even with these clear common premises, the project objectives show subtle differences that result in a different architectural form.

In the case of the Villa of Santa Cruz, this strategy is based on the construction of three pavilions with the main purpose of sheltering the archaeological structures. In this way, the remains are completely contained within the new forms and become imperceptible from the outside. In El Vergel, an intermediate solution is developed in which the intervention envelops certain areas of the complex and leaves the rest uncovered, awaiting future extensions. In a third situation, in Pedreiras intervention, the project focuses on the consolidation of the remains, their adaptation and the layout of an accessible itinerary for the visit, not so much on covering them. Therefore, presence of the new architecture is practically reduced to a gesture in a very specific part of the Villa.

The material decision is fundamental for the design of the new spatial environment in relation to the site. In this sense, three levels of relationship with the landscape can be established for each of the design solutions. In the case of the Villa of Santa Cruz, the wooden lattice, with its intrinsic sensation of shelter, of a certain transience as its appearance progresses over time, generates defined but permeable and ventilated spaces. This material filter provides an interrupted view of the landscape that makes it possible to clearly establish an inside and an outside. In the Villa of El Vergel, the introspective character of the volumes with respect to their surroundings in their exterior image is, in a certain way, inverted when observed from the inside. Permeability of its constructive skin allows a space with filtered light that blurs the enclosures and incorporates the occasionally blurred landscape into the interior. In a third and final degree is the Villa of Pedreiras, where the material austerity permits, from the interior, the virtual disappearance of the volume and its fusion with the heritage context.

In all cases there is a previous understanding of the ruin not only as an archaeological object, rather as an element that shapes a heritage landscape. In all three projects there is a profound reflection on how the intervention is implanted and dialogues with the place. All the cases are faced with generating a museum enclosure on an archaeological context introduced, in turn, in rural enclaves with a predominantly natural component. In addition, it is clear the solution has to offer a response to a specific functional program, but the real challenge

Fig. 13. Interior space of the pavilion in relation with the interior and exterior archaeological context. Domus Romana de Pedreiras de Lago, in Lago de Carucedo (Las Médulas, León) (Photo by LAB/PAP, 2018).



in these situations is to achieve this while configuring a new place. Inevitably, the new architecture transforms the landscape that has remained dormant and unchanged for a long time, generating a different reality. It can be said that this is the fundamental, conscious and necessarily recurrent premise in the mind of the architect who designs in landscapes, seeking to intensify their heritage value.

▪ NOTE

¹ ANÍBARRO, MIGUEL ÁNGEL 2013, p.73.

² FOUCAULT, MICHAEL 2022, p.283.

³ ZELLI 2013. Introduction.

⁴ Currently, the GIR is composed of the architects: Darío Álvarez Álvarez, Miguel Ángel de la Iglesia Santamaría, Nieves Fernández Villalobos, Sagrario Fernández Raga, Carlos Rodríguez Fernández, Flavia Zelli, Laura Lázaro San José, Ana Muñoz López and Lara Redondo González.

⁵ ÁLVAREZ, DE LA IGLESIA 2017

⁶ The project team, composed by Josefina González Cubero, Miguel Ángel de la Iglesia Santamaría and Darío Álvarez Álvarez, was associated at the time under the name of JMAD Arquitectos. DE LA IGLESIA SANTAMARÍA 2002, pp. 93-104.

⁷ ÁLVAREZ, DE LA IGLESIA, GONZÁLEZ 1995.

⁸ ÁLVAREZ, DE LA IGLESIA, GONZÁLEZ 1999, pp. 112-117.

⁹ ZELLI 2013, pp. 232-234.

¹⁰ TAMARGO NIEBLA 2017, pp. 62-67.

¹¹ ZELLI 2013, pp. 232-234.

¹² LAB/PAP 2013

¹³ DE LA IGLESIA SANTAMARÍA 2015, p. 69.

¹⁴ FORAMEN s.a.

¹⁵ LAB/PAP s.a.

¹⁶ LAB/PAP 2017 B

¹⁷ LÁZARO SAN JOSÉ 2021, p. 320

¹⁸ *Ivi.* p. 63

¹⁹ TAMARGO NIEBLA, 2017, p. 63

²⁰ LABPAP 2019, pp. 20-22

²¹ It was declared UNESCO World Heritage in 1997.

²² SÁNCHEZ-PALENCIA, FERNÁNDEZ-POSSE, FERNÁNDEZ MANZANO, OREJAS, PÉREZ, & SASTRE (2000), p. 196.

²³ UNESCO s.a.

²⁴ Excavations had taken place in the summer months between 1992 and 1995 by the CSIC team led by F. J. Sánchez-Palencia and M. D. Fernández-Posse. Subsequently, a work camp organised by the Las Médulas Foundation was carried out in 2015. LAB/PAP 2017 A, p.8

²⁵ LAB/PAP 2018 A, p.2

²⁶ In the original version of the project the added interior wall continued the original enclosing wall of the limekiln, but a report issued by the Servicio de Carreteras of the Diputación de León forced the ditched access to be configured towards the interior of this border. *Ivi.* p.3.

²⁷ LÁZARO SAN JOSÉ 2021, p.318-319

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