Konstantina Demiri
School of Architecture
National Technical University
of Athens

The Convergence of Architecture and Archaeology in a Palimpsestic Urban Setting

—

Issues and Concepts

"Almost all cities are the result of complex processes of layering through time. These processes have both contributed to the shaping of the physical landscape inhabited today and also, much more subtly, created an atmosphere of use, a demarcation of physical and social space, and an experience of the sense of the city."[1]

Cities are comprehensive spatial systems in a state of constant flux and historic cities especially are the result of a process of layering and appear as a kind of palimpsest. Their historic depth with traces of earlier city plans contributes to the vividness of the urban space and citizens' life. These *topoi* with historical, cultural, aesthetic, and emotional value constitute part of the collective memory of its inhabitants and affect peoples' life. In many cases they are physically separated from the modern city (being at a lower level), create a fragmented spatiality, are remote from the life of the citizens and appear as 'voids' in the urban tissue. However, they constitute part of the collective heritage of the inhabitants.

Important concepts for reading these archaeological areas within their urban context are the notion of 'palimpsest' and that of 'enclaves'.

1 Tim Williams, "Archaeology: Reading the City through Time," in *Reconnecting the City: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach and the Future of Urban Heritage,* ed., Francesco Bandarin and Ron van Oers (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 19.

2   Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Diacritics,* no. 16 (Spring 1986): 22-27. Originally published as "Des Espace Autres," *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (October 1967).

3   Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis, "Naples," in *Walter Benjamin. Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 163-73. The essay was written in 1924.

4   Ernst Bloch, "Italy and Porosity," in *Literary Essays*, trans. Andrew Joron et al., ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 450-457. Massimo Cacciari, "Non potere massacrarmi Napoli! Conversazione con Massimo Cacciari," in *La Città porosa: conversazioni su* Napoli, ed. Claudio Velardi (Napoli: Cronopio, 1992), 157-190.

5   Sophie Wolfrum, "Porosity-Porous City," in *Porous City: From Metaphor to Urban Agenda,* eds. Sophie Wolfrum *et al* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018), 16.

6   Roger Scruton "Public Space and the Classical Vernacular," in *The Public Face of Architecture: Civic Culture and Public Spaces*, eds. Nathan Glazer and Mark Lilla (New York; London: The Free Press, 1987), 7.

The first refers to their historic depth and not only to the stratification of their findings but also to different meanings associated with their evolution. The second one refers to their contemporary condition as heterotopic areas;[2] these are delimited by strict boundaries separating them from the urban surrounding and public life. An issue is raised on how we should deal with these unique areas, by transforming them from places of ruins into public, vivid places and allowing various forms of cultural actions. It is important to enhance their role in the contemporary city as dynamic places of coexisting activities with an emphasis on their boundaries considered as 'liminal' areas, instead of 'lines' of segregation.

Considering archaeological areas, the notions of 'porosity' and 'publicness' (a quality of being public) are essential as they advocate a socially engaged practice rather than a strict museum presentation. Porosity was originally related to urban social space and citizens' life in the urban fabric by Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis in their seminal essay "Naples";[3] it was followed by others as Ernst Bloch and Massimo Cacciari.[4] Sophie Wolfrum offered us a few independent connotations of 'porosity'. Some of them are: "Interpenetration, superimposition and multilayering of spaces/Integration, overlapping and communication of spatial elements/Ambiguous zone, in-between space and threshold/Permeability, spaciousness and ambiguity of borders/Coexistence, polyvalence and sharing/[…] The flaneur's perspective and a performative approach to urban architecture."[5] Thus, porosity corresponds to a situation where boundaries are permeable, and conditions of threshold develop. Applying the notion of porosity in the archaeological cityscapes we reach the idea of public space. According to Roger Scruton "A space is made public by the nature of its boundary […] The boundary which creates a public space is both permeable and open to our public uses. A truly public architecture is one which attempts to record and symbolise the condition of civil life, […] It is an architecture which possesses the virtue of civility."[6] This entails that archaeological sites should become areas of public actions with porous boundaries. This approach brings archaeology and architecture into convergence as through architectural interventions archaeological sites can become open, porous, public spaces that can promote social interaction, highlight the collectiveness, become a meeting place of social, cultural, political actions, offer equal opportunities to all and function as social condensers.

The Convergence of Architecture and Archaeology

7   Renée Colardelle, "Synthesis Session
    3 Interpretation and Museography,"
    in *Urban Pasts and Urban Futures: Bringing
    Urban Archaeology to Life. Enhancing Urban
    Archaeological Remains*, International and
    Interdisciplinary Symposium, Brussels:
    4-5 October 2005.

8   Denis Cosgrove, "Introduction: Mapping
    Meaning," in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove
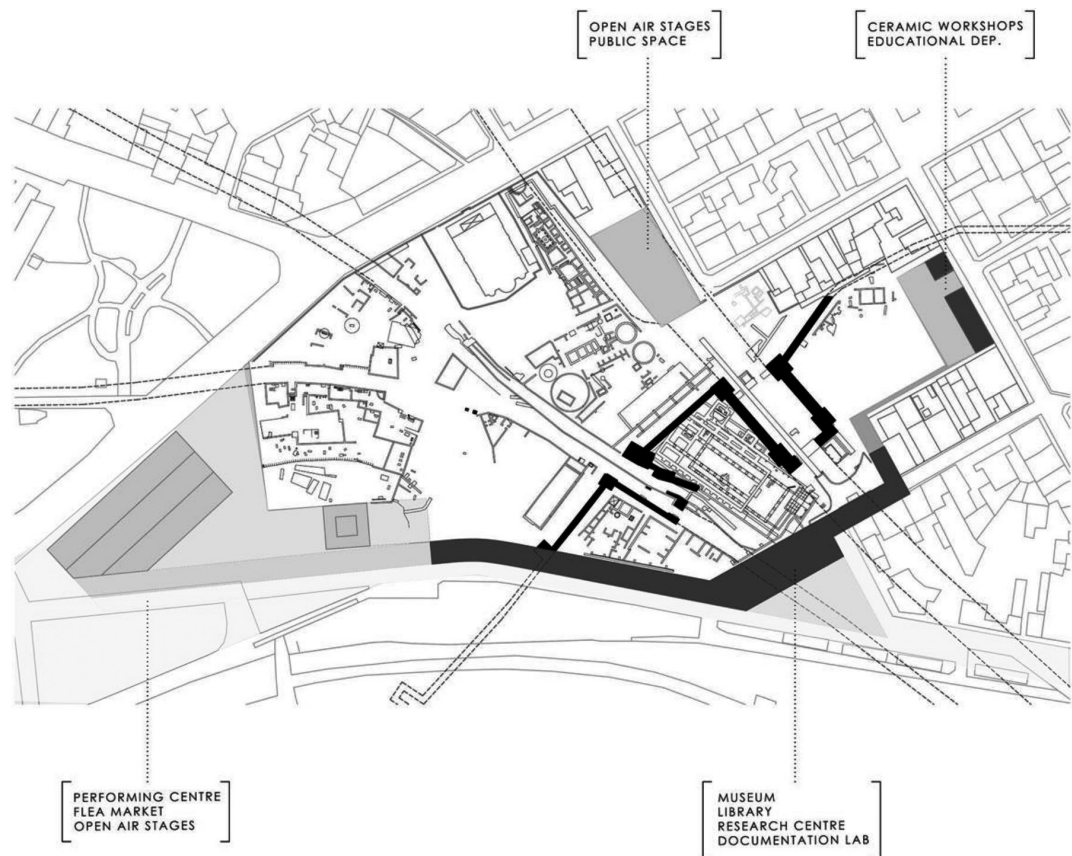   (London: Reakton Books, 1999), 10.

Four Viewpoints

"An archaeological site can become an excellent instrument for cultural action. It helps to guide the public from the concrete to the concept, provided it goes beyond relating its own history." [7]

The general objectives of the part of the ALA programme taking place in Athens are to focus on the interplay between the historical stratification of the urban landscape and the contemporary urban life by using the combined knowledge of architecture, landscape design, archaeology and urbanism. In general, it is a combination of a design studio and three modules involving both theoretical knowledge and its practical implementation. The aim is to delve into various issues, e.g. palimpsest as a key theme of urbanism, that help us to understand the city as a complex cultural phenomenon and as a locus of memories. Design strategies develop to reconnect the fragmented archaeological sites with city life and transform them from enclaves to areas of public life.

The *Design studio: Archaeology within the urban tissue* has as its leading master Professor Nelly Marda of the National Technical University of Athens and is run with the contribution of the archaeologist Professor Diamantis Panagiotopoulos of the University of Heidelberg, and myself. The studio dealt with the issue of openness, porosity and connectivity of the archaeological site of Kerameikos of Athens with the city's social and cultural life. Kerameikos – an old pottery district and cemetery – is characterised by five thousand years of continuous human activity. It was placed on the edge of the ancient Themistoclean Wall of Athens (480 BC), dividing the area into two parts, one inside and one outside the city. It includes two important city gates: The Sacred and the Dipylon. Two roads connected Athens to major locations. The first was the Sacred Way leading to Eleusis and one branch of it to Piraeus port. The second road was divided into two parts starting from Dipylon Gate; one leading to the Academy of Plato through Dimosion Sema and the other to the Acropolis through the Panathenaic Way. The unique topography and the special character of the area surrounding the archaeological site are signified by diverse cultural references materialised in its buildings' stock and the spatial formations of the urban fabric. It is through the elaboration of the notions of 'boundary', 'porosity' and its design interpretations that new relations were explored between Kerameikos and its surrounding neighbourhoods.
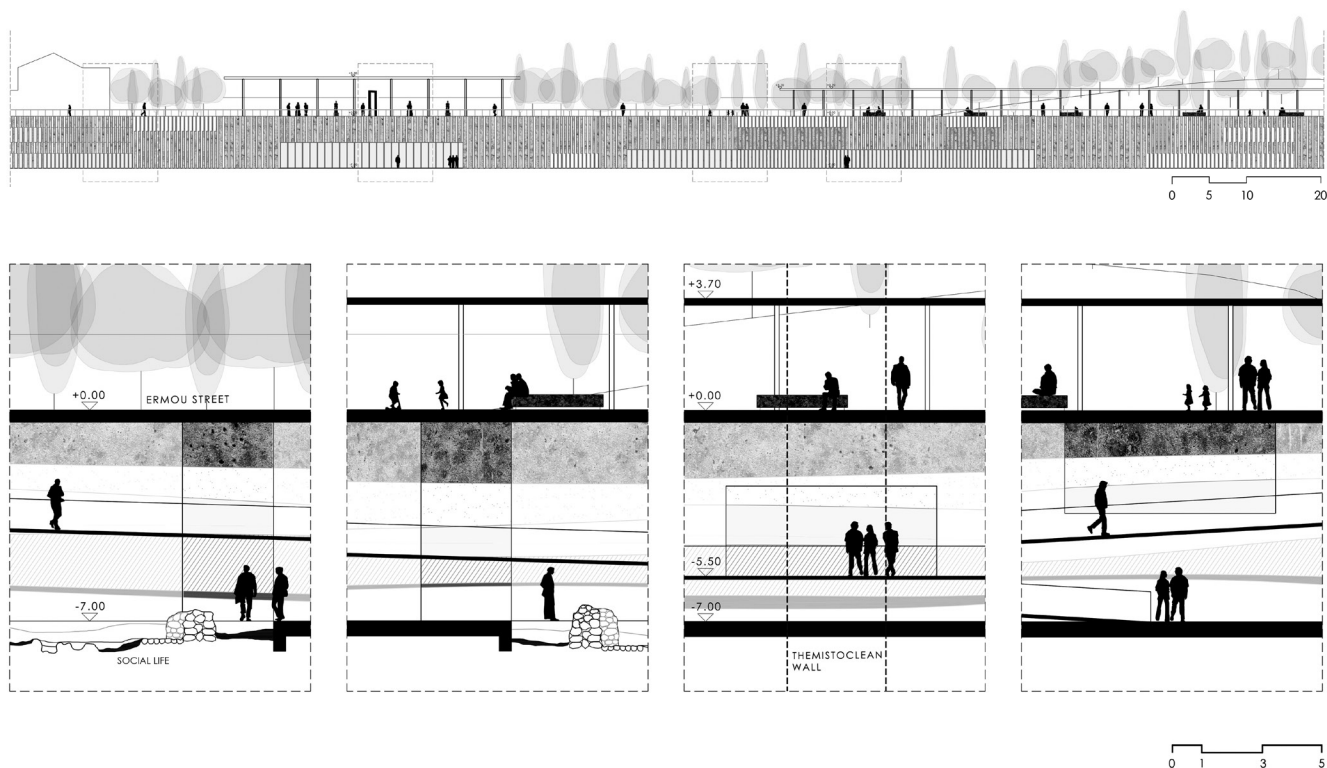
Initially, students used mapping techniques as expressive tools for recording the site and its relationship with the city. Mapping is "not restricted to the mathematical; it may equally be spiritual, political or moral […] is not confined to the archival; it includes the remembered, the imagined, the contemplated"[8] – it helps students to record activities, concepts and personal interpretations of the area and its history in an interpretive way. These interpretations in relation to the programme as well

OPEN AIR STAGES
PUBLIC SPACE

CERAMIC WORKSHOPS
EDUCATIONAL DEP.

PERFORMING CENTRE
FLEA MARKET
OPEN AIR STAGES

MUSEUM
LIBRARY
RESEARCH CENTRE
DOCUMENTATION LAB

fig. 1 D. Bonotulshi, J. Cardoso, M-V. Viera
Capote Gonzaga, The areas of interventions
(students' drawing).

as spatial qualities facilitate creative thinking at both visual and conceptual level and lead to intervention strategies. Finally, four different approaches were developed by the teams of students and each one attributed a title to its intervention expressing the concept of their approach.

The proposal entitled *Archive fever through the palimpsest of events* (D. Bonotulshi, J. Cardoso, M-V. Viera Capote Gonzaga) approached Kerameikos and its surrounding area through three key concepts: 'palimpsest', 'archive' and 'events'. Based on Derrida's idea of 'archive' they focus on the living archive of Kerameikos through the palimpsest of events (political, military, sacred, social, cultural) from ancient times to the present. Their design strategy resulted from a meticulous mapping of the events and introduced spaces for performative happenings, educational activities, and cultural events (figure 1). Their design proposal included a museum space offering multi-sensorial experience that substitutes the strict boundary of the archaeological site facilitating the gradual
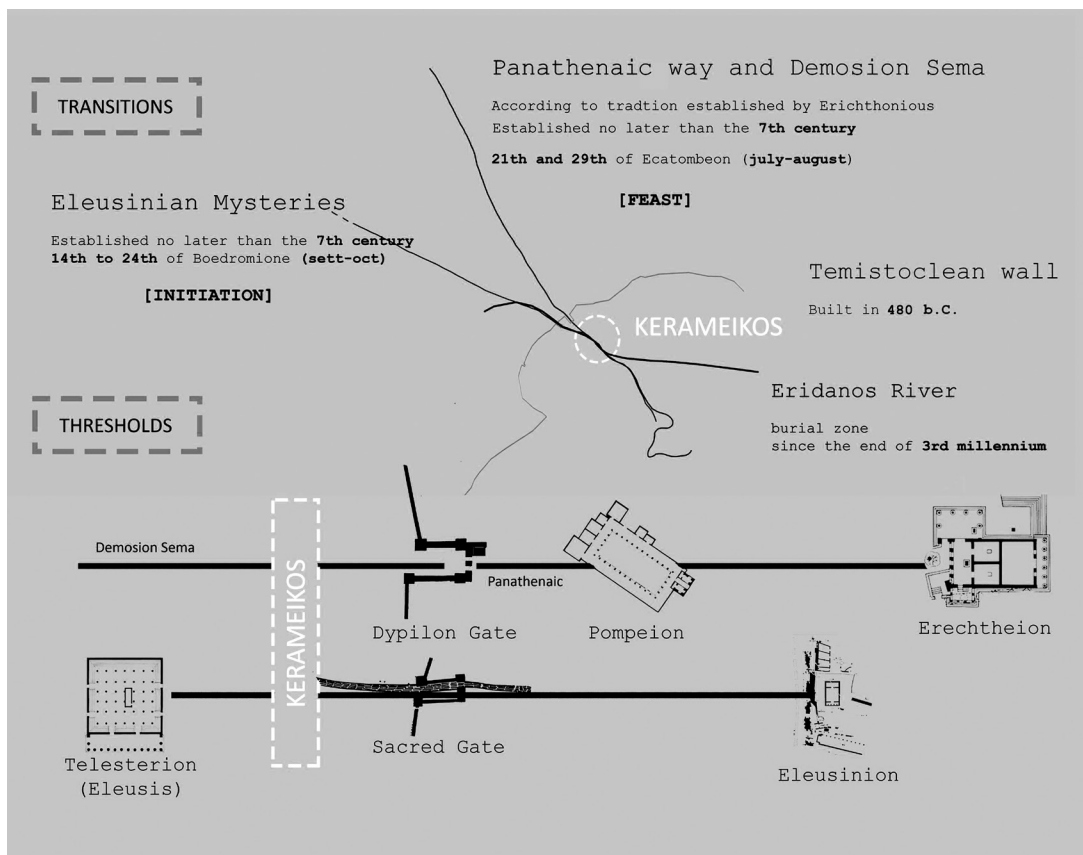
fig. 2 D. Bonotulshi, J. Cardoso, M-V. Viera Capote Gonzaga The museum merged into the existing retaining wall (students' drawing).

entrance into the area (figure 2). The archaeological terrain is extended into the ground floor of the museum, becoming an exhibit. The roof of the museum is an extension of the pedestrian periphery road and offers a place for organised events and a standing point for visitors to view the area from above. Via ramps, the gradual descent into Kerameikos offers an experience of a *promenade architecturale* (Le Corbusier's term referring to the experience of movement in space). Overall, their approach expresses the idea that it is important to approach archaeological areas not only as monumental *topoi* but as spaces of social interaction and cultural expression.

The proposal entitled *Continuity of myth in transmutation* (F. Baudouin-Simi, B. Melaku, N. Shiasi) was the outcome of the investigation of myths relating to the archaeological area and their symbolic significance in antiquity. The mapping of the place was conceptualised through the myth of Demeter and Persephone celebrated
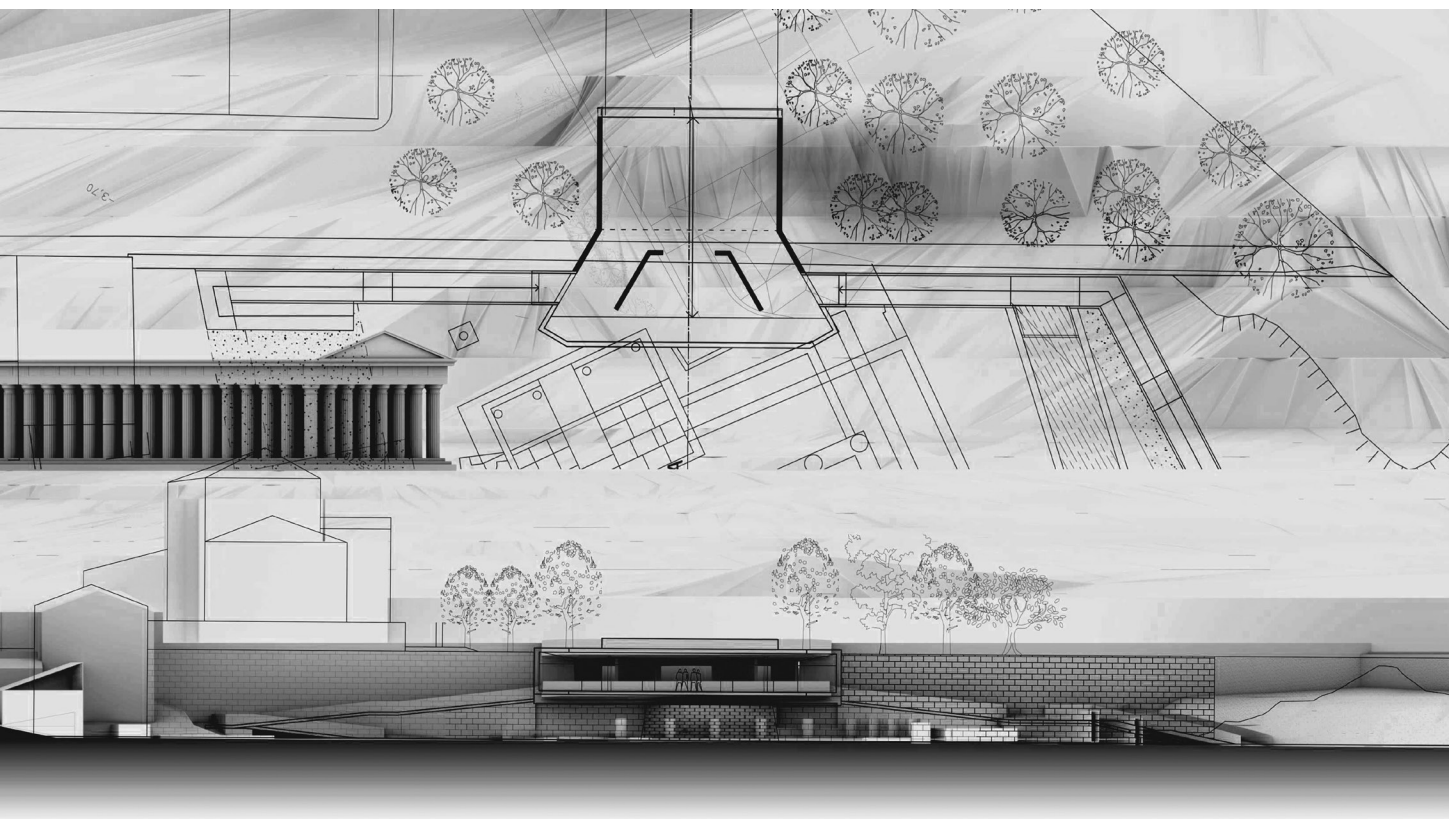
TRANSITIONS

Eleusinian Mysteries

Established no later than the **7th century**
14th to 24th of Boedromione **(sett-oct)**

[INITIATION]

Panathenaic way and Demosion Sema

According to tradtion established by Erichthonious
Established no later than the **7th century**

21th and 29th of Ecatombeon **(july-august)**

[FEAST]

Temistoclean wall

Built in **480 b.C.**

KERAMEIKOS

Eridanos River

burial zone
since the end of **3rd millennium**

THRESHOLDS

Demosion Sema

KERAMEIKOS

Panathenaic

Dypilon Gate   Pompeion   Erechtheion

Telesterion
(Eleusis)   Sacred Gate   Eleusinion

9   Iris Aravot, "Interpretations of Myth in
    Contemporary Architectural Writing," *Journal of
    Architectural and Planning Research,* vol. 13, no. 4
    (winter 1996): 271-290.

fig. 3   F. Baudouin-Simi, B. Melaku, N. Shiasi,
         Topography and Myth. The system
         of transitions and thresholds
         (students' drawing).

in the Eleusinian Mysteries. The myth was spatially related to Kerameikos through the Sacred Way followed by pilgrims on their way from Athens to the Eleusis. A myth according to Iris Aravot can stimulate concepts in architectural discourse considered as a contemporary narrative which legitimately influences architectural design.[9] The students considered mythology as a non-dogmatic and non-chronological narration related to the structure of our psyche and they used it as an instrument to deepen into issues of topography, landscape, and archaeology. Perceiving the myth of Demeter and Persephone as a recurrent transition from the Upper World to *Ades* (the Underworld), they transpose it to the topography of the site ending up with a system of transitional elements and thresholds (figure 3). Their design proposal consists of three threshold spaces at the crossing points of the main roads of antiquity with the archaeological site. The 'Initiation' threshold along the Sacred Way, the 'Sacrifice' threshold along the Demosion Sema road and the 'Feast' threshold along
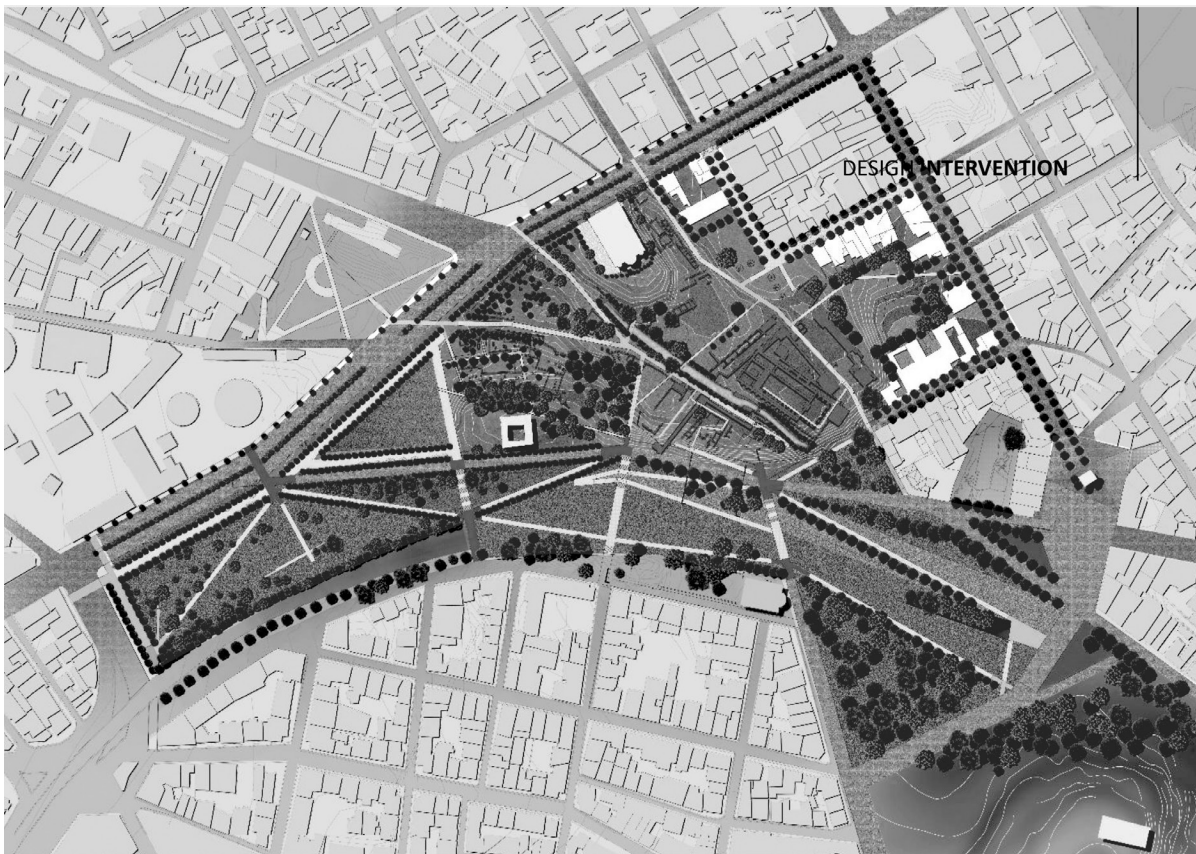
fig. 4 Baudouin-Simi, B. Melaku, N. Shiasi, 'Feast
Threshold'. Plan and elevation towards
Kerameikos (students' drawing).

the Panathenaic Way. These interventions function as entrances to the archaeological site; two of them become underground passages (descent and ascent according to the myth) and the third (figure 4) a place to gaze over the area before starting to descend into the archaeological terrain.

The proposal *Landscape layering through space/time* (J-C. Arias Tapiero, P-A. Mancilla-Lopez, W. Thaisuwan) focused on the vertical and horizontal layering of Kerameikos, the city of Athens and its topography. Their mapping was based on various collages of maps (from mid 19th century to today) and overlapping of contemporary photos on old paintings of the same location. In this way they explored the spatial elements of the historic urban landscape that remained stable and thus became characteristics of the urban tissue. The archaeological site was explored through various sections revealing the excavations through time. Their strategy was to create an archaeological park hosting various activities (athletic, recreational, performative, and cultural). The design

DESIGN INTERVENTION

proposal was to open the archaeological site completely (figure 5) and through brave interventions in the surrounding contours to intermingle the excavation terrain with its southern city neighbourhood which nowadays is isolated from Kerameikos due to the altitude difference and the existence of railway tracks. Students introduced a 'green platform' scrolling down above the tracks (figure 6). A network of paths, ramps, and plantation unfolds the view of the whole area to the *flaneurs*. The system of paths is extended inside the excavation area, slightly raised above the ruins, allowing visitors, with the help of digital technology (augmented reality) to grasp the evolution of the layering of the site through time.

The fourth proposal entitled *Athens fingerprints. Recording and decoding* (F-R. Fiano, Sh. Islam, A. Tsonidis) can be considered as a linguistic approach. Initially, students used three notions (labyrinth, rhythm and scale) to record the different experiences of movement of people in Kerameikos' surrounding neighbourhoods, thus attributing

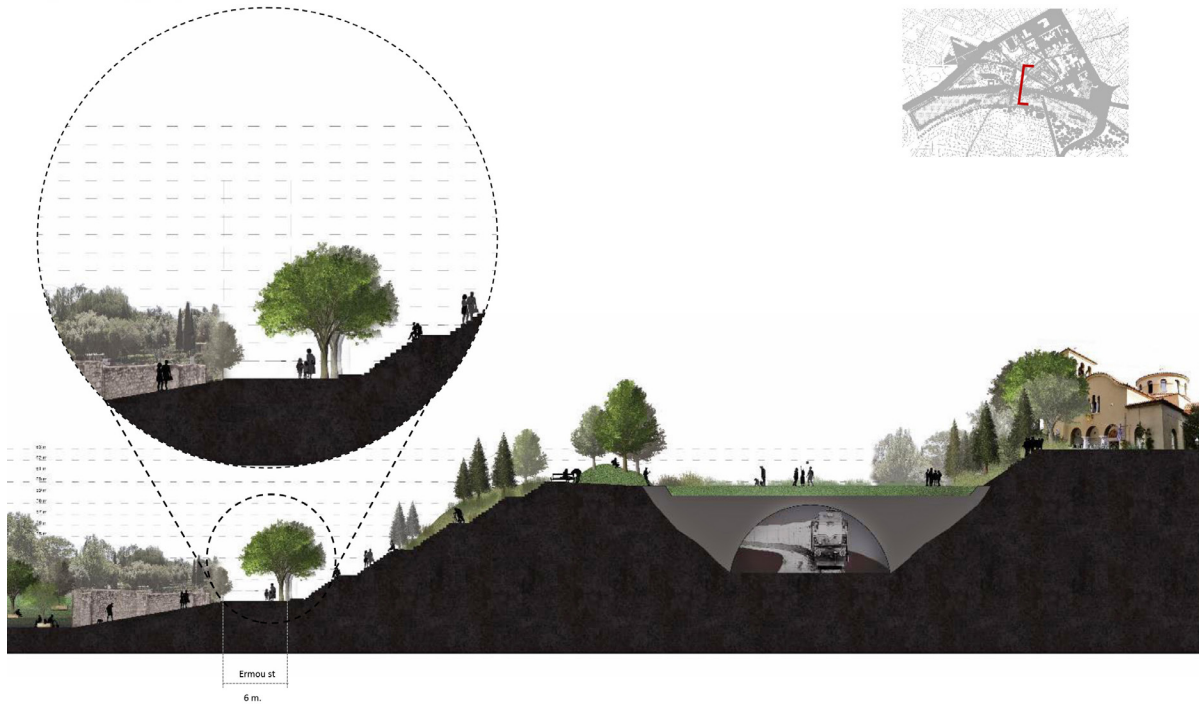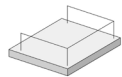**The Convergence of Architecture and Archaeology**

fig. 6 J-C. Arias Tapiero, P-A. Mancilla-Lopez, W. Thaisuwan, The 'green platform' connecting Kerameikos with the adjacent neighbourhood (students' drawing).

a particular fingerprint to every area. For the Kerameikos fingerprint, they focused on three connecting elements with the city: the roads, the fortified wall and the water supply system. These allowed them to record movements and the visibility of the *Àsty* (physical space of the city) and decode the intersections with the contemporary topography. Their strategy aimed at restoring the continuity in the city fabric, enhancing its legibility and vitalising experiences of the space. The design proposal was based on a vocabulary of devices (figure 7) applied in the various intersections of the connecting elements (roads, wall, water). These devices are implemented in space through three spatial tools: points, lines, and surfaces. Points designated the water system, lines the ancient road system and surfaces were employed in the intersections of roads with the walls. The outcome was a creation of interventions along the periphery of the archaeological site, where the roads stop abruptly. Some of them are *belvederi* for people to gaze out over the area. A tower (figure 8) is proposed, reminiscent
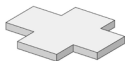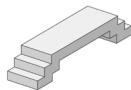
intersections		DEVICE	intersections		DEVICE
ancient & new road networks		BALCONY	roads & walls		STAIRS
ancient roads		JOINT	roads & walls		FRAME
water & roads		BRIDGE	water network		PILLAR
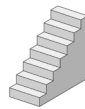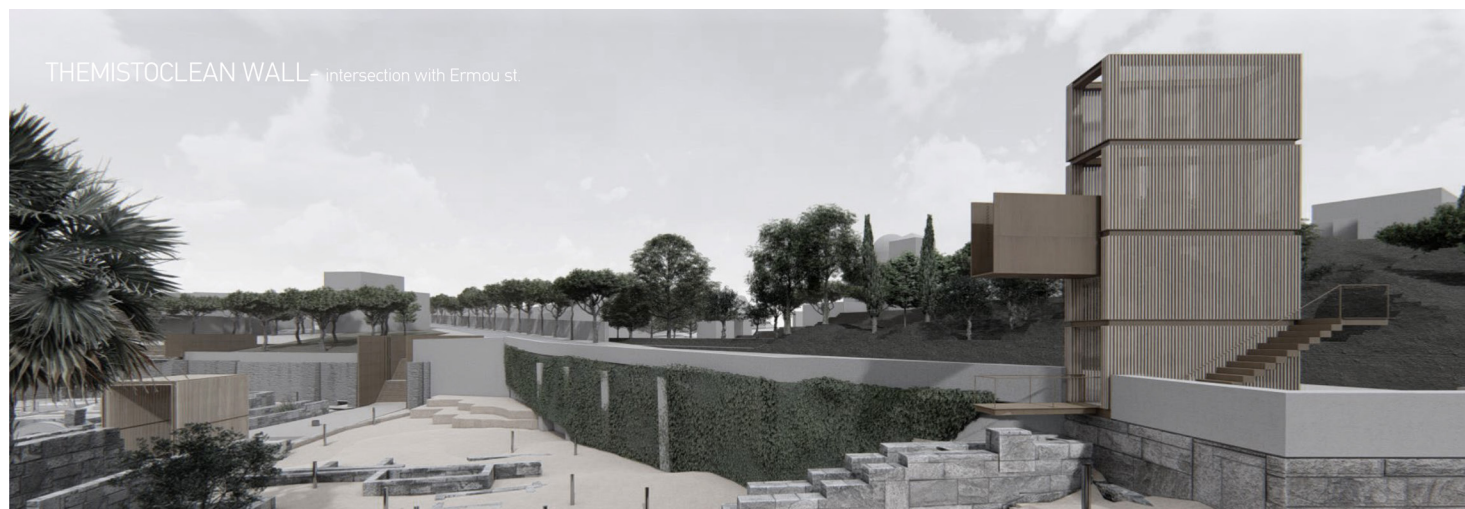
THEMISTOCLEAN WALL – intersection with Ermou st.

The Convergence of Architecture and Archaeology
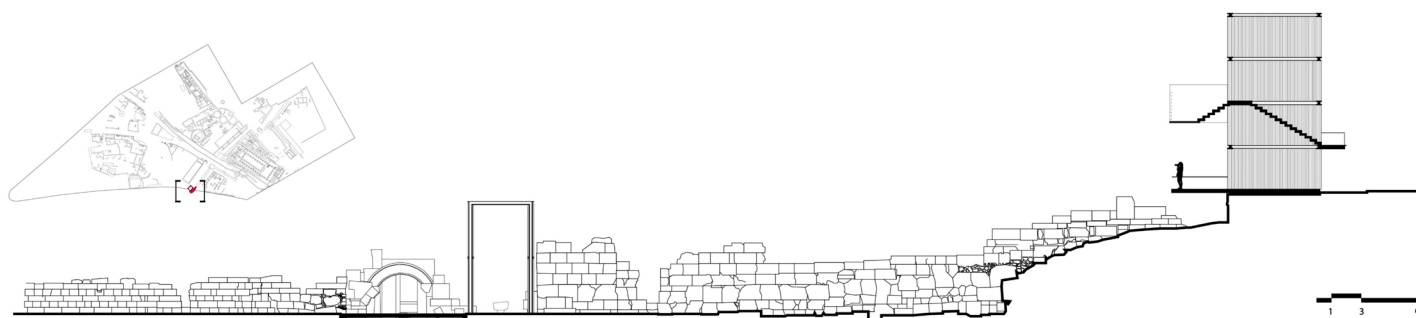
10 Marc Schoonderbeek, "Mapping and Experimentation," in *Architectural Design in Architectural Research Vis-à-Vis Research-by-Design*, eds. Johan De Walsche and Susanne Komossa (Delft: TU Delft, 2016), 88-89.

11 Laurent Olivier, *The Dark Abyss of Time. Archaeology and Memory* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 132.

12 André Corboz, "The Land as Palimpsest," *Diogenes,* vol. 31, no. 121 (March 1983): 33.

13 Geoff Bailey, "Time Perspectives, Palimpsests and the Archaeology of Time," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology,* vol. 26, no. 2 (June 2007): 205-207.

of a tower which was in the same place and a new entrance to the archaeological site is designed from the direction of the historic centre. Additionally, three portal-shaped constructions were proposed which are evocative of the ancient gates. Finally, the water system was pointed with mirror installations.

All approaches presented thus far have architecture converging with archaeology in diverse ways, due to the various mappings that precede. According to Marc Schoonderbeek "mapping is a representation of a social construct within a spatial frame and offers a means to navigate the space it represents [...] not only as a supporting tool, but rather as an integral part of the design process".[10] Thus, it resulted in different ways to operate the space under study and affected the students' design interventions. All teams dealt with the palimpsestic space by focusing on the 'erased' past and the visible layers. Their design interventions introduce new 'inscriptions' either by perforating the boundaries, altering the land morphology or introducing artefacts as modern *memory-objects*.[11] These interventions are reminiscent of hidden or erased aspects (events, myths, landscape context, water, constructions).

Three Synopses

"the land, so heavily charged with traces and with past readings, seems very similar to a palimpsest"[12]

The following three articles in this issue are related with the urban context in diverse ways. They introduce different approaches to the concept of palimpsest as a tool to delve into the overlapping temporalities enclosed in the history of the cities. The paper entitled *New public excavations – the city performs an autopsy* by Virginia Mannering and Tom Morgan draws on recent salvage archaeological excavations in Melbourne, Australia, which historically was developed as gold rush area and evolved in connection to the extractive process. The ground, as they point out, is "mobile and variable rather than stable" and is the result of continuous excavations through time, relocations of dirt leading to the transformation of the earth. The palimpsest in this paper corresponds to a 'spatial palimpsest' as introduced by Geoff Bailey where the material traces are carried out in spatially distinct locations resulting in the loss of their resolution.[13] Salvage archaeology in the city reveal the peoples' operations on *terra*, transmissions of 'dirt' and gold from one place to another offering a new insight into the process of the area's urbanisation and the political or cultural forces that played a significant part in its evolution. Thus, the urban archaeological excavations are considered as a metaphorical 'autopsy' of the city's history.

The essay entitled *Synchronous worlds. Architecture, archaeology and city through a project in Sicily* by Flavia Zaffora presents the results

fig. 7 F-R. Fiano, Sh. Islam, A. Tsonidis, The vocabulary of devices (students' drawing)

fig. 8 F-R. Fiano, Sh. Islam, A. Tsonidis, The tower at the intersection of Themistoclean Wall and Ermou pedestrian road (students' drawing).

14   Ibid., 204-205.

15   Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

16   Sigmund Freud, "A note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" in *Sigmund Freud*, Vol XiX, trans. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1923-1925).

17   Bailey, "Time Perspectives," 10-20. Olivier, *Dark Abyss of Time*, 129-130.

18   Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1982), 22.

of a research project concerning the enhancement of the archaeological park of the Greek colony of Naxos, near Messina, Sicily. The palimpsest in this case corresponds to a 'cumulative palimpsest' to refer to Bailey's distinction.[14] In this case the material traces from the successive episodes of deposition are still there. The layers in the area are the existing ruins and their landscape, both considered as a totality. The design proposal adds a contemporary *stratum* to the existing remnants and changes the archaeological park into an urban park as a threshold between the contemporary city and the sea. The project is mainly focused on establishing guidelines as strategies of enhancement of the area for future interventions and the proposed solution provides a potential one.

Thomais Kordonouri, in her article entitled *Archiving Metaxourgio,* maps the area of intervention – a neighbourhood of Athens at the north-west side of Kerameikos archaeological site – by employing Derrida's notion of archive.[15] 'Archive' and 'palimpsest' are both interrelated. Derrida's presentation of the notion of archive is associated with Freud's 'mystic writing pad'.[16] The core of his idea is the metaphoric notion of palimpsest. The author considers that the palimpsest imprints of Metaxourgio define its incomplete identity as the layers, traces, and records of the past. They have lost their hierarchy and are constantly revealed. Palimpsest consists of materials and objects extending in time and are not only limited to physical traces spread geographically but also to meanings and memories. The design proposal is based on the idea of Metaxourgio as an 'open archive' and its interpretation can lead to its lost identity. Significant traces of the archive of the area are studied such as ruins, building typologies and the grid system of its roads. All these are recorded and incorporated in the new intervention. According to the author, "the proposal aims not only to intensify the relationship of architecture with archaeology, but also to imbue the area's identity with meanings that refer to the past, present and future."

As an *epilogue*, all interventions, despite their differences in the way architecture converges with archaeology, have the common denominator of the idea that palimpsests are inherent facets of the evolution of the cities referring not only to physical aspects and practices but also to their incorporated meanings. There are many kinds of palimpsests[17] —and what remains for us is to interpret these historic deposits as archives of memory, and this interpretation is of vital importance before any intervention to add another layer in the process of stratification. As Aldo Rossi pointed out "One need only look at the layers of the city that archaeologists show us; they appear as a primordial and eternal fabric of life, an immutable pattern."[18]