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An analysis of architectural elements and an attempt at reconstruction of the so-called temple of *Hercules* in Celje

Abstract

Per ricostruire adeguatamente il tempio presso la collina Miklavški hrib a Celje, in Slovenia, è essenziale condurre un dettagliato studio degli elementi architettonici conservati. Le caratteristiche principali del tempio sono state determinate in base al confronto con quanto raccomandato da Vitruvio. L'analisi dei resti conservati *in situ* e dei materiali emersi porterebbe a ricostruire un tempio esastilo pseudoperiptero su podio nonché la presenza di un portico. Il tempio è attualmente attribuito al culto di *Hercules* ma l'ipotesi resta da verificare.

Keywords

Roman temple, *Hercules*, Architecture analysis, *Vitruvius*, Reconstruction, *Celeia*

At the Miklavški hrib hill in Celje, Slovenia, a temple with a portico and with two semicircular and one rectangular niche is preserved *in situ*. The temple was excavated in the years 1947-1951 and was partly conserved and represented in the 1950s[1] (fig. 1).

In addition to the reconstruction of the *aedes* walls, a Corinthian capital that had been found in the *aedes* was placed on top of a pillar and two pillars were built on two column-bases of the portico. At the site or in its immediate vicinity, architectural elements were found that show traces of construction, joining and installation. The temple lies on a plateau, delimited by steep slopes on two sides. Due to heavy rains and soil erosion, a part of the walls slid down the slope, a fact to which the destruction of a part of the northern and north-western part of the portico can be attributed. The temple lies on a terrace west and south of the so called Roman Road, while on the west it is delimited by a rather deep and narrow valley. A detailed analysis of architectural elements is required for their correct interpretation and in order to create a proper reconstruction of the entire temple on their basis. The present state of the Temple of Hercules is a mosaic of different factors: the original state during the excavations, the judgment of excavators and conservators (reconstructed *aedes* walls, location of marble blocks, *etc*.)[2], the actual state of the site after several decades (some stone pieces can be found at neighbouring houses) and the fact that potential elements can be found in the wider immediate vicinity (e.g. the church at Miklavški hrib). Fortunately, certain fragments of information can be found, on the basis of which the reconstruction of the actual state can be made. Essential is the study of proportions as recommended for Roman temples by Vitruvius.

Modular analysis of the preserved remains, geophysical investigations, and the study of the remaining preserved elements at the site reveal a hexastyle pseudoperipteral temple on a podium. The *pronaos* was paved, while stone walls of the *cella* were covered in plaster on both inside and outside surfaces. The original orientation, width, length and height of the *aedes* can be reconstructed, as well as the width of the walls and foundations. Geophysical investigations have revealed a staircase in front of the *aedes*, as well as an enclosed courtyard with an altar (fig. 2).

The analysis of the preserved architectural elements and other remains of the portico indicates two different heights of columns with Tuscan capitals. There was a stone *cornice* in at least a part of the portico. It can be assumed that at least the columns in the niches were partly built of bricks, and there was probably a fence in front of the niches. It has been possible to determine the width of the walls of the portico and the niches. The original positions of plinth bases can be reconstructed and they indicate that although intercolumns were not all the same, they keep up a steady rhythm. The portico was floored with a screed,

[1] Klemenc 1957, Klemenc 1961.

[2] Jerala 2012.

the walls of the semi-circular niches were covered in white plaster, and the walls of the rectangular niches with bricks. Modular analysis of the proportions of the entire temple enables the reconstruction of the positions of walls and niches (fig. 3).

Architectural analysis of the entire temple reveals that it corresponds perfectly to the guidelines by Vitruvius (4.5): it is oriented in the east-west direction, the view from the temple encompasses the larger part of the town, it overlooks the river and the lies near the nearby road. It should be noted, however, that the Celje temple lies in a special urbanistic context, on a plateau outside the town grid.

Additional information can be gained from the ruins in the eastern part of the portico, where a considerable amount of ceiling plaster has been preserved, as well as a fragment of an ornamented yellow painted egg-moulding. A 15 centimeters piece of a stone relief showing an arm with a mace was found there, which caused the temple to be named 'the temple of *Hercules*' (fig. 4).

It is possible that this was merely a votive figurine, donated in one of the niches, where, as indicated by North African analogies[3], secondary deities were worshipped. Wooden plumbing system was discovered in the immediate vicinity, probably leading to one of the niches, that might have been dedicated to an aquatic deity. The *naos* was dedicated to the main deity, to whom a 7 centimeters marble big toe probably belonged. According to the proportions of the male body, the statue must have been about 3,35 meters high. Considering the height of the *aedes* (about 9 m), this could be either a statue of a seated or a standing deity. In the eastern part of the *aedes*, i.e. in the *pronaos*, an antefix was allegedly found among roofing tiles, 2,5 meters deep. The antefix supposedly fell in "the basement rooms". This indicates the existence of a *favissa*[4], a relatively common feature of temples along the Rhine and the Danube[5]. Another indication for the *favissa* are additional walls, found in line with the walls of the *cella*, but not as carefully constructed. The ceiling of these "sacred basement rooms" was built as a self-supporting wooden ceiling or as an arcade support structure. Klemenc also mentions a large number of other foundations on the eastern side of the *aedes*, that could be attributed to the less well constructed walls of rooms with substructures. A prominent charred layer of ruins, burnt bricks and plaster indicates that the building was destroyed in a fire. There were no brick stamps, but a larger number of coins was found in the rubble layer. All the coins lay above the pavement and belonged to the time from Hadrian to the dynasty of Constantine. It should be noted, however, that a wall under the apse floor indicates that there could have been several phases of temple construction, and that some could belong to an earlier period.

[3] Eingartner 2005.

[4] Ritual pits in temples of different civilizations of the ancient Mediterranean, used for depositing votive objects after their use.

[5] Trunk 1991.

It can be concluded that the architectural elements that can be attributed to the temple discussed enable a consistent reconstruction, and that it is possible to determine the proportions of the *aedes* and the portico. It is only unclear whether the frieze of the *aedes* was ornamented and which type of the door was used. At present it is, however, possible to create an ideal reconstruction of the temple even with several more details, e.g. plaster in niches, painted egg-moulding, the shape of the antefixes etc. It is certain that aided by analogies and further research (geophysical investigations, archaeological excavations, stone analysis, computer visualisations and simulations) it will be possible to create a full reconstruction of the temple.

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ILLUSTRAZIONI

Fig. 1 A view over the present-day state of the so-called the temple of *Hercules* (photo by M. Jerala).

Fig. 2 Results of geophysical research (appendix by R. Plesničar).

Fig. 3 Reconstructed elements of the temple (appendix by M. Jerala).

Fig. 4 A part of a stone relief with an arm with a mace, according to which the temple was named the Temple of *Hercules* (Klemenc 1957, p. 101, fig. 9).

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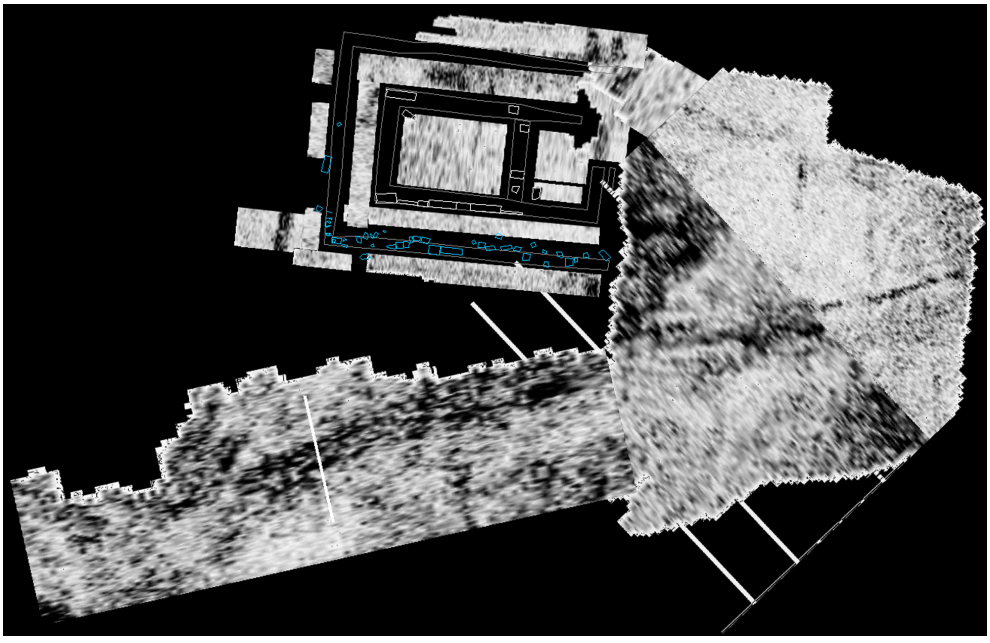

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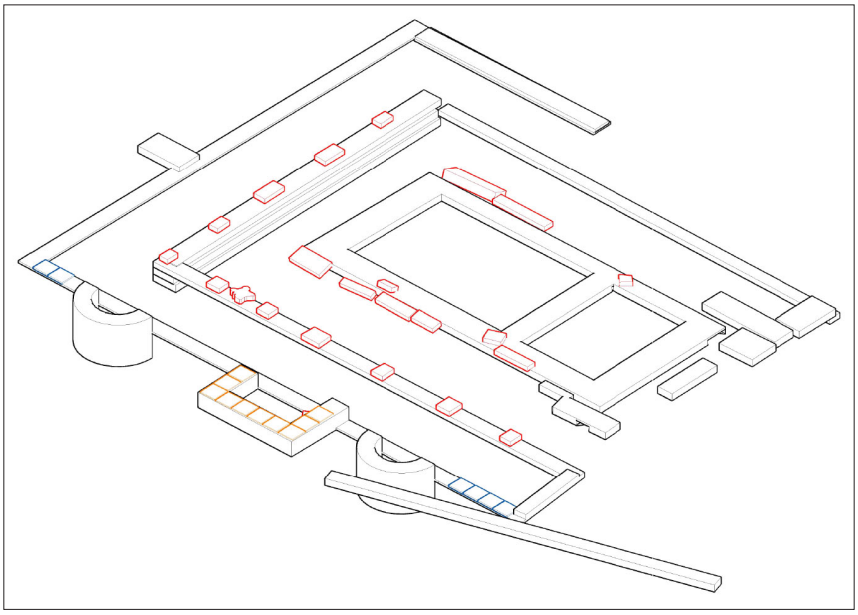

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