

Restoration of the Palacio de Mayoralgo in Cáceres (Spain).

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ABSTRACT

The Palace Mayoralgo (13th/16th century), in St. Maria Square in the Old City of Cáceres (Figs. 1 to 3) was acquired in 1999 to be the headquarters of the Presidency of the Caja de Extremadura. It had been empty and unused for many years, and it was also severely damaged since it was hit by bombs during the Spanish Civil War in 1937.

Different well known experts, in a multidisciplinary work, have participated both in the writing of the project to optimize architectural and constructive solutions. The development of the project and the works began in August 2000 and finished in August 2004.

The finding of the Roman archaeological remains at the beginning of the works forced some adjustments in the initial design in order to preserve and protect them.

The project and the work carried out have meant, on one hand, a considerable preservation work that increases the value of the Architectural Heritage.

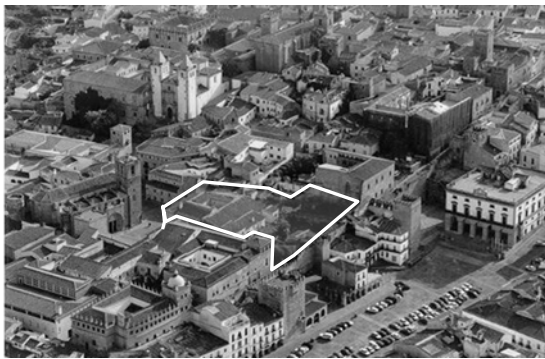


Fig. 1. Palace of Mayoralgo in St. Maria Square of the Old City of Cáceres (1999).

Fig. 2. Palace of Mayoralgo. Old postcard (1915).



Fig. 3. Palace of Mayoralgo after restoration (2005).

1 RECORDS

1.1 *Historical background*

The Palace of Mayoralgo was built by one of the families of more rancid ancestry and influence in the public life of Cáceres. The Palace is one of the oldest manor houses and during seven centuries, until its sale, it was the residence of the same family, the descendants of the famous Juan Blázquez, conqueror of Cáceres. Maybe this was the site of the Pérez's, one of the first families of colonists that repopulated the Villa in those times when the Jurisdiction prohibited the establishment of noblemen. Blasco Muñoz founded the first primogeniture of Cáceres in 1320. The loud case that Blázquez settled down among Juan the Fat and Diego García, made that the latter –winner of the case– began to be called 'that of the Primogeniture. Due to phonetic corruption, it has changed to Mayoralgo until today. Gentlemen of the Tower of Mayoralgo got the county -with the same name- in times of Carlos IV. Kinship with the favourite Manuel de Godoy helped them.

The main facade was erected between 1534 and 1538, when many constructions lost their fortress like character and were redesigned imitating palaces. At about that time the two towers facing Sta. Maria disappeared. The main facade was demolished by a bombing, in 1937, during the Civil War and reconstructed in the seventies. This is the most important facade of the building, due to its late gothic characteristics with a main front of big ashlars masonry, delicate windows and Mudejar reminiscence trace surrounding the blazon of the Mayoralgo.

The Counts of the Tower of Mayoralgo changed their residence from Cáceres to Barcelona in the first half of last century and their family sold the Palace to the State in the nineties. It was acquired, later on, by the Caja de Ahorros de Extremadura (Savings Bank of Extremadura) which returned then to its birthplace, since this was the place where the signature of the constitution of the Caja de Cáceres in 1906 took place and whose founder happened to be José Miguel of Mayoralgo, Count of Canilleros.

The change of the socio-economic structure, the new customs and ways of life in the modern city and mainly, the definitive loss of its feudal condition, for which it was initially conceived, brought with it during the last centuries, the slow but relentless decadence of the Palace that was being underused during its last period. The bombing of the Civil War implied not only a dramatic destruction but also a reduction of its habitability, a condition that was already very limited beforehand.

1.2 *Value and meaning*

The building responds to the palatine archetype of the Historical City, with remarkable architectural elements. The historical character and the value of its architecture transform it into a meaningful reference of the city and of the collective memory. Located in Santa María's Square, center of the city –of great urban quality–, it is a part of the whole group belonging to the World Heritage.

1.3 *Level of protection in the National Cultural Heritage.*

Since it is a Good of Cultural Interest, also affected by the general laws of the Artistic Historical heritage and the common laws of cities belonging to the World heritage, it is compulsory to keep the architectural structure, the facades and volumes.

It is regulated by the General Plan of Urban Ordination of Cáceres and in it by the Special Plan of Protection and Revitalization of the Architectural Heritage. The building is located in the Artistic Historical Group, in the sub-area denominated Monumental Historical Centre.

2 PRESERVATION AND USE BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE WORKS.

2.1 *Physical decay. Neglect and ruin.*

Before the works the building was, as it has been indicated, on the edge of ruin, strongly degraded (figs 4, 5, 6 and 7). Among the causes of the physical degradation it is necessary to consider the bombing already mentioned of the Civil War that originated considerable damages in the main facade, in the roof and in the structure of walls and vaults that almost completely disappear. This situation forced the dwellers to leave the affected rooms and to move to other rooms in the building. They even had to carry out some urgent repair work at this delicate moment in the middle of the war. The facade and the roof were restored in the seventies, but the other damages could still be observed when the restoration began. From the moment that the family sold the building until it is acquired by the Caja de Extremadura and the restoration project was elaborated, ten years had passed during which the neglect was absolute, which increased the physical decay the building was suffering and caused ruin in some parts.



Figs. 4 and 5. The building was strongly degraded: main facade (left) and old kitchen (right).



Figs. 6 and 7. Degradation of main facade in stone's sculptural iconography

2.2 *Architectural decay. Fragmentation of the architectural space.*

The greatest difficulty to approach the new ordination was the complicated and confused reading that the property offered, also degraded in its architecture as a consequence of the multiple transformations, doubtfully successful, that were extremely deforming its image. This forced the project team to interpret the original structure of the building, hidden in the disordered and chaotic fragmentation.

3 PURPOSE OF THE RESTORATION

3.1 *Aims and objectives*

The fact that a building as meaningful as the Palace Mayoralgo, in St. Maria Square in the Old City of Cáceres was chosen to be the headquarters of the Presidency of the Caja de Extremadura meant two previous tasks. First, the projection of the image of the Bank from the old stones of the monument. Second, the use of this building as a container of representative activities. In consequence with the mentioned positions, the carried out works make compatible the chosen place by assuming its historical-artistic values, and its location, with the functional necessities of a dynamic and current organization, making the old and the new live together in a revitalizing dialogue that by overcoming the concept of the simple conservation of the stones seeks their rational use.

3.2 *Historical and technical investigation*

Different well known experts have participated both in the writing of the project and during the works: archaeologists, architects, petrophysicists, engineers, experts in restoration and laboratories etc in a multidisciplinary work which has allowed optimizing architectural and constructive solutions. A maximum interest has been put to avoid and minimize any type of environmental impact using clean energy (electricity driven heat), noise insulators and any thing that could help. Achieve this in cooperation with ecologists nests of birds of this region have not been destroyed in order to keep their ancestral relationship with the building.

3.3 *Phases of execution*

The development of the project and the works has been done in three phases. The first one, from August 2000 to August 2001, consisted on gathering information from all experts to establish multidisciplinary approaches. Once the necessary technical documents were edited, the restora-



Figs. 7 and 8. Archaeological remains, 16th century: Romans hypocaust (left) and *aljibe* (water tank).

tion works begin in the Palacio for more than 2 years, between August 2001 and December 2003. The finding of the archaeological remains (figs. 7 and 8) at the beginning of the works forced some adjustments in the initial design in order to preserve and protect them. The archaeological importance and the need to incorporate the remains into the building suggested that we should start working in it once the main building was ready to be used. The works at the archaeological site are the third and last phase.

3.4 Details of the work.

The generating principle of the adopted solution was the need to adapt to the existent geometry, trying to group the different spaces according to their functions, paying attention both to the location demands expressed in the program of necessities and to the relationship among the different areas. The conditions imposed by the structural system, based on load bearing walls and brick vaults, as well as the position of holes and other elements to be protected forced a delicate integration work in order to make compatible the solution to the program of necessities with the reality of the building, giving value to their architectural composition. The architectural degradation already mentioned demanded a rationalization of the inter space in order to provide coherence to the building. The first task - previous to any other position - was, consequently, to discover this structure to assess those hidden elements and to recover the unity of spaces. The second task was to achieve simplicity by eliminating those elements or parts which were inadequate or secondary, which falsified the true orientation of the building and which had no sense for the new use of the building. In no case the unity of style has been sought. It was unjustifiable due to the heterogeneous character of the architecture of the building and because of elementary application of the current approaches, broadly consecrated in the Letters of the Restore, in the international guidelines and in the current laws of National Heritage. The necessary surgery, in any event, should be respectful with the character of Good of Cultural Interest of the Palace.



Fig. 9. Arches, in the central courtyard. In two columns appeared, with vegetable reliefs in their capitals that were evidence of a higher corridor.

A significant example may be the central courtyard. An apparently modest courtyard, almost vulgar before the works if it were not for the two arches that served as access from the main entrance and for some emblematic elements on doors and windows (fig. 9). However, hidden next to these arches, there were other two similar arches totally walled except for a capital that could be seen. When they were discovered their lateral stirrups appeared: two excellent granite pilasters which continued the initial arcade.



Figs. 10 and 11. Arches, in the central courtyard, after restoration.

On these arches, in a corner, two columns appeared, with vegetable relieves in their capitals that were evidence of a higher corridor. Since other rooms had already been fragmented, the cloister with the courtyard and the arches were hardly perceptible, and this forced the demolition of the walls that blinded the length of the corridor. It was only in this way that the integration of the fragmented parts in a splendid space unit could be achieved: the cloister, impossible to interpret starting from the degraded courtyard (figs. 10, 11 and 12). The whole, Aristotle said, is more than the sum of its parts.

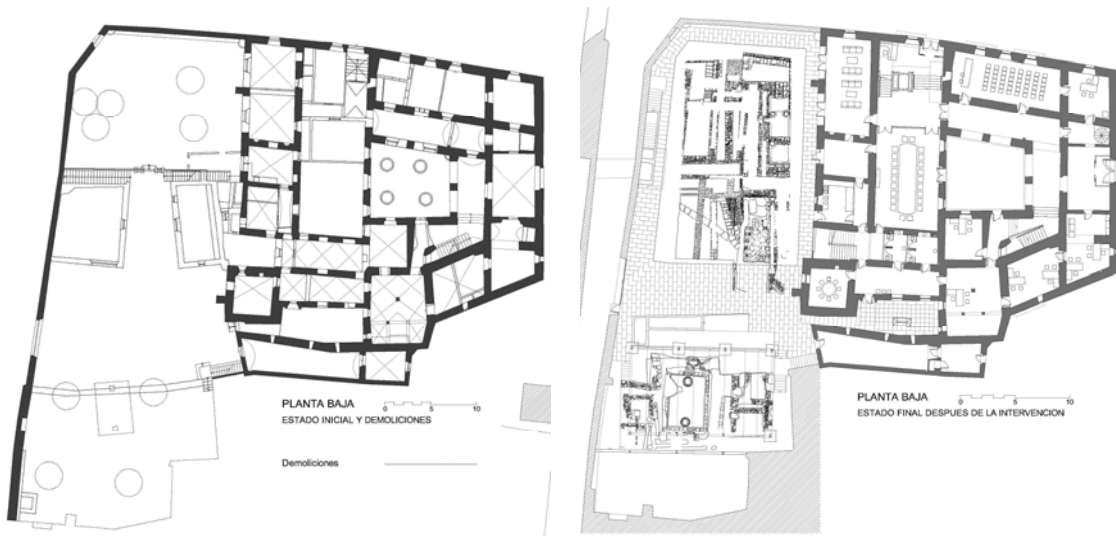


Fig. 12. Architectural degradation in initial state (left). Inadequate, or secondary, parts which falsified the true ordination. In the restoration (right), the integration of the fragmented parts in a space unit could be the cloister, impossible to interpret starting from the degraded central courtyard.

The interior communication is of monastic type, cloister around the central courtyard, which implies roundabout walks. Elevator and stairways were made for vertical communication, solving with small ramps or steps the remaining existent differences in the same floor. It has been necessary to order the facade overlooking the back courtyard with a compositive regulating plan due to the demolition of inappropriate annexed bodies. Consequently it was necessary to integrate it with already existent elements. A multipurpose building has been designed in the back courtyard (fig. 14).

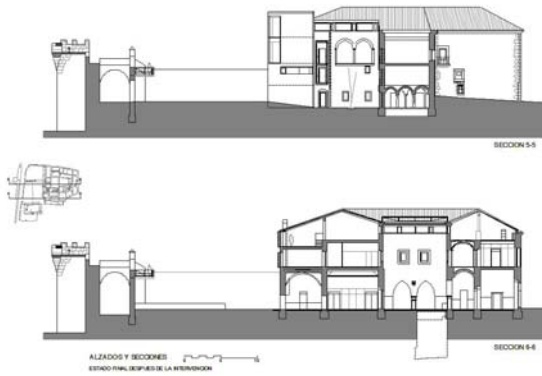


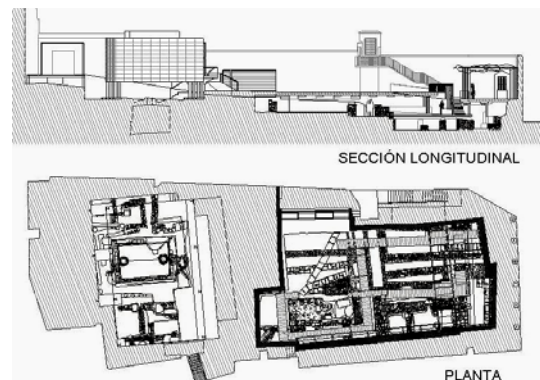
Fig. 13. Architectural sections.



Fig. 14. Multipurpose building.

3.5. The integration of the Archaeological Remains.

The second phase in the work on the Palacio de Mayoralgo was the Project of Integration and Consolidation of the Archaeological Remains in order to protect the site and allow the cultural community and citizens in general to view this valuable location. Thus, the Archaeological site will be compatible with the functional needs of a modern, dynamic organization, creating a revitalizing dialogue, between history and modernity. A rational use of these ancient stones, rather than their mere preservation. The Archaeological excavations occupy the most part of the west courtyard of the Palacio and show an important location with the different strata of the historical city. The integration of the remains in the Palacio is a cultural contribution of the Caja de Extremadura with the participation of the Regional Government of Extremadura to the city of Cáceres.



Figs. 15, 16 and 17. Project of Integration and Consolidation of the Archaeological Remains.

Two areas may be seen in the Project of Integration: the central part of the courtyard has Roman remains: several walls, a pond (nymphaeum) of rectangular shape, a hypocaust, traces of Roman roads, several tools, a bronze torso covered with gold and ceramic pieces. This stratum is at a quite low level, therefore allowing projecting its protection with a roof which lets people walk by. Thus the visit to the remains is a circuit where the lowest part (figs. 18 and 19) is and the courtyard on the surface is devoted to social and cultural activities of the Caja de Extremadura. The roof is separate and made of glass at the edges. In this way the heavy roof is lightened, natural light falls on the site which can be seen from outside, creating the effect of a continuous presence. In the other area, the remains are ordered the multipurpose building in a transparent space that allow their protection and view.

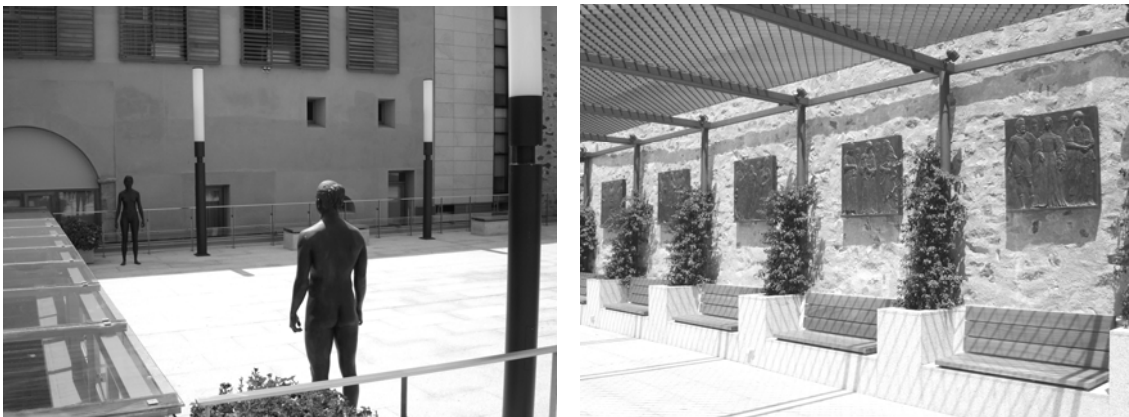
It is important under the presence of a Roman aljibe (water tank) the building will also be a centre for the interpretation of the Archaeological Remains with exhibitions, conferences and projections as complementary information for visitors. It is worth nothing that the structure and

composition of the building were modified during the works to adapt it to the characteristics of the site and to prevent damages to it.



Figs. 18 and 19. Visitable remains in a crypt (lowest part in the courtyard). Grating remembers the Roman “opus reticulatum”.

In the outside area, there is a pergola with climbing plants and other species in pots to evoke the previous garden, impossible to have now with the excavation of the site. The wall closing the courtyard under the pergola is ornamented with bas-reliefs in bronze which are allegories to all the historical phases in the site as the difference in attirement shows. Between the pergola and the access to the archaeological site, a curtain of water falls cascading next to the old Roman pond. Its ancestral sound will remind us of the hydraulic use of great part of the remains. Two bronze sculptures, a man and a woman both naked and standing, situated in the superior part of the courtyard, represent timelessness. The bas-reliefs and the sculptures make complete an allegorical iconographic program and the continuity in History.



Figs. 20 and 21. Two bronze sculptures (left), a man and a woman both naked and standing, situated in the superior part of the courtyard, represent timelessness. The bas-reliefs and the sculptures make complete an allegorical iconographic program and the continuity in History.

3.6. Context in which the construction works have been carried out.

Santa María's Square, the Star's Arch, the Adarve and Aldana Hill are especially significant places of the Monumental City, the place where almost everything that is of importance in Cáceres happens. Santa María's square is the centre of cultural, tourist, religious, entertainment and administrative activities, among others. It is not a single square, but a group of crisscross

squares that discover new perspectives as the walker progresses. This game of linked spaces creates a tension as one walks by that makes the walker go on hoping to reach the moment where one dominates the splendid view of the whole. Therefore, it was necessary to take into account four conditioning factors: the history, the place, the building and a program of necessities to be solved. Thus, the modern new uses will be developed among the old stones in a happy coexistence joining past, present and future.

The transformation forced to change the use of the Palace, of medieval character, so that, in the future, it could harbour the Institutional Headquarters of the Caja de Ahorros de Extremadura, centre of the social and representative activity of the entity, in a restored surface which was both noble and comfortable. The work attempts to revitalize the Palace adding modernity without losing its historical and monumental character. Thus, its true architecture appears and it is dignified by means of the necessary restoration. The daily activities inside the building will mean its occupation during many hours of the day contributing, this way, to strengthen the life of the Monumental City.

3.7. Technical problems and problems of design.

The work has demanded to overcome several difficulties in urbanism, architecture and technique. The first due to the restrictive character of the protection laws. Those of architectural type due to the necessity of recovering the spatial and compositive values of the building, to integrate the old thing with the new one and to adapt to the future use the existent ordination. And the technical difficulties due to the heterogeneous construction: load bearing walls, brick walls; thread vaults, blocked vaults; stone arches, brick arches etc., with their habitual pathologies and the degree of uncertainty in their behaviour. Great value has been given to the architectural structure of the building and its adaptation has been optimized to the foreseen uses looking for the best commitment among the following basic conditions: Adaptability of the solution to the already existent architectural resources; Geometric simplicity; Elimination of inappropriate that perturbed the architectural ordination; Hierarchy of spaces and flexibility with them, bearing in mind the limitations of the building; Good accessibility and rational system of circulations; Regularization of the facade and the back courtyard, strongly degraded and in compositive disorder; Geometric regularization of the roof to unify its volume and to solve its damaged waterproof condition due to many and chaotic intersections of the laps; Treatment of the party wall of the South side to reduce the visual impact

3.8. Use of adequate construction, restoration and craftsmanship techniques. Use of adequate and results.

The traditional constructive system of the building has been kept entirely with masonry load bearing walls, brick vaults and rubble work. Specific variations were the elevator, stairs. Structural reinforcements, injections which could alter the mechanical work, permeability, textures in walls and vaults have been left out. Instead, traditional procedures have been used. In the restoration of vaults, walls and cladding, air lime has been used. Exceptionally, plaster has been used following the previous constructive system. No artificial cement or any other material incompatible with the previous constructive system have been used. Well preserved cladding or that of artistic or historical value has been kept. The roof was restored regularizing the slopes and intersections in disorder and preparing a new laminate-glued wooden structure inwardly with panels of "thermochip" with cedar wood, taking advantage of the available volume and obtaining an excellent feeling of space. The elements of value have been restored, particularly those of stone or wood. Previously the necessary specialized reports had been made. Special attention has been paid to the front of the main facade. During the writing of the project we made a petrophysical

analysis to determine the preservation state and to diagnose any pathology. The focal humidities have been eliminated or dispersed with an appropriate drainage or specific treatment. In this sense special attention must be paid to the problems of capillarity of the interior walls that will require an exhaustive analysis. The facilities have been channelled between the backs of the vaults and the pavement or where there is reinforcement, between backs and soffit. Where necessary, modern technology has been used trying to make old and new systems, without imitating or confusing. The new method is clearly different from the old method. Specifically the walls of the Archaeological site continue in the masonry wall done in the restoration work by means of a grating which allows transparency and at the same time sets the borderline between different historical phases. Emphasis has been made to guarantee all restoration works be reversible, making assembly techniques easy.

3.9. Use and maintenance in the future.

The fact that the building has been restored for a new use guarantees its maintenance. At present, since its opening as the social headquarters of the Caja de Extremadura, it is permanently for the different administrative services of the company and it will continue so in the future. The installations and the constructive systems of the building have a maintenance plan with the criterion of guaranteeing maximum accessibility. In this way, a systematic follow-up of preventive preservation can be made.

4 DIFFICULTIES DURING THE CONSTRUCTION WORKS

The fact that the promoter has been a financial company without purpose of lucre with social and cultural objectives has made easier to overcome the different unforeseen situations during the development of the work and to readjust the increases in the costs of the work, generated by the finding of the Archaeological remains and by the way unpredictable situations, so common in any restoration work. On the other hand, the fact that the restoration and the archaeological site have had a favourable welcome by citizens and public institutions have enhanced the project and have added and extra value to the Historical Heritage of Cáceres.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The restoration of the building, its permanent use and as the preservation and integration of the archaeological remains are a great opportunity to establish a meeting point between society and its history. The palace and the remains appeared in the courtyard are direct witness of the historical sequence of the city, from its beginning, in republican Roman time, until today, as headquarters of the main economic company of the region. But the importance of the restoration of the Palacio, a main historical-artistic reference in the center of the monumental city, as well as the importance of the archaeological remains and the singularity of their integration, gives this restoration highlighted character beyond the purely regional or national importance. We understand that this project and the work carried out have meant, on one hand, a considerable preservation work that increases the value of the Architectural Heritage, saving the restored monument from ruin, and on the other, an important investigation effort, with remarkable contributions to the knowledge of the history and the local culture that it is also European history and universal culture in Cáceres, World Heritage Site.