RE-READING THE THRESHOLDS OF TIME:

THE PROJECT AS A TOOL FOR KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN POSEIDONIA, ELEA, AND THE COASTAL COLONIES OF MAGNA GRAECIA

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ABSTRACT

In the Mediterranean context, archaeological heritage is widespread and pervasive: fragments of architecture and cities that resurface, but which too often appear silent, disconnected, incomprehensible, suspended in a state of distance from the present. Much more than simple testimonies to be preserved, these fragments deserve to be read with greater attention: they are forms born of a deep relationship with the place, the climate and the cultures that generated them. For the architect, they represent both a source of knowledge and a field of experimentation: on the one hand, they preserve principles from which it is still possible and necessary to learn, and on the other, they invite us to question how to intervene in those places today and to what extent it is possible and legitimate to transform them. It is in this tension that the research finds its field of investigation, setting itself the goal of redefining the role of architectural design as a critical and at the same time (re)generative tool in relation to archaeology.

The case study of the Archaeological Park of Paestum and Velia is the starting point for this journey: two coastal cities that make up a single Archaeological Park but differ in origin, shape and geographical condition. Paestum, Poseidonia: a city on the plain, was founded by Achaean colonists from Sybaris and has an agricultural vocation; Velia, Elea: a hilltop city of Phocaean origin, was born out of a strategic relationship with the sea. But why did they come into being in these places, in these forms? What relationships did they have with the territory, with the resources, with the culture that generated them? And what do they represent in their current condition? Understanding the structure and form of these cities means not only analysing their morphology, but also reconstructing the historical and cultural context that determined their origins. The research therefore aims to construct a broader comparative framework around these case studies, which will include other centres of similar foundation, in order to identify potential recurrences, paradigms and formal constants. This operation allows us to recognise fundamental principles capable of guiding design thinking and reaffirming design as a form of knowledge.

GOALS

The objective is therefore not to find a single formula, but to outline a way of looking, reading and acting. Addressing the issue of contemporary design in archaeological sites means questioning the condition of an architecture that, over time, has lost the ability, courage and possibility to measure itself against ancient artefacts. Yet, conservative practices alone, although motivated by a desire for protection, often produce the opposite effect, transforming many archaeological sites into untouchable scenarios. But can this condition of immobility really be considered a form of protection? Overcoming the dichotomy between conservation and transformation means recognising that design, when born from a deep knowledge of places, can become an act of care and enhancement. Studying Paestum and Velia, and the world that generated them, means questioning the profound reasons for building in the Mediterranean, in the hope that archaeology can once again become not only an object of protection, but a living interlocutor in the construction of the present.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, the research is twofold: theoretical and operational. The theoretical component aims to explore the critical and conceptual foundations of the relationship between design and heritage through the analysis of texts, theories and positions that have contributed to defining the debate on conservation and contemporary intervention in archaeological contexts over time. The operational component, on the other hand, uses selected case studies as tools for investigation, in order to explore and verify the validity and applicability of the principles that have emerged. Maintaining a direct link with the built environment is, in fact, a necessary condition for giving the research a concrete dimension. In this process, a number of exemplary projects, experiences in which architecture has been able to dialogue with heritage without reducing it to a mere image, will serve as terms of comparison and critical reflection.

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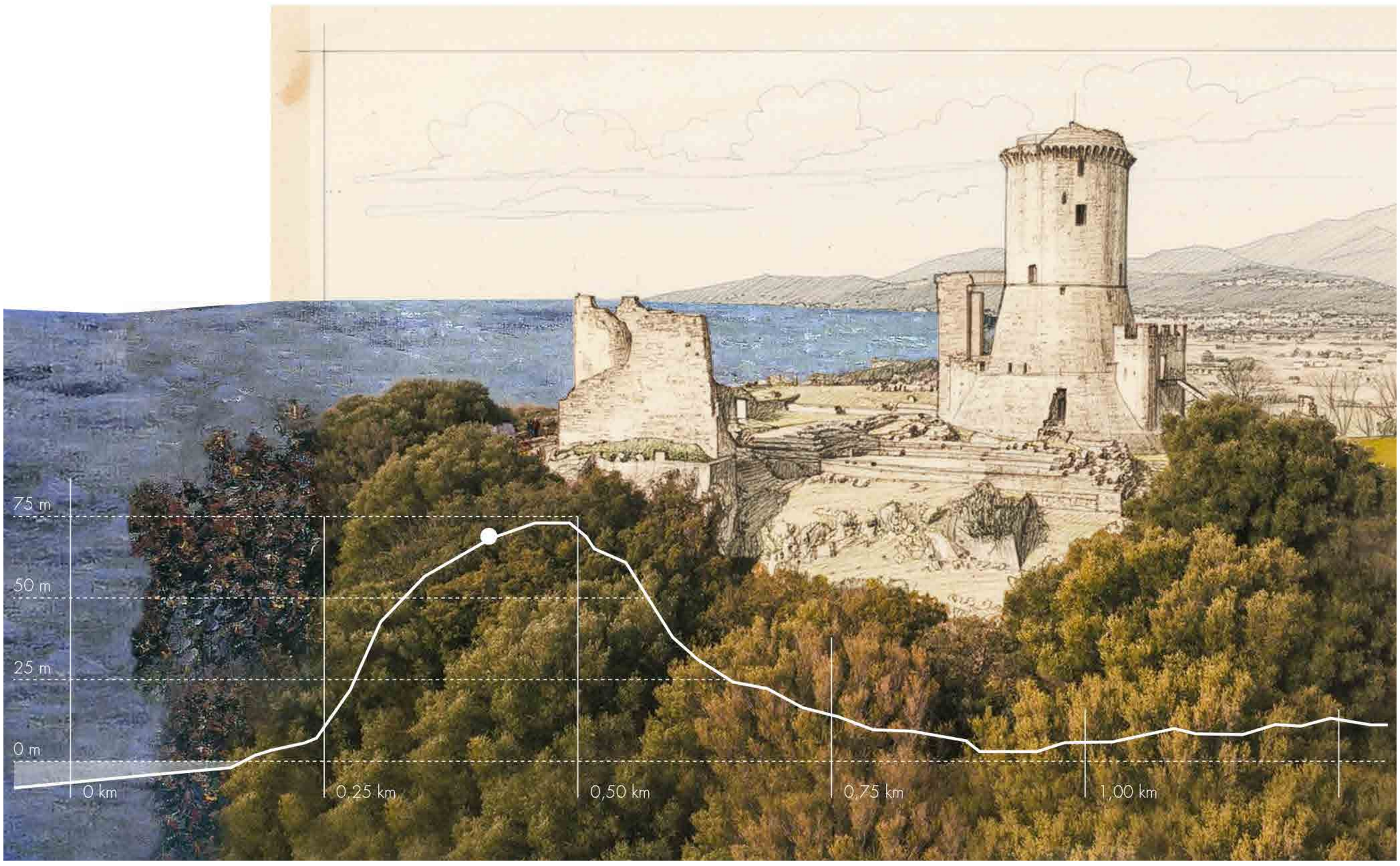

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