St. Mary's Church on Maligrad island in Lake Prespa Critical analysis of the restoration project

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Abstract - *This paper critically examines the ongoing restoration of St Mary's Church, located on the Maligrad Island in the Albanian part of Lake Prespa. Built in 1369 by the Serbian nobleman Kesar Novak, this Orthodox church is located within a natural cave on the cliff and is a historical and artistic jewel, as it is embellished with centuries-old frescoes and characterised by its close connection with the surrounding nature.*

The current restoration project is multifaceted, aiming to refurbish various aspects of the church, particularly its surfaces and the frescoes. A significant aspect of this project includes enhancing the church's accessibility from the lake and improving its lighting, particularly to augment its night-time ambiance.

This paper critically analyses the restoration project, assessing in particular its adherence to established theoretical principles of historical restoration and understanding the methodology adopted.

In the broader spectrum of the ongoing discourse concerning the synergy between restoration theory and practical application, this critique meticulously examines the design decisions made during the restoration. In particular, it is investigated how the new access routes and lighting systems are in harmony with the historical authenticity of the church and how the symbiotic relationship of the church with its natural environment is emphasised.

This interdisciplinary study contributes significantly to the broader discourse surrounding the challenges and opportunities inherent in executing restoration projects. By delving into the specifics of St. Mary's Church's restoration, the paper tries to bridge the gap between the execution of this project and the general principles of restoration theory. The results of this analysis offer valuable insights that serve as a guide for future conservation and restoration initiatives, particularly those that aim to safeguard unique cultural heritage sites such as St. Mary's Church, overlooking Lake Prespa, in order to pass them on to future generations.

Keywords - *Architecture, Geology, Cultural Heritage, Deep-Time*

Introduction

This article is intended as an initial contribution to the broad debate on the relationship between theory and practice in the field of restoration.

To achieve this, it is first necessary to define the main theoretical positions on the subject, in order to frame the current state of research and resume the discussion where previous studies left off. While existing literature has long debated the theory-practice gap, a number of studies tend to treat theoretical frameworks and operational methodologies as separate domains, rarely examining how they interact in concrete case studies. This paper aims to address this gap by combining critical analysis with empirical observation. The primary research questions that guide this paper involve evaluating how restoration theory is applied in practice, particularly in terms of the preservation of material integrity, contextual harmony, and the challenges posed by increased accessibility demands.

In particular, the first section will review the 'official' occasions on which the theory-practice relationship has been the focus of reflection, as in the case of International Declarations or Italian Ministerial Decrees. In addition, explicit reference will be made to the thought of Professor Giovanni Carbonara, who was able to systematically and organically organise his reflections on the most diverse topics in his numerous writings.

Professor and architect G. Carbonara, who

developed the school of thought known as 'critical-conservative restoration', has consistently identified the theory-practice relationship as a weak point requiring careful study and methodological rigor. Beyond diagnosing the issue, he also proposed solutions to ensure that restoration practices align more closely with theoretical principles.

Afterwards, the ways in which the distance between theory and practice can be shortened and eliminated were illustrated. Referring to the studies of professor and architect Alessandro Ippoliti, the role that history plays in the field of restoration is unquestionably crucial, not only as a tool of knowledge, but also and above all as a means capable of guiding design choices, approaching the concrete reality of restoration that coincides with making architecture. To make the importance of history in restoration more tangible, some virtuous cases have been exemplified in which a correct "hermeneutic circle" has been established between history and restoration. After this necessary theoretical background, the case study was presented, namely the church of St. Mary on the island of Maligrad, in the lake of Prespa, in the municipality of Pustec (Albania) (Figure 1).

This church boasts ancient origins, a rich pictorial apparatus and a strong and preponderant relationship with the surrounding natural environment. A restoration of the church has been proposed and is currently being carried out, involving the roof, the iconostasis and the wall paintings. Previous interventions date back to the years after 1990. The aim of this paper is to move from theoretical reflections to an operational approach, studying the design choices that have been made and analysing whether they are consistent with the theoretical dictates of restoration. This includes a critical assessment of the interventions support the legibility of the monument's history, preserve its physical and spiritual integrity, and respect the site's unique environmental and cultural context. In particular, this paper seeks to critically examine the balance between historical fidelity and modern demands, such as structural safety, tourist accessibility, and the symbolic meaning of the site.

The study of case studies such as the one proposed in this article is fundamental for experimenting with a methodological approach to the theme of the relationship between theory and practice in restoration, and for outlining new operational practices that are more effective than those used to date. The case chosen is, moreover, very illustrative, as it is affected by the tourism drives of recent years, which can often lead to more hasty operational choices to the detriment of the monument.

Literature Review

The relationship between theory and practice in restoration

The relationship between conservation theory and practice has long been acknowledged as problematic. In 1997, Prof. G. Carbonara identified the significant gap between theory and practice as an ongoing issue, which often results in a decline in the quality of operational outcomes . Even before this, there had been important reflections on the subject. For instance, both the Italian Decree and Ministerial Circular on the Restoration of Monumental Buildings (1882) emphasized the need for planning and executing restoration work in a way that ensures the best conservation of historical and artistic heritage, while avoiding common mistakes . Later, the 1938 Instructions for the Restoration of Monuments underscored the State's responsibility

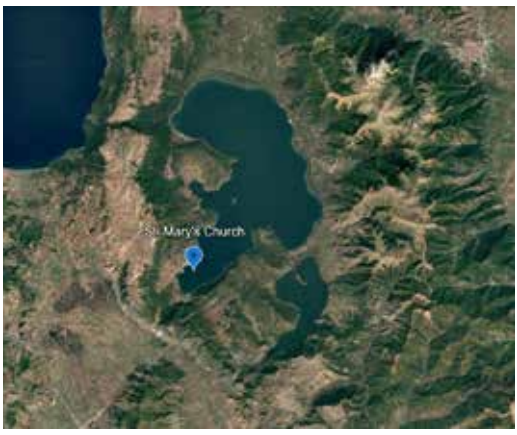

Fig. 1: Location of St. Mary's Church
source/ https://earth.google.com/

for safeguarding artistic heritage, stipulating that restoration activities must be conducted under the supervision of professionals from the Ministry of National Education (now the Ministry of Culture) . Even today, officials in the Superintendence Offices remain the only ones with a high level of professionalism, as access to these positions requires a specialization diploma or a doctoral degree in a field related to the tasks within the organization.

In 1975, the European Charter for Architectural Heritage reiterated that integrated conservation necessitates the development of several key elements: legal means (including the creation or updating of laws and regulations, when necessary); administrative means (ensuring that administrative structures are properly equipped to manage the entire intervention process, from planning to execution); financial means (with specific financial aid being essential); and technical means (the need for highly specialized professionals, including both experts and contractors) .

In the same year, and in alignment with the previous statement, the Amsterdam Declaration further emphasized the importance of strengthening legislative and administrative measures, alongside the critical need for specialized skills in restoration. It highlighted the urgent requirement for highly qualified personnel through multidisciplinary programs, as restoration integrates a wide range of skills in a coherent way, including drawing, topography, surveying, building materials, applied chemistry, building science, consolidation, technical physics, technical installations, exhibition design and museography, architectural composition, building legislation, town planning, economic estimates, and more .

In tracing the gap between theory and practice that has become evident over the decades, it emerges that, particularly in the last thirty years of the 20th century, there has been a growing interest in cultural heritage. This has led to a significant increase in restoration work, carried out using the same approach as during the building boom period, which has resulted in a deterioration of the practical component and, simultaneously, a weakening of theoretical reflection.

This shift has led, on one hand, to a crisis within the Superintendencies, which have become severely understaffed, and, on the other hand, to poor-quality outcomes. Whether the issue lies in the method itself or in the inadequate practical application of the principles, the result is the same: the well-established theoretical principles are often sidelined in the face of technical, bureaucratic, and economic challenges.

Professor G. Carbonara's analysis identifies two fundamental elements whose absence further exacerbates the gap between theory and practice in restoration . The first is the qualification and specialization of workers, managers, technicians, and all those involved in the restoration process, which significantly differs from the work on 'new' sites. The second is the recognition that restoration is a process that thrives in the close relationship between history, technique, and conservation, viewing them not as independent and self-contained skills, but as interconnected components that together constitute the restoration intervention.

Regarding the first issue, specifically in relation to the training of technical personnel responsible for cultural heritage preservation, Professor G. Carbonara emphasized the strategic role of universities, defining them as the 'natural ally' of the Minister of Culture (MIC) . Universities, through their degree programs, specialization schools, and

Fig. 2: Piazza Municipio in Naples

source/ https://www.metropolitanadinapoli.it/linea-1-metropolitana-di-napoli/stazione-municipio/

Fig. 3: Underground station in Piazza Municipio in Naples – Example of the relationship between ancient and new

source/ https://www.metropolitanadinapoli.it/linea-1-metropolitana-di-napoli/stazione-municipio/

Fig. 4: Underground station in Piazza Municipio in Naples – Example of the relationship between ancient and new

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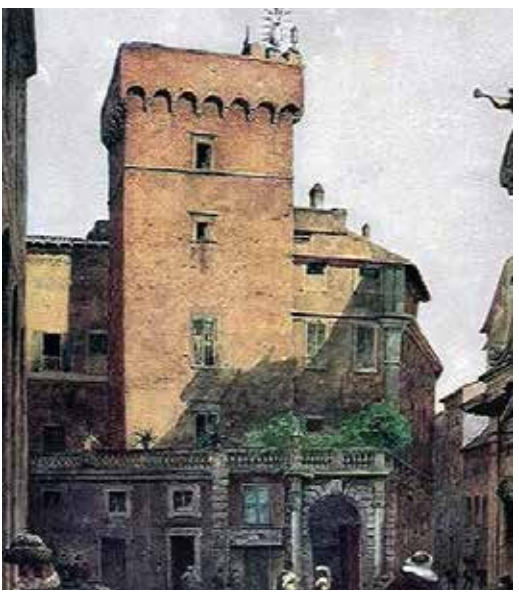


Fig. 5: Palazzo Scapucci in 1896

source/ https://www.info.roma.it/roma_sparita_dettaglio.asp?ID_stampa=19

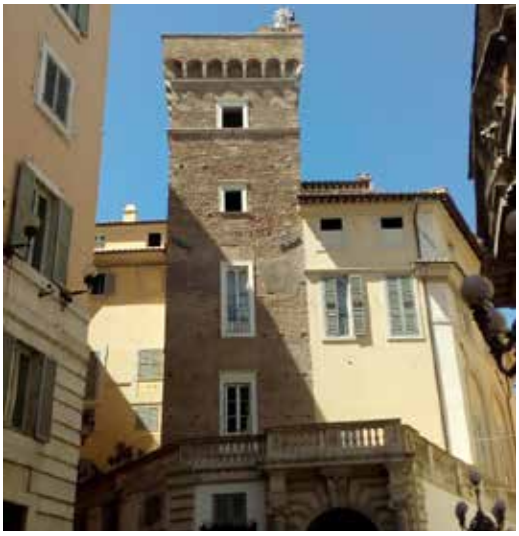


Fig. 6: Palazzo Scapucci today

source/ https://www.unaguidaturisticaroma.com/blog2/post/28173/palazzo-scapucci-e-la-sua-scimmia

Fig. 7: Island view (2015)

source/ Document sheet for cultural goods – St. Mary Church on Maligrad island

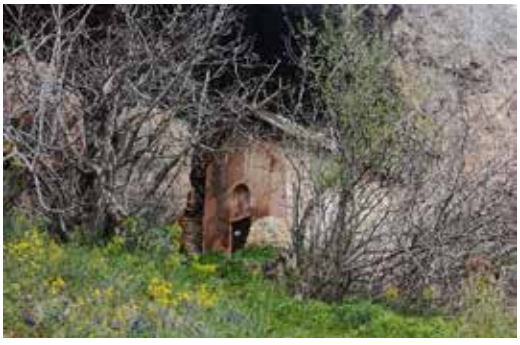


Fig. 8: St. Mary church (2018)

source/ Document sheet for cultural goods – St. Mary Church on Maligrad island

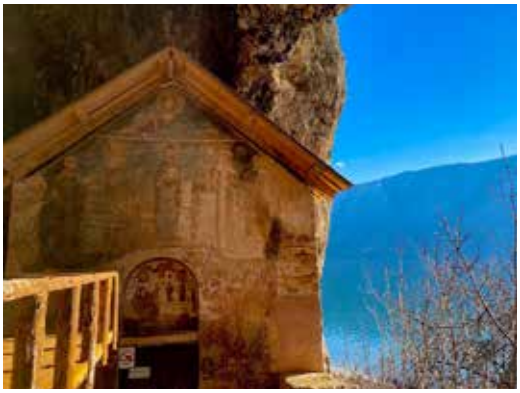


Fig. 9: St. Mary church: pictorial apparatus (2022)

source/ https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipNlEGvbSJ1TAmJ-1OZ3lGvGltx9gYZLDbFhUbYJ=s1360w13

PhD courses, serve as the bridge between theory – where methodological thinking is cultivated and disseminated – and practice, by training future architects-restorers. Therefore, the collaboration between the MIC and universities is crucial in fostering high-level, specialized training.

On the second point, given that restoration is a cultural act with a strong interdisciplinary nature, a figure is needed who can continuously synchronize the individual skills involved. It is in this context that the architect-restorer assumes the role of 'a good conductor' , ensuring that all disciplines work in harmony towards a cohesive restoration outcome.

Conservation and contemporary challenges

Architectural restoration, since its origins, has evolved under the influence of various theoretical principles that reflect the needs and challenges of each historical period. However, with the advent of modernity and the emergence of global issues, restoration methodologies have had to address new challenges. In recent decades, attention has focused not only on the aesthetic and structural preservation of monuments but also on their ability to withstand environmental and climatic changes. Climate change, in particular, has introduced a new set of challenges, shifting the perception of restoration from a static intervention to the idea of dynamic conservation that responds to the evolving surrounding environment. In this context, several recent studies have begun to address restoration problems with modern technologies and ecological requirements in an integrated manner. Specifically, Bonazza and Sardella (2023) highlight how climate change has prompted a new reflection on conservation criteria, proposing the integration of innovative techniques that can minimize environmental damage during interventions . Similarly, the GREENART project, through the use of eco-friendly materials and technological solutions, demonstrates how sustainability can be incorporated into restoration practice, maintaining a strong connection to historical traditions while ensuring the durability of structures .

These new challenges lead to a fundamental reflection on the future of restoration theory. Practice can no longer be seen merely as a replication of established historical principles but must be reinterpreted in a context that addresses contemporary needs, both environmental and technological. The introduction of innovative solutions, while preserving the historical identity of the monument, represents a direction that enriches restoration theory, bringing a new perspective to interventions on architectural heritage.

Tools and methodology

In reviewing the numerous writings of Professor Alessandro Ippoliti, it is necessary to dwell on the role that the subject of architectural history plays in the field of restoration.

First of all, ever since the Renaissance, the study of past architecture was aimed at a practical action, namely that of design. In recent times, it was Gustavo Giovannoni who asserted the autonomy of the discipline of art history, redefining its methodology, starting from the assumption that the most important characteristic of architecture is the historical processuality that manifests itself as transformations over time on the material . It is from this thought that the Roman school would come to life and, subsequently, it is with the fundamental contribution of Arnaldo Bruschi that the new figure of the historian-architect will be defined , the only one "able to fully understand architecture in its

historical dimension, through the application of the specific operational tools of the trade and in particular with the experience of drawing as an instrument of representation, investigation, reading and critical expression of the specific characteristics and values of the building" .
From the thoughts of Giovannoni explained above, it follows that the history of architecture is a close interlocutor of restorative action. In fact, as the monument is the architecture that par excellence manifests transformations in its material over time, then the discipline of history becomes fundamental during a restoration project. However, it cannot be understood as preliminary research for the project, but rather, it is necessary that between history and restoration a "hermeneutic circle develops through which the comprehension process takes place according to a circular path" , i.e. the deep historical knowledge suggests correct operative directions and, vice versa, from the restoration site can emerge "new contributions to the knowledge of the historical process" .
On the one hand, it is in the fruitful relationship between history and restoration that the design outcomes are respectful towards the monument and respond to the principles of restoration theory. On the other hand, it must always be kept in mind that working on historical heritage inevitably brings with it the confrontation with different problems inherent in the various disciplines. Hence the character of restoration as a highly interdisciplinary field, which makes use of different technicians to pursue the single goal of conservation for future generations.
Thus, the way in which the different disciplines relate to each other also influences the design outcome. In fact, taking up metaphorically and somewhat freely what Cesare Brandi expresses in his Theory of Restoration (1977), they cannot be parts of the total, but must be parts of a Whole, identifying the restoration project in the Whole, which, having listened to all the different instances, will ultimately result in a unitary text coherent with the monument and its stratifications over time, thanks to a highly specialized figure capable of overseeing the entire process of knowledge, design, and execution .
A fruitful dialogue between the different technical disciplines, combined with a strong and deep-rooted historical awareness, is the key to the operational success of a restoration project and, thus, the alignment of practice with the theoretical principles of restoration.
There are many fortunate cases in which the successful combination of different techniques has led to well-calibrated and informed interventions.
This is the case, for example, of the construction of the underground station in Piazza Municipio in Naples (Figure 2), where the difficulty of the site was not only due to the archaeological pre-existences in relation to the new construction, but also to an intricate archaeological stratification spanning very different epochs that needed to be clarified. The use of an interdisciplinary and transversal methodology led to a project for the use of the ancient site juxtaposed with the new (Figures 3 and 4), in order to preserve the historical evidence for future generations. The successful outcome is explained by Collovà, who writes: "For once, archaeology enters our time as a present thing. It is not a mute and cumbersome remnant to be put under glass, but an active fragment of the architecture of the past that becomes concretely, constructively, and meaningfully part of contemporary construction" .
Furthermore, the restoration of Palazzo Scapucci (Figures 5 and 6) in Rome represents a successful example of interdisciplinary collaboration and

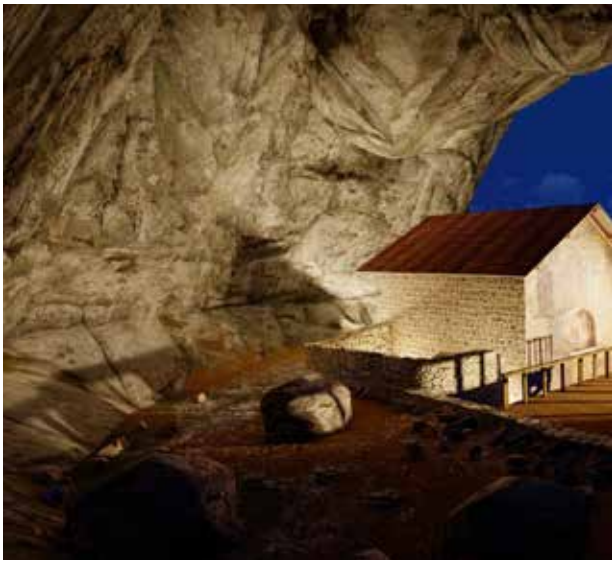


Fig. 10: Design rendering in night conditions

Fig. 11: Project rendering in which the roofing (copper sheets) is visible

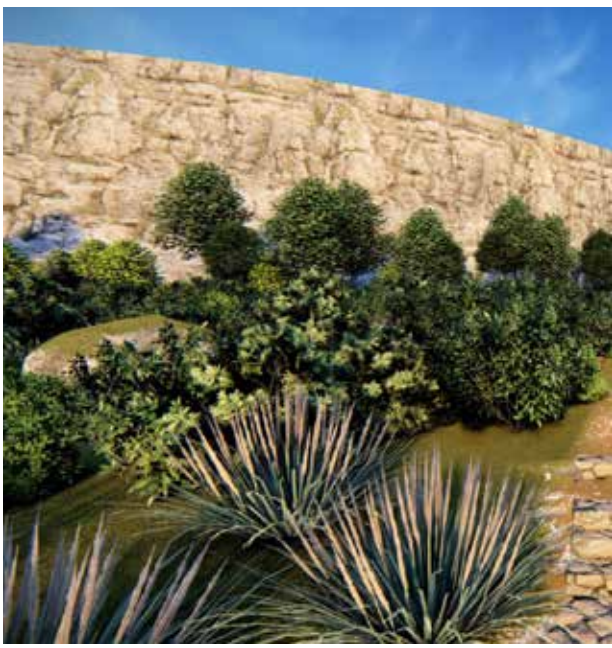
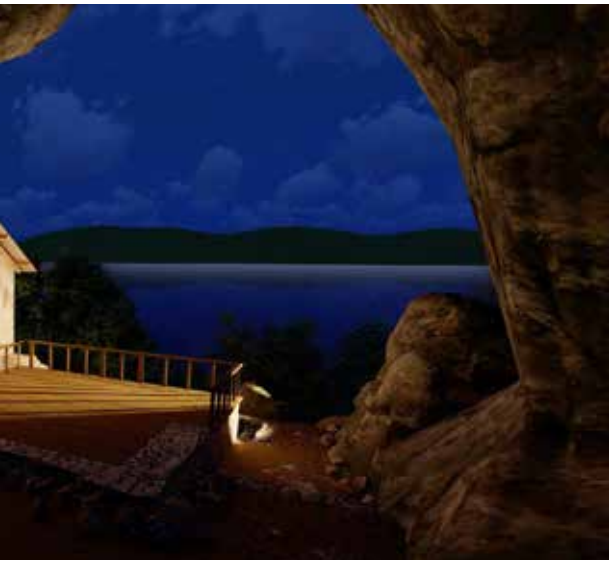


Fig. 12: Render of natural stone stairs



source/ Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Korça

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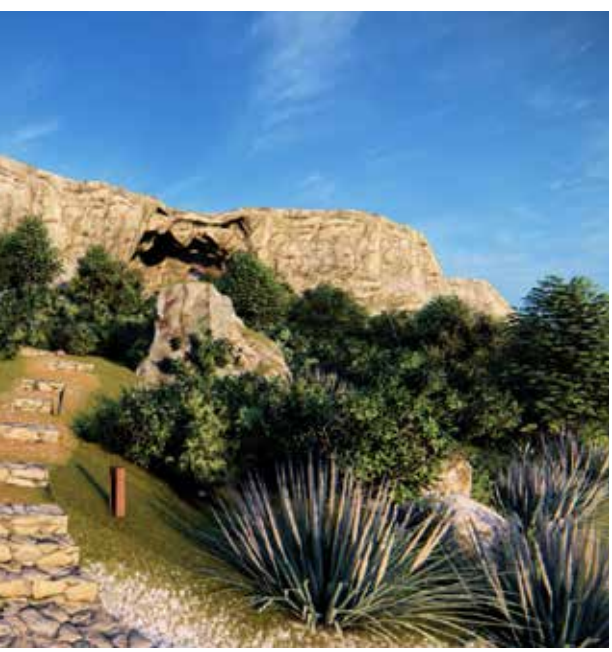


source/ Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Korça

how the integration of historical knowledge in restoration has coherent operational implications. In this regard, Professor Daniela Esposito writes, "The restoration experience carried out in Palazzo Scapucci represents an example of interdisciplinary study that has resulted in a critically controlled reading of the values of the architectural work" . She also emphasizes how the intervention responds to the theoretical principles of restoration: "The result manifests itself in a careful design aimed at distinguishing the new intervention from the pre-existing, ensuring reversibility, chemical-physical compatibility, minimal intervention, and aesthetic control of the architectural whole, in a careful 'balancing' of historical and aesthetic elements" .

Fortunately, although they still do not represent the majority of heritage interventions, there are numerous other exemplary cases in which restoration theory and practice have come together successfully. In Rome, the restoration of the Domus Aurea adopted a scientific and highly reversible approach, with minimal interventions aimed at ensuring structural safety and historical legibility, while avoiding invasive solutions . Similarly, the restoration of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza managed to balance conservation and functional needs, employing non-invasive technical solutions to preserve the Borrominian structure.

Another theoretical consideration, which should be addressed before moving on to the case study, concerns the importance of context when approaching a monument for restoration. Although the case study will be adequately introduced in the following section, it is evident how the physical location of the church has influenced its origin, development, use over the centuries, physical transformations, and even its current function. For this reason, it is the author's opinion that St. Mary's Church on Maligrad Island shares several similarities with the historical city context. In fact, just as the "city constitutes a privileged environment for the study of the relationship between man and the territory" , similarly, the system consisting of St. Mary's Church, the hermit churches, Lake Prespa, Pustec municipality, and the surrounding villages represents the essence of the history and identity of that area—the Albanian region of the Prespa Lakes Park. Therefore, it is essential to implement appropriate operational practices and ensure moments of convergence between theory and practice: only by broadening the perspective to include the historicized context can we define a project that adheres to the cardinal principles of restoration while remaining coherent with the various historical and aesthetic considerations.

The setting

The church is located in a cave on the high rocky outcrop along the coast of Maligrad Island in Lake Prespa (Figures 7 and 8). It is accessible by water via fishing boats and attracts many visitors, who are interested not only in the lake's waters but also in the history, culture, and biodiversity of this unique place.

In fact, the Prespa Lake region, which spans the three countries of Albania, Greece, and North Macedonia, is a cross-border protected area, established on February 2, 2000, specifically due to the biodiversity and endemic species found there.

Moreover, the Albanian portion of the park is home to a rich cultural heritage, including the Train and Hermit Caves on Maligrad Island, where capitals, columns, and tiles have been found, suggesting the presence of an early Christian church in the area.

Additionally, on the island of Maligrad, there are the ruins of Tsar Simeon's 11th-century summer villa.

A comprehensive overview of the history of the church discussed in this article was provided by Antonio Poshnjari as part of the Art and Architecture course (taught by Dr. Elio Hobdari) at University College LOGOS, Master of Science in Religious Tourism.
The earliest confirmed date associated with the church is 1345, as indicated by an inscription around the apse. It is also well-established that in 1639, the church underwent reconstruction under the direction of Kesar Novak, a Serbian nobleman who controlled the Lake Prespa region during the 14th century.
The church's location, situated on a high rocky outcrop, made it an ideal retreat for hermit monks, who sought isolated areas near lakes to lead their ascetic monastic lives.

Architectural and artistic description

The plan of the church is quadrangular, with dimensions of 4.60x3.30 m. It is a single-storey building and is covered with a pointed barrel vault and a gabled roof.
The entrance to the church is through a small door in the western wall, above which is an arched niche that creates the feeling of height for the low doorway. The church is lit by three windows: one square-shaped window for the main altar area, while the other two windows illuminate the nave.
The nave is separated from the altar area by two carved wooden iconostases. The more recent of the two was installed in 1604, while the first dates back to 1345, that is, from the first construction phase of the church.
In the altar area, as you approach the apse from the outside, there are niches for the prosthesis and the diaconicon.
In the first construction phase, the church was covered with a pitched roof supported by a wooden structure, with rough stone walls bonded with mud mortar. Later, the walls were raised, and the church was covered with a cylindrical vault at a higher level. The walls of the second construction phase are bound with lime mortar, and there is also brickwork on the inside. The walls on the west and south sides are plastered, thus forming surfaces suitable for covering with wall paintings, which are present on the west wall.
The church reaches a total height of approximately 6 meters.
The Church of St. Mary is the most representative monument in the Prespa Lakes Park area, and on Maligrad Island in particular, which is renowned for its historical, architectural, and artistic values: it still preserves the mural paintings in good condition, which were created in three different phases, and numerous inscriptions, which have also made it possible to date the main construction phases of the monument, as well as the family portrait of Kesar Novak on the western façade of the church. These testimonies constitute an important historical source, providing valuable data on the artistic tastes of the local nobility, as well as the organization of the iconographic program in 14th-century churches in the area.
The church, located in a natural rock cavity on the southern side of Maligrad Island, has attracted the attention of numerous Albanian and foreign researchers, such as V. Djuric, UN. Stranski, Th. Popa, Dh. Dhamo, and A. Meksi, who have studied and explored its architectural, pictorial, and historical features, based on the authentic material, frescoes, and inscriptions preserved.
Regarding the frescoes (Figure 9), three phases of painting are preserved on the walls of the church:
- the first phase is dated to the year 1345

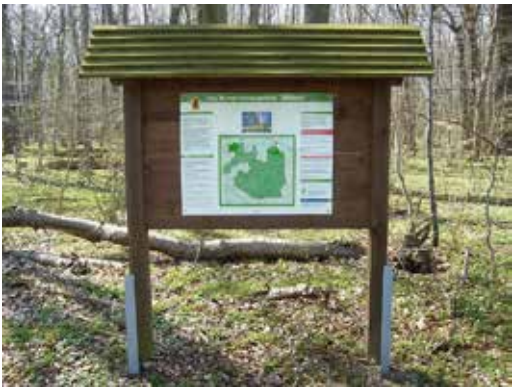


Fig. 13: : Example of an explanatory panel
source/ Technical report restoration project (May 2019)

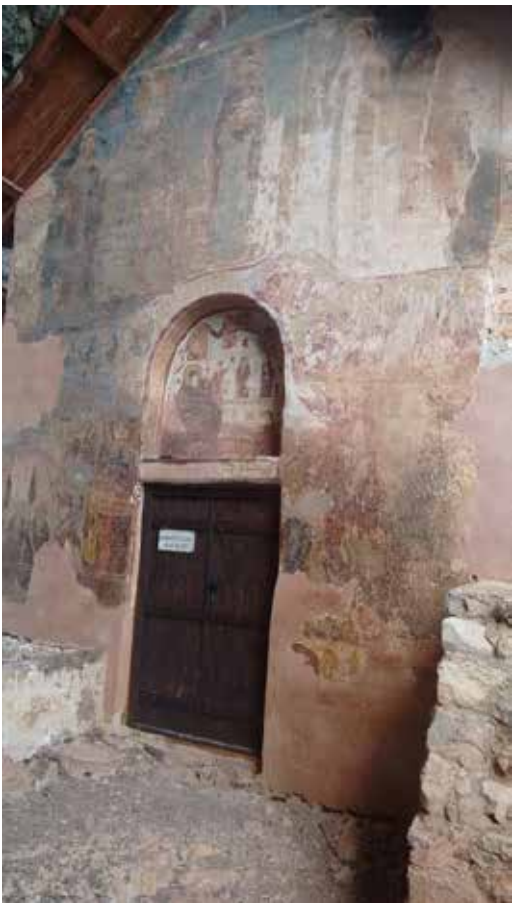
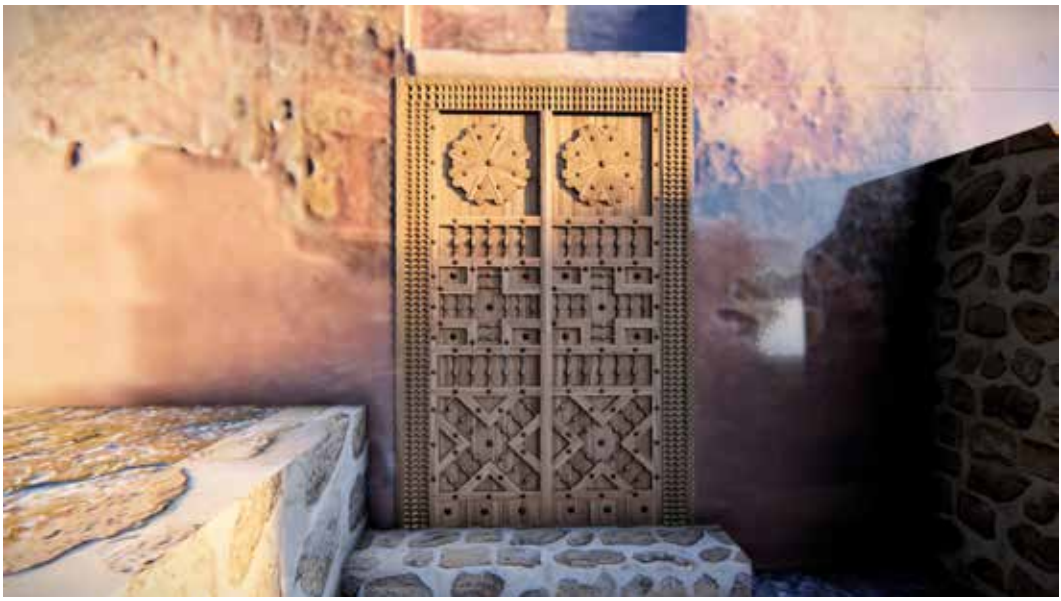


Fig. 14: : St. Mary's Church with a view of the gateway (2018)
source/ https://lh3.googleusercontent.com

and is primarily found in the altar area.
- The second phase of painting is dated to 1369 and, according to the surviving inscription, corresponds to the year of the foundation of the nobleman named Kesar Novaku, whose family portrait is painted on the western façade of the church. This phase includes most of the scenes in the nave, but also those on the southern façade. These wall paintings are considered a typical example of the artistic style of the Palaeologue Renaissance of the 13th-14th centuries, due to the liveliness of the compositions, the movement of the faces, the expressiveness of the portraits, and the density of the colors. According to the research by Prof. E. Tsigaridas, the scenes in the church of Maligrad belong to the same iconographic tradition as the monuments that were painted by the Thessaloniki studies of the early Palaeologian period.
- The third phase is dated to the 17th century, around 1607, and some fragments are preserved only on the western façade of the church.



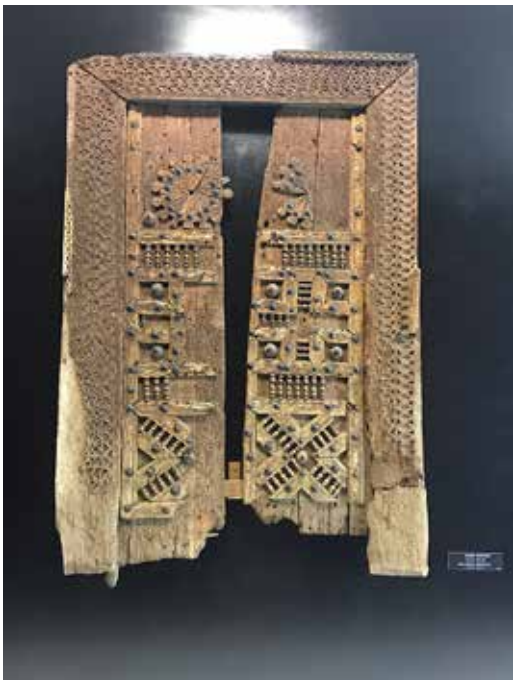


Fig. 15: : Design rendering with detail of access door source/ Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Korça

The restoration project: critical reading

The critical analysis of the restoration project was carried out by comparing the interventions to the main theoretical frameworks presented in the first part of the essay. The aim was to assess the degree of consistency between theory and design practice, taking into account not only core principles of conservation, such as reversibility, material compatibility, distinguishability of the intervention, and minimal intervention, but also the project's ability to respect and enhance the specific identity of the monument, namely the Church of St. Mary.

The building's essence, symbolic value, and its unique relationship with the surrounding natural environment were considered key elements in critically interpreting the design choices. The analysis was developed by comparing the stated intentions, achieved outcomes, and the theoretical framework, to understand whether and how the design decisions preserved the original spirit of the place.

The latest restoration project for St. Mary's Church on Maligrad Island dates back to 2019 and was carried out by the following design team: arch. Amanda Cici, arch. Fotjon Qirinxhi, arch. Mariola Gjoka, and Eng. Xhuljana Avdolli.

The project's objectives were essentially twofold:

- To make the site safe, which includes ensuring both the structural stability of the building and safety conditions in the surrounding area;
- To attract more visitors by improving accessibility to the site (i.e., the path from the pier to the church) and providing adequate explanatory signage.

Interventions related to the first objective include repairs to the church roof, which is badly deteriorated, as well as securing the perimeter wall and the wooden platform in front of the church.

The interventions linked to the second objective, on the other hand, involve the improvement of the natural path leading from the wharf to the church, both during the day and at night (Figure 10), and the installation of signs to help visitors reach and understand the monument.

The wall paintings are not included in this intervention, and may be addressed in a future project.

Even in the definition of the objectives, it is necessary to consider that, as G. Carbonara explains in his Approach, reuse in restoration is a means (not an end, as in recovery) to reach the ultimate goal: the transmission of the monument to future generations. Therefore, the objective is the transmission to future generations and the preservation of authentic materials. The means by which this is achieved can include compatible reuse, such as opening the monument to tourists, and not the other way around.

The monument is the focal point of the intervention, and its identity drives the design choices.

Moving on to the individual interventions, they will be analyzed in the following order:

a. restoration of the roof;
b. fixing of the perimeter wall;
c. access route to the church;
d. creation of explanatory panels;
e. main door.

A) Restoration of the roof

The roof is the main issue concerning the church's

physical and material integrity, rather than its surroundings. In fact, the wooden ceiling is in an advanced state of decay, and to ensure the site's safety, the project calls for its restoration.
The current roof consists of a double-pitched wooden structure, with copper metal sheets resting on top. The original roof is unknown due to a lack of documentary evidence.
The project foresees the dismantling of the existing roof and the installation of a temporary structure. Due to the rocky terrain, where scaffolding cannot be attached, it was decided to temporarily cover it with plastic material, given the small area involved. The dismantled wooden elements will be inspected, consolidated, and, if necessary, replaced. Everything will then be reassembled as it was, including the copper sheets (Figure 11).
It is noteworthy that in the technical report, the designers explicitly reference the possibility of modifying the design during construction, should new information about the roof emerge.
The lack of historical data constituted an obstacle to a new cover, hopefully similar to the original. Therefore, the choice was to leave everything unchanged, albeit with greater static safety. Certainly, this intervention respects the criterion of minimum intervention and does not lead to daring and grossly unsuccessful solutions.
Critical restoration, in particular the first strand, which is the critical-creative restoration, affirms that where there is no support from the historical datum, the architect resorts to his more design-oriented and "creative" side, guided by the strong identity that the monument manifests.
Abstaining from making a choice, as happened in this case, is an action that does not fully honor the role of the architect in the restoration project.
What is certain is that the restoration project always opens up new challenges because it cannot be framed in strict rules that can be applied like an instruction manual. It is the task of the architect-restorer to disentangle himself from the difficulties related to sources, interpretations, ensuring a clear and not misleading reading of the monument.

B) Fixing of the perimeter wall

The perimeter wall, which is severely deteriorated, is in need of intervention to ensure the safety of the area in front of the church. It will be restored by grouting it with a mortar based on hydraulic lime and volcanic sand, in order to make it similar to the existing material.
Once again, the principle of minimal intervention is respected, ensuring visual unity.

C) Access route to the church
The path from the pier to the church is currently a natural path with no signposts. The design proposal consists of placing stone steps in the steepest sections, while in the areas with the steepest slopes wider steps will be placed, as if they were 'platforms'. The idea of the final result is shown in figure 12.
Although not explicitly stated in the technical report, this project proposal clearly follows the dictates of the so-called 'naturalistic engineering', which is a discipline that studies how to use plant parts associated with materials such as stone, earth, timber, or steel as building materials. The goal is to create interventions with a low impact on the landscape and in full harmony with the surrounding natural environment.
In this case, the need to secure the path skillfully aligns with the theoretical principles of restoration, proposing a solution that is compatible, even from a material perspective, with the surrounding environment.
D) Creation of explanatory panels

The signage, which is currently absent, will be created through panels made mainly of wood and, in some cases, light metal structures (Figure 13). Again, it was decided to use compatible and lightweight materials. Additionally, the panels will be placed away from walls or archaeological structures to preserve the authentic material, in line with the principles of modern restoration, and to achieve a better integration into the landscape.
E) Main door

In the May 2019 and March 2020 project reports, no reference was found to the access door to the church, the current appearance of which can be seen in Figure 14.
However, in the rendered images that have been produced, it can be seen that a new wooden door has been proposed (Figure 15).
The design of this new door is not random, but traces the remains of a 14th-century church door from Korça and preserved in the National Museum of Medieval Art in Korça (Figure 16).
Certainly, the designers raised a subject for discussion: how can the gateway be reinterpreted if its original appearance is unknown? The answer given by this project was that of analogy in terms of place and time, i.e., to study gates from the same period that are found in neighbouring areas.
This is a critical approach that allows for a result consistent with the identity of the monument. The attention to be paid in these cases concerns the blurred boundary between copy and reinterpretation, in order to ensure a clear and coherent reading of the monument.
For this reason, proposing a wooden door (principle of material compatibility) similar to those present in the same historical period and geographical area, but with a simplified design, would have allowed the monument to be interpreted clearly without generating a non-authentic reconstruction, as in this case.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article is set within the debate on the relationship between theory and practice in the field of restoration. After an excursus on the major positions that have developed around the subject, we applied them to a case study, that of St. Mary's Church on the island of Maligrad. The restoration project dates back a few years and skilfully took advantage of the monument's privileged location, in an isolated, unspoilt place, difficult to reach, surrounded by nature and in perfect harmony with it. These characteristics have always been present since its foundation, as an ideal place for a relationship in which the faithful could communicate with God, and have been maintained in the project proposal. On the other hand, what emerges is the attention paid to tourism needs; tourism is a useful means of passing the monument on to the future, and should not be the ultimate goal of the intervention nor should it guide design actions. Rather, it is history that guides design choices. History is the main tool that restoration must use. Historical research must not be an action aimed at mere theoretical knowledge, but must become action and, therefore, architecture, guiding the project. Careful and punctual historical research must accompany the project, enabling the monument's identity to be understood and ensuring that this identity is preserved. Lastly, it must be specified that the interdisciplinary nature

of restoration cannot be disregarded, deferring areas of intervention. Rather, synergetic work between the different disciplines is required in order to make the monument-organism adequately readable: architects, engineers, chemists, botanists, restorers, etc.
The lack of these two aspects, profound historical knowledge and strong interdisciplinarity, can easily lead to partial and uncoordinated restoration interventions, not guaranteeing the correct reading of the architectural text.

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