WHERE OLD MEETS NEW: NEW LIFE FOR OLD RUINS

ŞEVKET ERŞAN, HİLAL ÖZKAN

ABSTRACT

Ruins: buried cities brought to light by archaeologists in every part of the world; sacred temples dedicated to divinities that we have ceased to worship; towers, forts, strongholds, military defences made useless by the unremitting development of new weapons; industrial plants and factories no longer compatible with modern techniques of production and abandoned like the carcasses of huge old-fashioned cars; buildings that have been gnawed, mutilated and reduced to a state that bears no relation to their original purpose; buildings that have sometimes deteriorated to a point where their original form can hardly be recognised; buildings that only survive in the form of isolated fragments.
Ruins form a considerable part of our architectural heritage and, actually, even of the World Heritage List: they are preserved as ruins, maintained as ruins and visited by a growing number of people who, in ruins, see values, significance and meaning – in spite of their condition. When dealing with such ruined structures, several different problems and issues are faced and different philosophical approaches and strategies are involved depending on the hierarchy of values for the different categories of buildings. Monuments with high historic and age values are often preserved in their existing form as ruins, avoiding any interventions that endanger these values. On the other hand, in less important buildings with regard to their historic and age values, and mainly when the largest part of their structure is maintained in a good condition, special consideration is given for their reuse and social revival.
In this paper, several case studies are presented regarding the conservation of historic ruins in around the world but mostly in United Kingdom, showing the positive and negative consequences of different philosophies and approaches followed in each case. Through these examples, the different concepts of conserving historic complexes – such as ‘museum’ conservation, final form of ruins, matters of authenticity, dynamic maintenance, compatibility of materials, structural reinforcement – are discussed.

Keywords: ruin, conservation, heritage, transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

Abandoned historic buildings and archaeological sites constitute an important part of the cultural heritage of every country. In most countries, ruins were the catalysts for conservation measures. For example, in Britain, they are afforded the highest protection within conservation legislation. Scheduled monument consent takes precedence over both listed building consent and conservation area control. Many are national icons; some, like Stonehenge, Hadrian's Wall and Fountains Abbey, have achieved global status as World Heritage Sites.

When dealing with such ruined structures, several different problems and issues are faced and different philosophical approaches and strategies are involved depending on the hierarchy of values for the different categories of buildings. Monuments with high historic and age values are often preserved in their existing form as ruins, avoiding any interventions that endanger these values (archaeological sites). On the other hand, in less important buildings with regard to their historic and age values, and mainly when the largest part of their structure is maintained in a good condition, special consideration is given for their reuse and social revival. These latter buildings are very often restored in a complete form (original or one of their main architectural phases), with such interventions as necessary for the buildings to be adapted to contemporary needs. Nevertheless, there is nothing new about breathing new life into old ruins. The Forum in Rome is one of the most famous ruins in the world and many of its buildings have been reused at some point. This reuse extended beyond the common practice of recycling the marble in new structures, and included the adapting of existing ruins for new uses. The Trajan Market, built in AD 107-110, was completely transformed for reuse in the Middle Ages. The phases of medieval, and Renaissance building in the Forum were subsequently removed in the single-minded archaeological pursuit of the 'glories of imperial antiquity'.

2. APPROACH

The relationship between preservation and transformation of old buildings is an ever-present aspect of all restorations, but in some cases it is particularly critical. In places where the sitution has been compromised by demolition or even collapse, the conservation of the remaining parts, though often called fundamental, is often circumvented by the need to adapt the existing parts to new requirements as foreseen by the project. The new construction can therefore lead to substantial demolition of parts of the ancient artefact, even if contrary to the declared intention of conservation.

There are many examples of redundant historic buildings being brought back into use, buildings that are largely intact and still present a commercially viable solution. However, when dealing with abandoned and redundant buildings and sites, there is often a dilemma: preserve them in their ruinous condition as found or restore them completely. The division of monuments into 'dead' and 'living' is not considered appropriate anymore, because every monument, in any condition, is a 'living' example of civilization, capable of transmitting certain messages. 'Museum' conservation and 'passive' maintenance of existing building complexes are now considered the best option only in a few exceptional cases. The 'dynamic maintenance' approach is more often encouraged, based on the motivation of human resources. Intervention is often a matter of degree. To what extent should the historic be compromised by the new? Can the new remain subservient to the old if the old is now in ruin and much is already lost?

Particulary, looking at the complex relationship between conservation and transformation, deals with the real possibility of transferring these feelings from the field of human science to the architectural field, that is to say, to see if it is possible and correct to establish a creative relationship with ruins. There is a great difference, for instance, between the reconstruction of Mostar Bridge in Bosnia Herzegovina after Civil War (with the same building materials and form as the original), and the new presentation of Pont Trencat in Spain, partially destroyed in 1811 during the Napoleonic invasion. We can state without doubt that in Mostar, the two sides of the river are now connected by a copy of the original bridge. The fact that it is a copy will probably mean that the dramatic events that caused its destruction will be forgotten.

Figure 1. Mostar, Bosnia Herzegovina, bridge after the reconstruction

The experience of Pont Trencat is completely different. At the request of the local community, which expressed the strong desire to re-use the old bridge, what remains of the ancient structure was connected to a new one. Ruins were scrupulously preserved and the reconstructed part of the bridge, built with innovative materials, has been simply leaned up against the old. Undoubtedly, our way of perceiving this ruin and its environment has changed, but by fully respecting the ancient structure and its original building materials, and also by preserving the traces of its previous destruction, the bridge has been transformed, from a historic object fit only for contemplation to a structure with a specific role.

Figure 2. Tordera, Spain, Pont Trencat after the integration

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1. House of Ruins

This house by NRJA won the Gran Prix for the Latvian Architecture Prize (2005), the Best Technology Award at the Interior Digest Magazine (outstanding implementation of a project using contemporary construction, constructive and electronic technologies, 2006) and was nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award (2007).

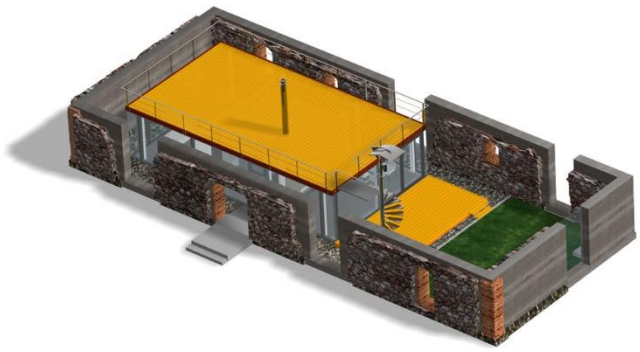

Figure 3. Diagram of the new and old structure

The House of Ruins is located in Latvia on the coast of the Baltic Sea. It is a new family house built inside the19th century ruins of a traditional Latvian barn. The architects here have used the idea of contrast where wind from the sea is opposed to the warmth of the family, and perfection of glass is set against rough surface of the old stone. The house provides both, modern life comfort and quietness of the nature. Organised in one level, it also contains a small courtyard and a spacious roof terrace for watching the sea and surrounding meadows.

3.2. Kolumba Museum

This towering edifice, which almost completely engulfs the medieval ruins of St Kolumba's Church, takes an extreme and less sympathetic approach to building over ruins. Yet paradoxically it emphasises the special character of the ruins.

St Kolumba was badly damaged during the Second World War and was transformed into a memorial garden during the 1950s. With the ruins becoming increasingly surrounded by commercial development and a collection of temporary roof structures protecting the delicate archaeological excavations, the Archdiocese of Cologne commissioned Swiss architect Peter Zumthor to build a new museum to house its collection of religious art with the ruins of St Kolumba accommodated within it.

Figure 4. Kolumba Museum

The new structure both incorporates and shelters the original. The contrasting light grey brick was developed for the project and provides a contrast in colour, in texture and in the monolithic simplicity of the massive new structure. But this is not an uncoordinated relationship between old and new: there is a subtlety to this holy alliance. Directly above the exposed ancient fabric, the weight of the new masonry is relieved by small perforations in the masonry that also admit a dappled light into the cavernous interior, where the remains of the old church lie.
The interface of the undulating rubble stonework and stone dressings of the old structure, and the small masonry units of the new brickwork, provides a workable junction for building new on old. The overall visual contrast is striking but, like many great buildings, new and old, this is one that needs to be experienced firsthand to fully appreciate the success of this approach.

3.3. Astley Castle

The mediaeval Astley Castle was once the home of an aristocratic English family, but has stood as a ruin since the 1970s, when a devastating fire wiped out the hotel that occupied the building at that time. In a competition of ideas, Witherford Watson Mann Architects were chosen to give a new life to Astley Castle, an old fortified manor in Warwickshire, proprietary of the royal family.
Astley Castle is a remote site with rich historic resonance: a moated castle, lake, church and the ghost of pleasure gardens are grouped around a shallow ridge. After decades of decline and decay, the project opens this private estate for public access through a network of new pathways and salvages the ruins of the castle, binding them into a vivid new house for the Landmark Trust.
The architects designed a two-storey residence that would squat within the building's chunky sandstone walls. Clay brickwork was used to infill gaps in the structure, creating a visible contrast between the new and old structures. Laminated wooden beams form a new system of floors and ceilings, creating living areas and bedrooms in the oldest part of the castle. The wooden roof also stretches over extensions added in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, but instead of blanketing these spaces it simply forms a hollow canopy, creating entrance courtyards that are exposed to the rain.

Figure 5. Astley Castle, after conservation

Astley Castle is one of six projects shortlisted for the Stirling Prize, which is awarded to the building that has made the greatest contribution to British architecture in the past year.

3.4. Norwich Cathedral Refectory

The one-metre thick 14th-century walls of the library at Norwich Cathedral were deemed untouchable, structurally, by the Cathedrals Fabric Commission of England. As a result, designing a new refectory building within the ruins of the cathedral cloisters presented a delicate challenge. Michael Hopkins Architects' modern intervention appears delightfully simple and yet captures the essence of the cathedral nave with a treelike wooden structure supporting its lead roof.

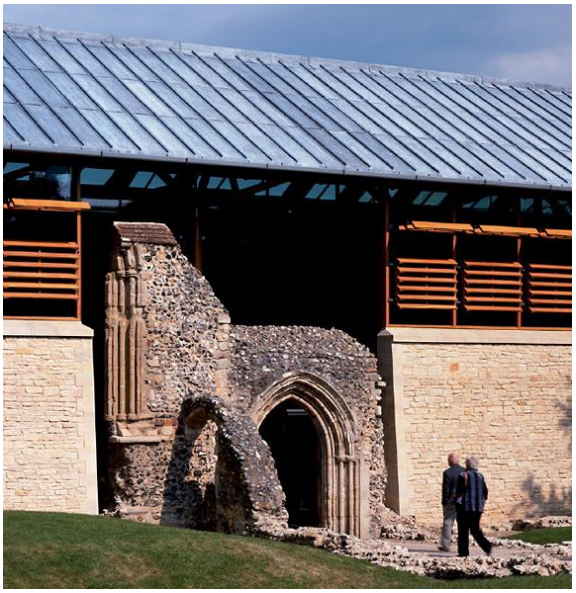

Figure 6. Norwich Cathedral Refectory

The lightweight framed structure fits inside the original ruined building and its predominantly glazed outer walls sit effortlessly on the original fabric, minimising the load placed on the ancient rubble walls, both structurally and visually. However, the large sheets of rigid glass and the random composition of the walling material, which includes flint, brick and limestone, do not sit easily together. The clever part of this junction is the subtle introduction of another masonry walling material that bridges this difficult connection. Building up the flint walls with a new yet subtly different masonry solves two problems: it provides a practical solution for a difficult junction, and it provides an identifiable contrast between the old and the new, making it much easier to read the building's history.

3.5. The Dovecote Studio

The Dovecote Studio forms part of the internationally renowned music campus founded by Benjamin Britten in abandoned industrial buildings on the Suffolk coast. A general strategy for regeneration of the Maltings was developed through close dialogue with the client, English Heritage, and Suffolk Coastal planning officers.

The new studio builds upon the original industrial feel on the campus and almost seems to gracefully grow from the old. Clad in Corten weathering steel, the structure is understood as a separate structure, yet compliments the existing shell with its rust-red shade almost matching the red bricks. For construction, the ruin had to be stabilized prior to inserting the new structure. Suffolk Welding crafted the steel into a single weather tight form. The sides and roof planes are made of full size 1200 x 2400mm sheets with regular staggered welded joints, into which door and window openings were cut in locations dictated by internal layout. Each panel was prefabricated by local steelworkers, then delivered to site to be assembled in a compound next to the brick ruin. Functioning as an art studio, a large north window provides perfect lighting conditions for the artists. The studio is flexible enough to be used by artists in residence, by musicians as rehearsal or performance space or even for temporary exhibition space.

Figure 7. Dovecote Studio

The Haworth Tomkins design complements the distinctive architecture of the Maltings in a way that is both sensitive and uncompromisingly modern. It solves the complex challenge of working within a fragile ruin without losing the essence of the ruin to the ambitions of redevelopment.

4. CONCLUSION

The relationship between transformation and conservation in ruined buildings is difficult but possible. It involves a different, unusual way of looking at a ruin, not as a metaphor or the end, but on the contrary, as a symbol of life. In this sense, it should be up to us to demonstrate that, in this new dimension, we can create a new future in which, by re-using the traces of the past, it is possible to keep the idea of persistence of time as against inevitable decay.
Finding the right solution for adapting a ruin is one of the greatest architectural challenges. Not only is the form of the structure often uneven, and the materials compromised by years of exposure to the elements, but the philosophical challenges of how to approach the design and how to touch the existing fabric lightly are complex and highly contentious.
Achieving a clear contrast between new and old while ensuring a successful technical collaboration between materials is bound to present a dilemma when ancient stone meets new ambition.

REFERENCES

-Oteri, A.M.2009. Ruins and Design: Dialogues over time, Eaae Transactions on Architectural Education, pp. 379-392, Leuven.
-Pedretti, B.1997.Il progetto del passato, Bruno Mondadori, pp. 1-16, Milano.
-Roth, M.S.1997. Irressistible Decay. Ruins reclaimed, The collection of Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and The Humanities, pp. 1-23, Los Angeles.
-Stanford, C.2000. On preserving Our Ruins, Journal of Architectural Conservation, pp. 28-43.
-Oteri, A.M.2009. Visioni, teorie,restauri del rudere in architecttura, Argos, pp. 91-123, Roma.
-Reference from Internet: http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/life-for-ruins/life-for-ruins.htm (date of connection: 2017)