[de]exoticizing
the Sephardic Museum
of Toledo

approximations
on democratizing the museum space

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DIPLOMARBEIT

[de]exoticizing the Sephardic Museum of Toledo:
approximations on democratizing the museum space

ausgeführt zum Zwecke der Erlangung des akademischen Grades
eines Diplom-Ingenieurs / Diplom-Ingenieurin

unter der Leitung
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[de]exoticizing the Sephardic Museum of Toledo: approximations on democratizing the museum space

The idea of the museum as a democratic space originates in the foundation of the modern museum when the Frenchman, following the revolution, occupied the royal palace and opened its collection to the public. However, the romanticized ideals of a democratic space did not prevent the museum from becoming an agent of different political agendas that produced national myths and sources of pride. Considering these aspects, in this presented research the evolution of museums in the West and the effects of applied politics in the historical narrative are investigated in relation to the spatial strategies applied in museum buildings. In these terms, the Jewish museums are discussed, as they develop unique conditions within the European cultural scene, revealing the contradictions of political agendas and challenging their legitimacy through a spatial 'otherness'. A special focus is set up on the Sephardic Museum of Toledo which is located in the medieval Synagogue of the Transit, since the different layers of its architecture materialize various political intentions that converted the building into symbols of contradicting ideologies. The developed perspective through theoretical discussions is reflected upon a new curatorial design for the museum, alongside a detailed analysis of the architecture and its urban setting.

[ent]exotisierung des sephardischen Museums Toledo: approximationen zum demokratisieren des musealen raums

Die Idee des Museums als ein demokratischer Raum kommt ursprünglich aus der Gründung des modernen Museums, wenn die Franzosen in der Revolution den Louvre-Palast besetzten und die königliche Sammlung für die breite Öffentlichkeit zugänglich machten. Allerdings verhinderten die romantisierenden Ideen das Museum nicht, ein Mittel der verschiedenen politischen Ideologien zu werden, die nationale Mythen und stolze Geschichten produzierten. Unter Berücksichtigung dieser Aspekte, werden in der vorliegenden Forschungsarbeit die Evolution der Museen in Westen und die Auswirkungen der angewandten Politik auf die historische Erzählung in Bezug auf die eingesetzten räumlichen Strategien in Museumsgebäuden untersucht. Des Weiteren werden in der Arbeit die jüdischen Museen behandelt, da sie einen eigenartigen Zustand in der europäischen Kulturszene entwickeln, in dem sie durch ihre räumliche ‚Andersartigkeit' die Widersprüche unterschiedlicher politischen Vorhaben offenlegen und ihre Rechtmäßigkeit infrage stellen. Ein besonderer Schwerpunkt liegt auf dem sephardischen Museum in Toledo, das sich in der mittelalterlichen Synagoge „El Tránsito" befindet, wobei ihre architektonischen Schichten unterschiedliche politische Ansätze materialisieren, die das Gebäude in Symbole der widersprüchlichen Ideologien verwandelten. Die entwickelte Perspektive als Folge der theoretischen Auseinandersetzung neben einer detaillierten architektonischen und städtebaulichen Analyse wird in ein kuratorisches Entwurf für das Museum übersetzt.

[des]egzotizasyon del museo sefardi Toledo: aproksimasyones al demokratizar el espasio de muzeo

La idea de muzeo komo un espasyo demokratiko deriva de la fundasyon del muzeo moderno, kuando los fransezes okuparon el palasyo real i avrieron su koleksyon al publiko. Ma las ideas romantikas de un espasyo demokratiko no detuvo el muzeo de ser un medio de diferentes ajandas politikas ke krearon mitos politikos i orijenes orgulyozos. Konsiderando esto, se melda en el presente lavoro la evolusyon del muzeo en el Oksidente i los efektos de politikos aplikados en los kuentos istorikos en relasion kon las stratejias del espasyo en los edifisyos de muzeos. Ansina, se melda tambyen los muzeos djudios, dado ke eyos dezvelopan kondisyones espesyales en la esfera kultural de Evropa, demostrando las kontradiksyones de las ajandas politikas i kestyonando su firmidad a traves de su 'alteridad' espasyal. Se konsentra espesyalmente en el Museo Sefardi de Toledo, ke se topa en la sinagoga antika del Transito, ya ke los diferentes trokamientos arkitektonikos a lo largo del tiempo materializa diferentes objektivos politikos ke konvertyó el edifisyo a simbolos de ideolojias kontradiktoryas. La perspektiva konstruida al final del lavoro se prodjekta a un dizenyo kuratoryal kon un analiz detalyado de su arkitektura y situasyon urbana.

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A Journey through the Mediterranean

Who are Sephardim?

The history of Sephardim is a story of migration, displacement, and an ongoing search for belonging.

Sephardim, deriving from the Hebrew word "Sepharad"- literally meaning Spain - is attributed to the descendants of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, who were expelled in 1492 from Spain and in 1496 from Portugal. The Alhambra Decree, signed on 31st July 1492 by the Catholic Monarchs Isabel I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, forced the practising Jews in both kingdoms to leave the country immediately or convert to Christianity in order to be able to continue living on the Peninsula. Following the example of the Spanish Monarchs, King Manuel I of Portugal issued a similar decree in 1496 which eradicated the centuries-long Jewish presence on the Peninsula.

After the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, Sephardim were scattered all over the Mediterranean and Europe. They mostly settled in North Africa, or following the invitation of Sultan Bayezid, immigrated to the East and settled in today's Turkey, Greece, and other Balkan countries. New Sephardic communities had also emerged in Italy, Netherlands, and Britain. Following the beginning of the 17th century many of them immigrated to the Americas in search for new places to settle and flourish.

Prior to expulsion from the Peninsula, Sephardic Jews barely had a 'unified' identity. They were referred to in medieval Spain as Jewish subjects of their cities or regions (e.g., Jews of Toledo, Jews of Seville) and didn't form a collective within a broader region as we see today (Ray 2008:18-19). This period is referred to as "the Jewish Golden Age" in Iberia, as high economic success, social status and intellectual productivity characterized the medieval Iberian Jewry (2008: 18). According to Jonathan Ray, even though the Jewish communities of the Peninsula have shared "cultural, religious and radical identities" prior to migration, "it is the process of migration, resettlement, and the reconstitution of their nation among a network of minority communities that created a new sociocultural synthesis." (2008: 19). The process of displacement, and thus the diaspora, have forged a more unified Sephardic identity in the following centuries, even though the geographical borders of the communities have expanded.

Fig. 01 Catholic Monarchs, Façade of University of Salamanca ©Shutterstock

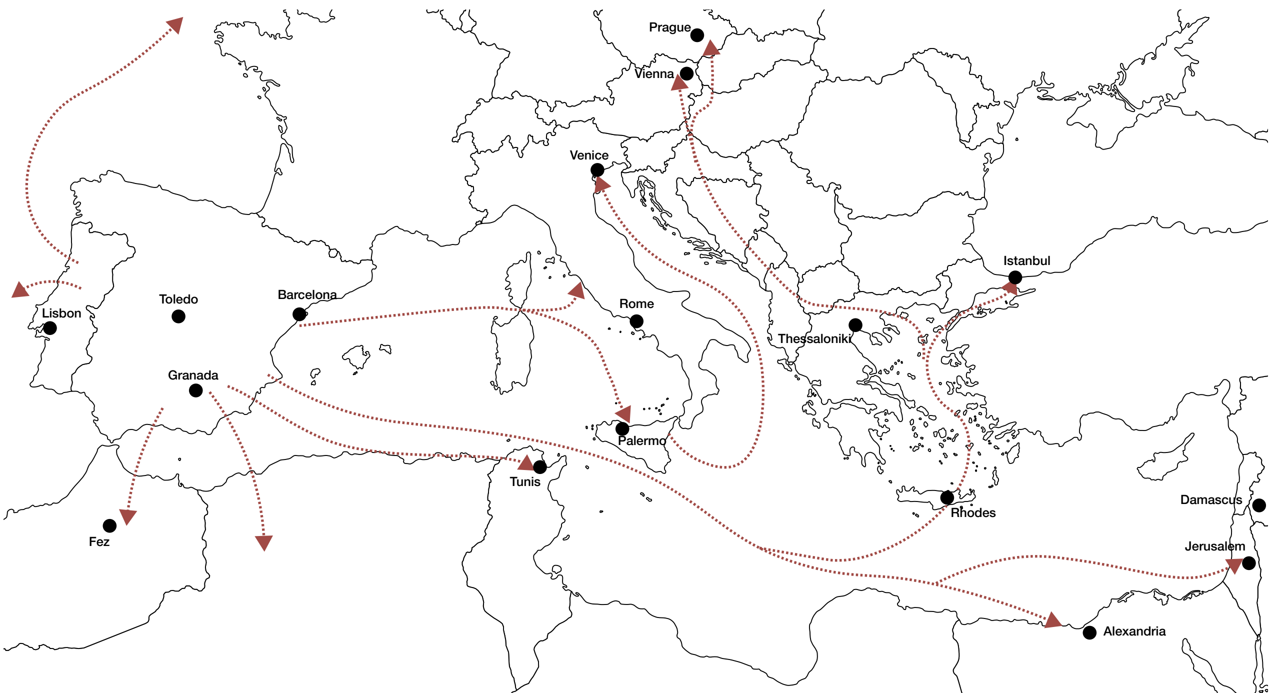

Fig. 02 Migration Routes of Sephardim after 1492

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The diaspora culture of Sephardim is especially expressed through a central element - its own language - which is today known as *Djudeo-Spanish, Ladino* or *Djudezmo*. The origins of Djudeo-Spanish dates back to the Middle Ages, before the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula. It is considered as a Romance language, since its base is medieval Castilian with influences of Hebrew. During the following centuries, Djudeo-Spanish formed endemic characteristics in different regions where Sephardim formed communities as a result of contact with the local languages.

Today, Djudeo-Spanish is considered a vanishing language, with an estimated 400,000 (Hetzer 2004: 237) and 11,000 (Harris 2011: 58) speakers worldwide, most of them living in Israel, Turkey, Greece, and the United States. It is also estimated that there are approximately 40,000 Jewish individuals in today's Spain (Linhard 2014: 16); a significantly small amount in relation to Spain's total population, which is over 40 million.

Fig. 03 Jewish Community members in Turkey in the re-opening ceremony of Edirne Synagogue ©Ioana Aminian

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Fig. 04 King Felipe VI receiving a prize from members of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Spain

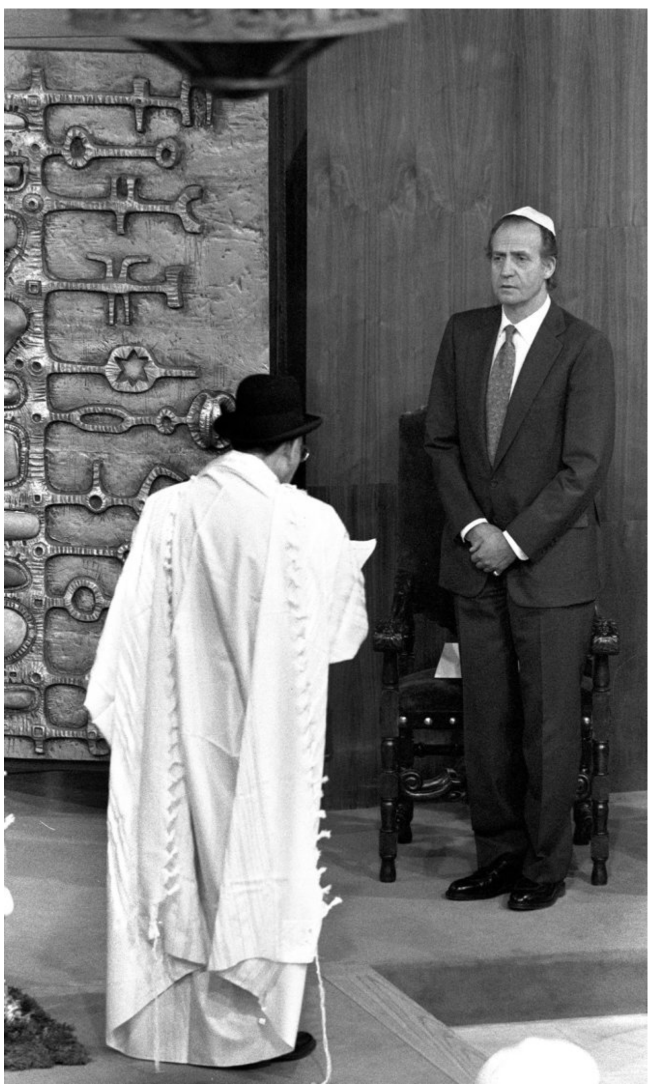

Fig. 05 King Juan Carlos in the Synagogue of Madrid, 1992 © Archivos de la Historia

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The return of the Jews to the Peninsula, according to Tabea Alexa Linhard, “has become a common motif in diverse cultural fields” (2014: 16), beginning with the former King Juan Carlos’ speech in 1992 at a synagogue in Madrid, in which he welcomed the descendants of the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. Following similar commemorating events of the fifth centenary of expulsion, the presence of Sephardim has intensified in mainstream Spanish culture, as the country was advancing in its democratic transition.

Flesler and Pérez Melgosa, as well as Santiago Palomero - the former director of Museo Sefardí of Toledo - also hint to King Juan Carlos’ speech, in which they argue that “the new interest in reconnecting the Hispano-Jewish culture acquired the highest political visibility through the actions of the Spanish royal family, who, since the death of Francisco Franco in late 1975, have demonstrated interest in normalizing Spain’s relations with the Jewish people” (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 4). In the following years, the Sephardic culture and language had found new places in public institutions: the Cervantes Institute opened a Ladino department in 2006 to promote the preservation of the language and the culture of Sephardim; many universities have since established departments for Sephardic studies, and in 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation opened Centro Sefarad-Israel in Madrid as “a centre that promotes the understanding of Sephardi and Jewish culture in general and fosters Spanish-Israeli relations” (2020: 5).

20 years after the 500th anniversary of the expulsion, in November 2012, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented “the initiative to grant Spanish nationality to the descendants of the expelled [Jews in 1492]” (Pinto 2021). The applicants had to prove their cultural ties to Spain and pass a language and culture exam in order to be eligible to apply for citizenship. These requirements provoked many discussions amongst the applicants as this was seen as very controversial.

At the present time, as of 1st October 2019, applications from outside of Spain are not allowed. Within 6 years, 36,182 Jews obtained Spanish nationality and 3,020 were denied (Europa Press 2021). Similar to the Spanish law, the Portuguese government approved a simpler process for descendants of Sephardic Jews to obtain Portuguese nationality by naturalisation in 2015, by only proving Sephardic ancestry through certification from the institutions of Portuguese Jewish Communities. As of February 2022, Portugal has granted citizenship to 56,685 (JNS 2022) individuals and still has 80,102 pending applications.

The intention to establish a 'law of return' was actually initiated for the first time in 1924 by the dictator Primo de Rivera. With economic motivations, the Spanish state wanted to grant citizenship to its protégés, as "the new states that emerged after the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire no longer recognized them." (Linhard 2014: 19). However, the "return to Sepharad" became a visible phenomenon in the Spanish mainstream culture only after the transition period, which favoured the image of Spain as a tolerant, open, and multicultural European country that had recently joined the Union. Thus, by reclaiming themselves as heirs to Sepharad, the Spaniards had the chance to showcase "their full belonging to modernity and western Europe." (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 6).

Contemporary representations of the relationship between the Jews and Spain is constructed by the same token through a conventional narrative structure in popular fiction and mass media, as well as in Jewish cultural heritage tour materials. It favours an image in which the story "begins in medieval Iberia and in the era of coexistence," - to which it is referred as *Convivencia* in Spanish - "persecution in the fourteenth century, the establishment of the Inquisition, and the expulsion." (Linhard 2014: 16). According to Linhard, "Jews remained absent from the Iberian Peninsula until commemorations of the expulsion initiated a complicated restoration of Jewish Spain. The narrative would then come full circle with a mythical return to Sepharad" (2014: 16). Also, tourism, which has been a major contributor to Spain's modernization process, has played a major role in popularising the country's Jewish heritage and prompted a general interest in "all things Sepharad". The publishing market benefited from "stories about *convivencia*, the Inquisition, the expulsion, and the return to the lost homeland" that became subjects for best-selling novels and popular television series (Linhard 2014: 17, Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 2).

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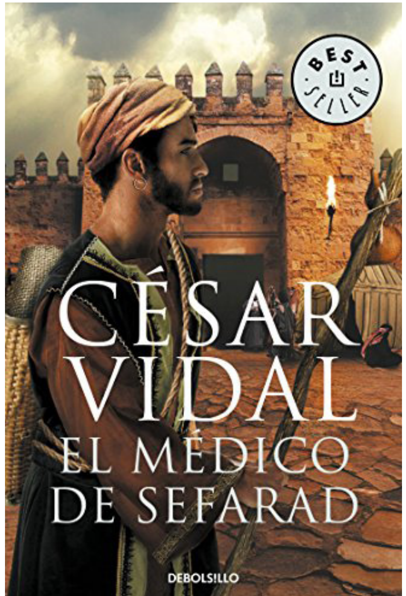
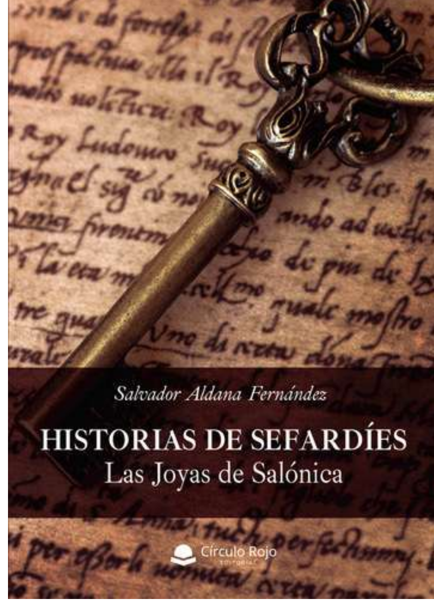
Flesler and Pérez Melgosa suggest that the marketing of *convivencia*, the "living together of the three Abrahamic cultures" (Christians, Muslims and Jews) in the Iberian Peninsula, have especially served the purpose of presenting different localities and the country as a whole as heirs to an exemplary tradition of tolerance and as experienced players in global political and religious conflicts" (2020: 6).

Despite all attempts to restore the Jewish presence in the country, the narrative of the history in the old Jewish quarters and heritage sites of different cities across the Peninsula are haunted by a strong nostalgia and exoticism, in which the absence of the Jews solidifies a fictional medieval image of Sephardim. On the other hand, the Sephardim who live today in the country "rarely enter the Spanish imagination except when they can be imagined as fitting the stereotype of descendants of medieval Iberian Jews who continue, after five centuries, speaking Spanish out of love and nostalgia for Spain" (2020: 3).





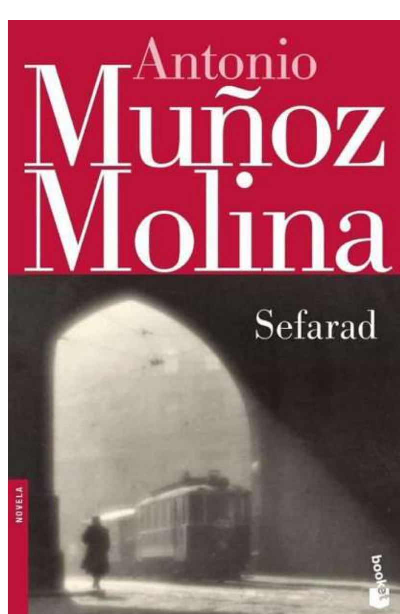


Fig. 06 Popular books of stories with Sephardic themes

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Jewish Spaces in Spain

Parisian historian Diana Pinto attributes the term *Jewish spaces* to such places in which the Jewish culture gradually re-emerges in European political and social discourses; especially in places where Jews have not lived since the Second World War. Even though the history of Jews in Spain and the relation of Spaniards with Jews have developed under different circumstances than other countries of Western- and Central Europe, the contemporary dynamics in relation to Jewish life and culture share similar socio-political characteristics.

Over the last decades, the Sephardic culture has become a profitable heritage product for many Spanish cities. The old Jewish neighbourhoods, synagogues - if there are any left - museums and annual festivals are being marketed as places of interest in the country, where new "Jewish spaces" in well-known parts of the cities emerge.

> *"To many people in Spain today, the name Sepharad projects an aura of mystery and desirability over the territory they inhabit."*
>
> (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 5)

That mystery and desirability may also be accompanied in Spain by "shallow, opportunistic, and antisemitic Jewish-themed commentary, activities and displays" (2020: 7), like in any other country in Europe. However, it is also unjust to dismiss these activities as pure opportunistic heritage products of a country that is highly dependent on tourism. There are cultural activists, historians and community members that interact on different levels with the Jewish culture and the Jewish space, even though they all have mentioned difficulties they faced by local administrators and leaders of public institutions, who are not willing to collaborate. Most of the Jewish community members I came across in Barcelona, Madrid and Ceuta were also reluctant to express their discomfort on this topic, as they do not want to find themselves in a conflict with the local authorities.

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Flesler and Pérez Melgosa exemplify these tensions through a case, in which Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened in the organizations before 1992, as soon as they became aware of the preparations of Jewish organizations for the expulsion's fifth centenary. The country suddenly became an active participant in most of these projects to hat the program aligned with its political interest, in which the image of Spain should be maintained "along the lines of a conciliatory *convivencia*, neglecting to express any sense of collective responsibility for the intolerance that resulted in their expulsion." (2020: 17). As the country struggled to maintain a peaceful transition from a dictatorship to democracy, it did not want to evoke memories of more recent conflicts - that of the civil war - which also brought persecution, expulsion and violence for many sectors of the society.

It is a very difficult task to maintain a solid national narrative without contradictions in a Jewish space, as these spaces tend to embody histories and notions that repudiate the myths:

> *"Jewish spaces are 'Other' spaces. Other spaces challenge the conventional conventions of place and space, which, to a large extent… still rest on the paradigm of homogenous nation-state… Exploring Jewish topographies thus allows for new, subversive perspectives on the places and spaces of the majority society and for rethinking spatial assumptions that have been taken for granted."*
>
> (Brauch, Lipphardt and Nocke 2008: 3 as cited in Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020)

Despite all the obstacles caused by the local authorities or the superficiality of the generic narrative, the emergence of these 'other' spaces in the centres of Spanish cities alter what Henri Lefebvre calls 'the lived space' (in Dünne and Günzel 2006: 336), which constitutes networks of social and political relationships.

The interventions in the well-known historical centres of Iberian towns generate new spatial identities and meanings in traditional spaces, and they help to "re-create their [the citizens'] relation to these very spaces and to position themselves in relation to the identities newly evoked by them" (2020: 11) or they basically as Norah Sternfeld calls, help us to "unlearn" [verlernen] (2018) the solidified identities of these places, imposed by the nationalistic remembering patterns.

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According to Flesler and Pérez Melgosa, Jewish spaces can also be conceived as 'Thirdspaces', a term in which Edward Soja redefines Lefebvre's "lived space" as a space "that is both abstract and concrete, real and imagined" and that creates "another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism…" (1996: 11).

Within these parameters, the Sephardic Museum of Toledo, Spain's national Jewish museum, stands out as a Jewish space which materializes "the converso history" (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 27) of the Sephardic Jews through its architecture and "focalizes a complex manifestation of Spain's desire to memorialize its Jewish past in terms of its present context" (2020: 27). In these terms, like many other [national] museums of the same type around Europe, the Sephardic Museum becomes a crucial place in Spain where the Jewish culture is performed on an institutional level and deserves special attention to study the intricate relationship between politics, space and culture of contemporary society.

In 1964, General Francisco Franco, Spain's infamous dictator, issued a decree which formalised the creation of the Sephardic Museum of Toledo. The Synagogue of the Transit (La Sinagoga del Tránsito), was one of the best-preserved synagogues in Spain and it was chosen to house the new museum which would materialize "Spain's desire to strengthen its links with Sephardi Jewish communities around the world." (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 141). According to the authors Flesler and Pérez Melgosa, who portray the landscape of Jewish memory in Spain extensively, the dictator's gesture was a post-World War II strategy to break free from the doubts about the regime's sympathy to Nazism.

Until the transition period, the new Sephardic Museum didn't receive much support from the state and could extend its collection mainly through private donations, especially from influential Jewish families. The museum became a subject of interest as a powerful political symbol when the socialist government came into power in the 1980s, fitting into its agenda to accelerate the dynamic process of modernization (2020: 141).

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The building of the museum embodies, as we will see throughout the historical and architectural analysis, many dynamic socio-political and cultural layers that emerged throughout Spain's history. These layers built up over five centuries, and led Flesler and Pérez Melgosa to address the building's *converso* nature (2020: 143), a term which is attributed to the Jews that converted to Christianity in order to remain in the Iberian Peninsula after the persecutions that started with the pogroms of 1391, and reached its zenith with the expulsion in 1492.

Toledo: the city of three religions

Before going into more depth into the physical and abstract constructed layers of the building, it is important to contextualize the environment, the city, where the building stands still: the city of *convivencia*, Toledo.

Toledo is a city in the autonomous region of Castilla La Mancha with over 80,000 inhabitants, 70 km south of the capital Madrid. Historically, Toledo served as the capital for many Iberian kingdoms. First, Visigoths declared the city as their capital and later it went under control of the Caliphate of Cordoba and ultimately became the capital of the Taifa of Toledo. Between the 8th and 9th centuries, Toledo turned into "an authentic oriental city" (Palomero Plaza 2013: 32) and had also become the first city on the Peninsula that went under Christian control.

Today, if one pays close attention to details, one can still find traces of the Islamic rule in the historical centre, even though they do not date back to the times of their rule. In the houses, cathedrals converted from mosques, churches, synagogues, and public baths decorated with plaster work inspired by the Islamic art, one can see the brick-and-mortar traces of the cultural contact zone that the city had once been.

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Fig. 07 Map of Spain with its major cities that promote their Jewish heritage

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Besides being the noble capital of medieval Spain, Toledo is also known as 'la ciudad de las tres culturas' (the city of three cultures), as Jews, Muslims and Christians have lived together for centuries in the city. During the 12th and 13th centuries, Toledo became an important cultural centre in the West under the rule of Alfonso X "El Sabio" (the Wise), in which the translation of Arabic texts to Castilian and Latin created a movement called the "Toledo School of Translators" that went beyond medieval European knowledge at the time (Palomero Plaza 2013: 37). Under the rule of its wise king, the city had become a cosmopolitan city with a vivid cultural life, with only a few Mediterranean cities at the time having such a status.

During that time, Toledo contained the largest Jewish community in Christian medieval Spain (Gerber 2012: 33). They lived in the *'Judería',* the old Jewish neighbourhood, which is located in the western part of the historical centre and "constitutes an authentic city in the city" (Palomero Plaza 2013: 36) with two mudejar'* synagogues that still stand today: The synagogue of El Tránsito and Santa María La Blanca.

After the expulsion in 1492, the forced conversion that individuals experienced, extended to an urban scale of "Christianisation" (Palomera Plaza: 37): the synagogues were converted into churches, and the monastery of San Juan de los Reyes was erected just on one of the main streets of the old Jewish neighbourhood. The "imperial city" housed the court and the Iberian aristocracy, which converted Toledo into one of the most important cities of the Habsburg Spain. During this period Toledo continued its cosmopolitan lifestyle by being home to many artists and merchants that kept the cultural and economic life intact (2013: 18).

* I will use for the architecture inspired by Islamic art on the Iberian Peninsula the general term 'mudejar', even though it is in itself a very controversial term that is related to forms of national history narratives. In order to delimit the historical and cultural discussions of this work, I will not discuss the arguments in the field of art history on this topic.

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Fig. 08 View towards the medieval city of Toledo

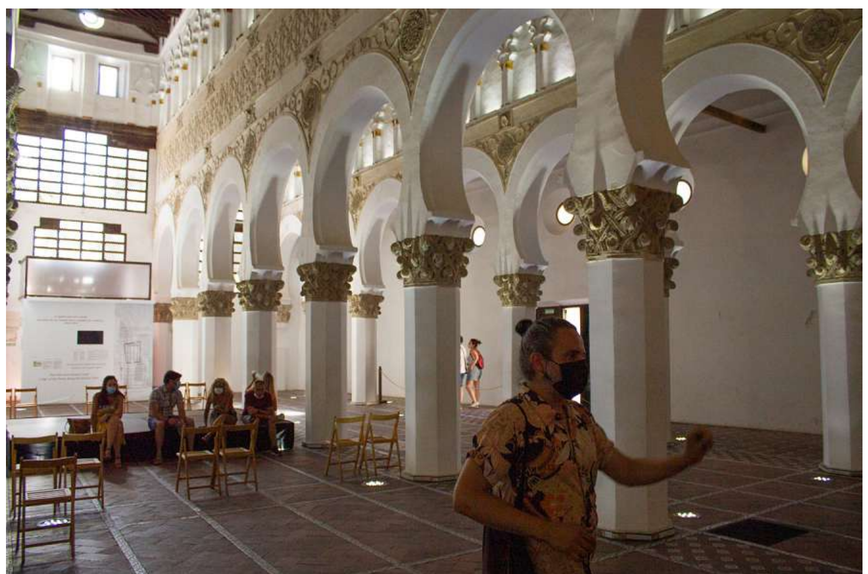
Fig. 09 Santa Maria La Blanca

Fig. 10 The Synagogue of the Transit

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1. Synagogue of the Transit
2. Santa María La Blanca
3. Shofer Synagogue
4. Church of El Salvador (former mosque)
5. Mosque of Las Tornerías
6. Mosque of Cristo de la Luz
7. Monastery of San Juan de los Reyes
8. Convent of Santa Úrsula
9. Convent of Santa Isabel de los Reyes
10. Church of San Marcos
11. Primatial Cathedral of Saint Mary of Toledo
12. Church of San Ildefonso
13. Convent of San Clemente
14. Convent of Santo Domingo El Antiguo

Fig. 11 Map of Toledo's medieval centre showing major religious building complexes of the three religions: the scale of the Christian building complexes and the remaining Jewish and Muslim buildings reveal the "Christianization" of the city in the post 1492-era.

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With the relocation of the court to Madrid in 1561, the donation of the houses to religious institutions increased and the city acquired a religious image. Even though Toledo had lost its political importance, the richness of the church facilitated work opportunities to many artists, like in the case of El Greco, who made Toledo his home (2013: 40).

In the centuries that followed the relocation of the court, the city faced deterioration, which attracted many romantic artists and poets of the time. Palomero exemplifies the situation with Antonio Ponz´ text titled “Imágenes de la melancolía” (Images of melancholy) where he describes the Toledano ruins:

> *“Acaso la mitad de Toledo está arruinada, siendo montones de ladrillos y tejas rotas lo que en otro tiempo eran casas, y esto se nota más a la parte de mediodía.”*
>
> (Perhaps half of Toledo is in ruins, with piles of brick and broken roofs which were once houses, and one notices that more at midday)
>
> (Palomero Plaza 2013: 41)

By the second half of the 19th century, with the arrival of the rail line to the city, the administration slowly increased the restoration of Toledo’s monuments. However, even at the end of the century, Toledo stayed behind other Spanish cities when most of them were under the influence of an accelerated modernization process (2013: 42). At the beginning of the 20th century, with the creation of the regional tourism commission, Marquis Vega Inclán established a monument policy in the city, in which the Synagogue of the Transit and the House of El Greco were the first monuments to be restored (2013: 42).

In 1986, Toledo’s historical centre was declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, which strengthened Toledo’s image as a tourist destination.

Today, Toledo is a popular destination for many Spanish and international tourists, as the historical centre by the meander of river Tajo is rich in gothic and Moorish monuments that testify the history of three (Abrahamic) cultures that lived in the city. The existence of such monuments contributed to the ‘myth of *convivencia*’ (2013:69), even though, as many authors like Palomero Plaza, Linhard, Flesler and Pérez Melgosa emphasize, the open end stories of *convivencia* reflect a utopia that crumbles under the reality of the historical and political relations between the three communities. The national myth erases centuries of violence and persecution, antisemitism and Islamophobia

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that is still present on the Iberian Peninsula. Furthermore, as was mentioned before, the myth of *convivencia* has contributed significantly to Spain's image-making as an emerging democracy and resurfaced as a great marketing tool for many cities in the Castilian plateau which could not benefit from the tourism boom of the 70s, like the other Spanish cities by the Mediterranean Sea.

What is a synagogue?

It is essential to contextualize the origins of the Synagogue of the Transit as a place of Jewish worship, and to comprehend and identify issues that derive from different spatial layers of this unique place.

The word *synagogue* derives from the Greek word *'synagein'* which means to bring together. A synagogue has three main purposes to serve the community (Weissbach, 2011; Krinsky, 1996): worship, study, and congregation. Any place where a *'minyan'** is gathered can be a synagogue, which creates difficulties for typological studies when analyzing them as a building type. Throughout history, the synagogues were erected under different conditions and in different times in Europe, creating an extensive architectural variety and diversification. On the other hand, like in the case of the Iberian synagogues, they were mostly excluded from the canonical knowledge of art history or appeared as marginalized examples because the participation of the Jews in military and political structures were limited (Dodds 1992: 113).

There are many different arguments on the origins of the synagogue , which is a central topic in Jewish studies because of the effective cultural amnesia that followed the destruction of Solomon's Temple. Judaism became "congregational rather than hierarchical and centralized" (Krinsky 1996: 7) in the post-temple period because Jews had to "strengthen other institutions to shelter worshippers and students of the Torah" (1996: 7). As a result, synagogues have become significant places for Jewish communities around the world, even though they were not intimately related to the public face of Judaism and played an even less significant role for Jewish women until modernity (Snyder 2013: 3). On the other hand, synagogues differed from other sacred spaces such as mosques and churches, because Jews considered synagogues as "surrogates, convenient but not essential to Jewish identity" (2013: 6). They were not considered as holy temples - because the Holy Temple was already destroyed - and instead emerged as

* Minyan is a group of at least ten men over 13 which is required for public worship.

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multifunctional spaces in which they worshipped, studied, or did business. On the other hand, the poverty of Jews, legal restrictions, and limited skills, but also the importance of being oblivious to the environment during prayer (Krinsky 1996: 20) were some of the important reasons why Jews adapted any building they could use and had little space to think and articulate architecturally. As a result, the premodern synagogues tend to hide a common architectural lineage, being modest and almost invisible until the 19th century (Krinsky 1996; Snyder 2013).

In spite of the ambiguity in the history of the architecture of synagogues, Carol Herselle Krinsky has made an extensive study of the European synagogues in the book "Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning" in which the Iberian synagogues such as the Synagogue of Córdoba, Santa Maria la Blanca and El Tránsito of Toledo are included. Instead of constructing a linear typological evolution of synagogues throughout history, Krinsky presents "groups of buildings or tendencies in synagogue design" (Krinsky 1996: 2) since socio-political conditions and regulations for Jews in Christian society varied in different parts of Europe.

Architecturally speaking, Krinsky sets up the following parameters for European synagogues by comparing them with the temple, mosques, and churches (1996: 13-19). These parameters can also be identified in the Synagogue of the Transit today, even though not all of the architectural elements attributed to Krinsky's parameters derive from its primary use. Synagogues usually have courtyards, which can be a rear or side court and irregular in shape. They are usually not porticoed. The courtyards, like the whole synagogue, can serve both for religious and secular purposes: they can be a place where worshippers can wash their hands before prayer, or it can be a place for legal declarations and decisions. Krinsky arguments that this duality comes from the fact that the Torah merges the sacred and secular elements:

> *"The divine will is expressed in everyday activity and daily affairs have sacred implications."*
> (1996: 12)

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Fig. 12 The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans A.D. 70, David Roberts 1850 Collection of Yeshiva University Museum.

Fig. 13 Façade of the Synagogue of Cordoba

A further religious aspect that determines synagogue architecture is the tradition of Jewish worship, which is directed towards “inside the heart and intellect of the worshipper, within his close-knit community” (1996: 13). Respectively, most of the premodern synagogues in Europe are not monumental and don’t come up as “urban exclamation marks” (Primo Levi cited as in Snyder 2013: 44). They are humble and quiet, and if monumental, they are hidden in dense urban settings, like in the cases of Córdoba and El Tránsito.

By taking these parameters into account, one can easily say that the Synagogue of The Transit shares many aspects with the typological descriptions of Krinsky, however it is difficult to come to certain conclusions about the building’s primary form, as it was subject to constant transformation over the past few centuries.

In contrast to the ambiguity of the building’s primary form, the Synagogue of the Transit clearly reflects the social status of its patron and the political structures of its time rather than just the era’s generic architectural codes. That is why it is also crucial to study the context in which the building is created and how it is used up until today, in order to expand the comprehension of the architectural articulations that manifest itself in this particular space.

The Synagogue of Samuel HaLevi: From a place of worship to a museum

The synagogue where the Sephardic Museum of Toledo resides was built by Samuel Halevi Abulafia, who was the chief royal treasurer and advisor to King Pedro of Castile, between 1359-61. Halevi came from a Jewish family that had served Castilian kings for several generations. With a special permission from the sovereign, he constructed the building in the lot just beside his residential palace, where today the El Greco Museum lies.

The synagogue, attached to the palace of Halevi, expresses similarities shared with the buildings built by aristocracy, high church officials or princes of the epoch. Jane S. Gerber argues in her article, in which she draws a portrait of the patron through the building’s architecture, that the synagogue reflects Halevi’s tastes while also embodies “timeless features” common to the Jewish architecture of worship elsewhere. According to Gerber, the decorative vocabulary “testifies in stone and stucco to the complexity of its patron and his cultural identity” (2012: 37).

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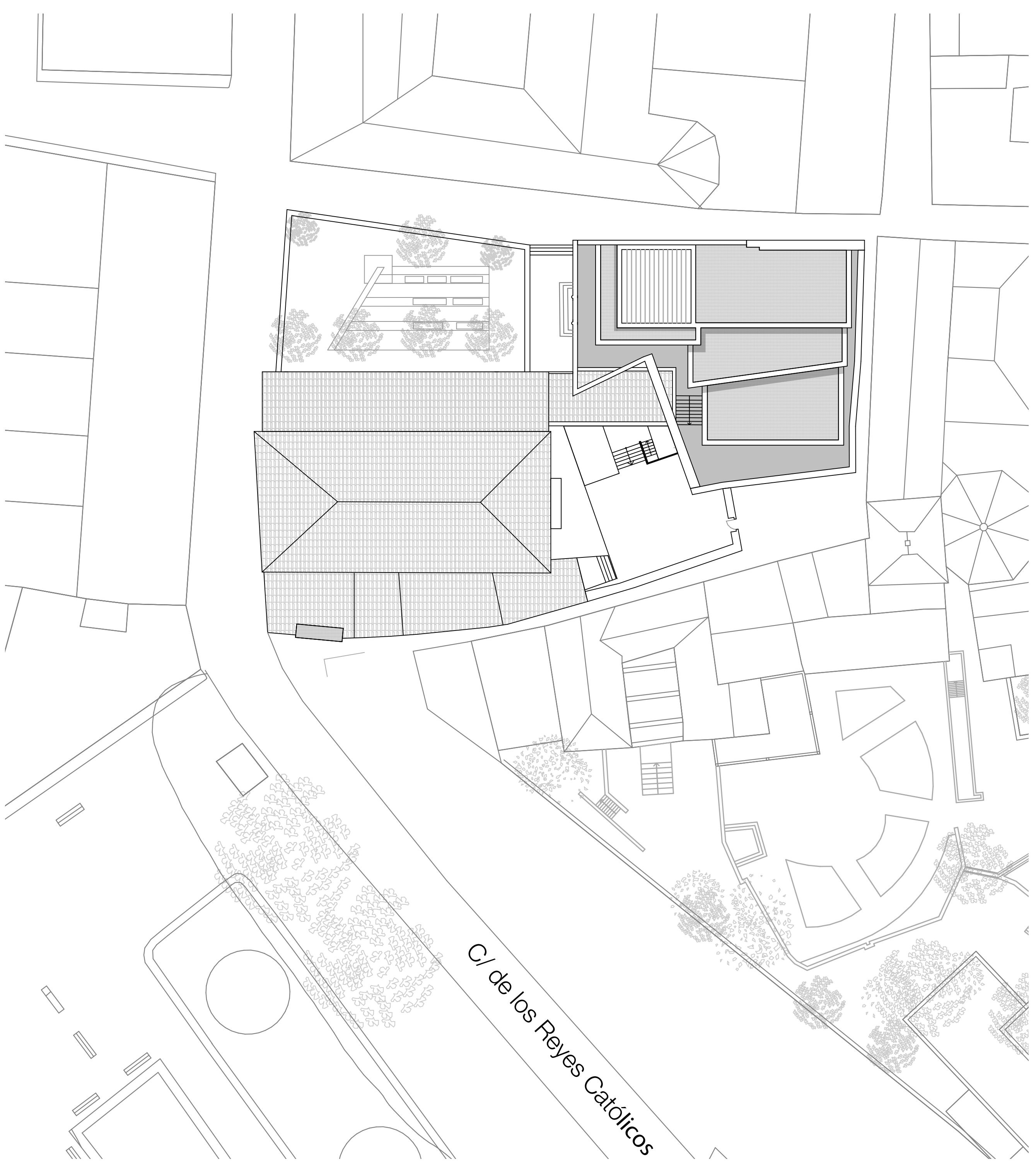

Fig. 14 Situation Plan, 1:500

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The architecture and its decorative details, built by Arab architects from Granada, reveals how the cultural elements of different groups were embraced and melted in a pot: in which the Castilian coats of arms, floral motifs inspired by the Islamic art, Arabic and Hebrew inscriptions were carefully placed in the decorative composition of the building.

The synagogue of the Transit is not extraordinary merely for its rich architectural vocabulary. It was constructed at a time when constructing non-Christian buildings was strictly limited in the Castilian kingdom, as the "Christianization" of Toledo was at its full pace with its emerging convents, churches, and monasteries (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 143).

Possibly, in order to not stand out, the building blends into the urban landscape through its abstinent brick exterior. The interior is decorated with polychrome stucco work with floral and calligraphic motifs, which has survived until today. Even though the colours of the stucco work have disappeared throughout the centuries, they are visible in some fragments which can still be appreciated today.

Fig. 15 Southern Façade, Synagogue of the Transit

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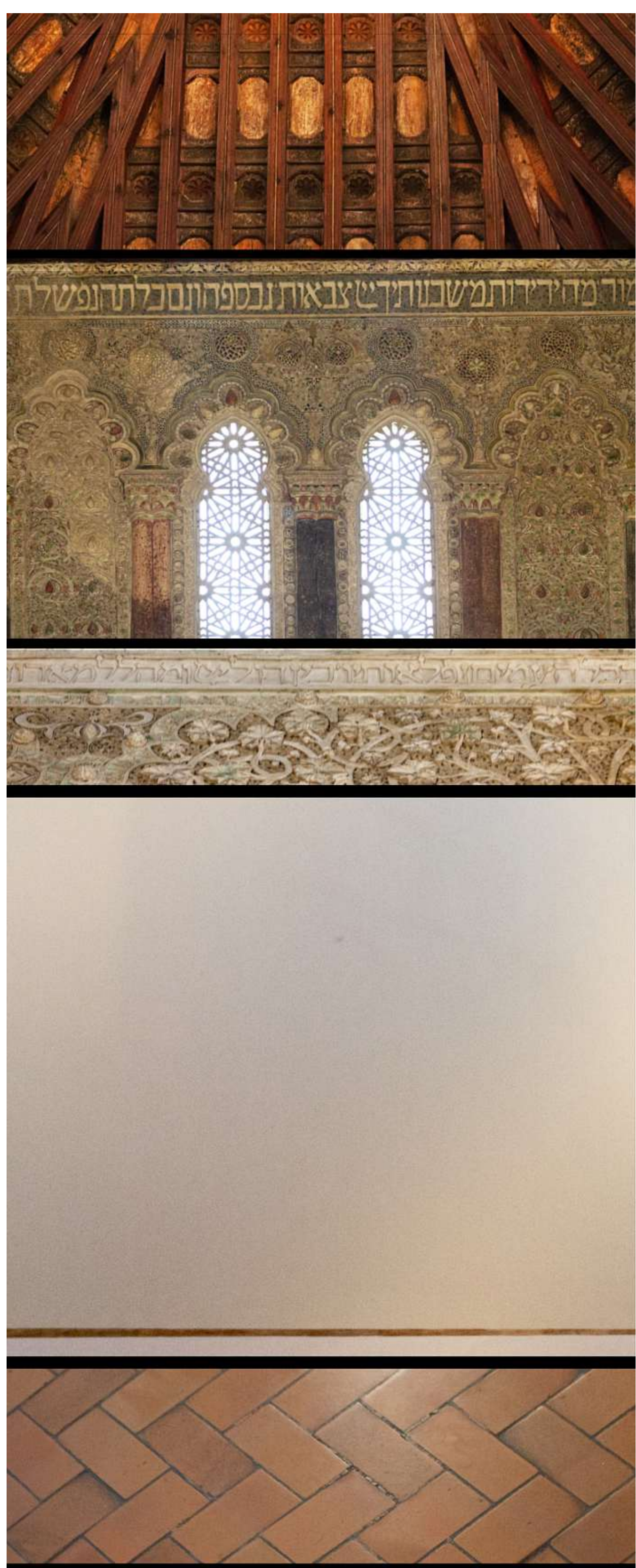

Fig. 16 Material Details, Synagogue of the Transit

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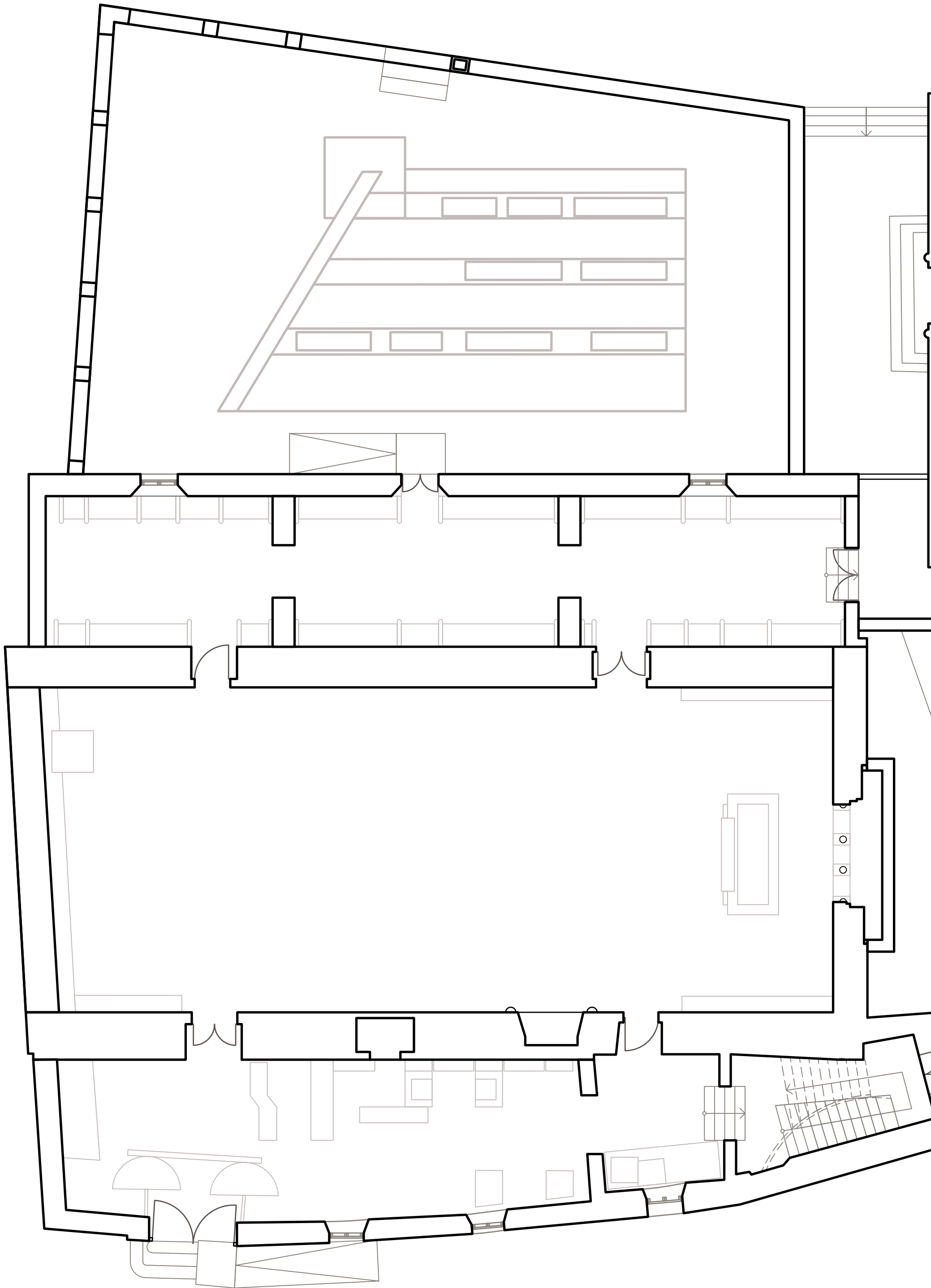

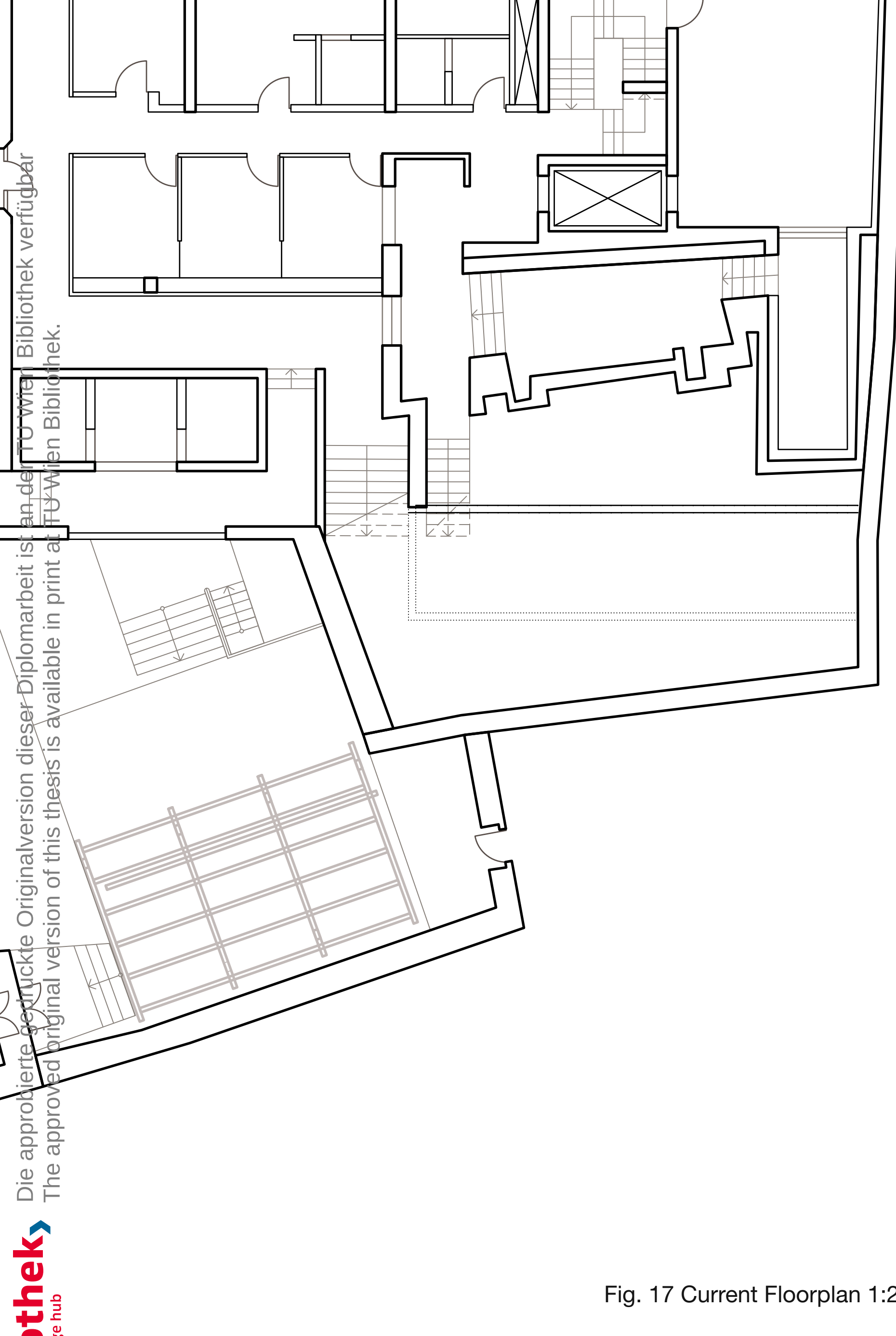

Fig. 17 Current Floorplan 1:200

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Fig. 18 Northern Façade, 1:200

Fig. 19 Western Façade, 1:200

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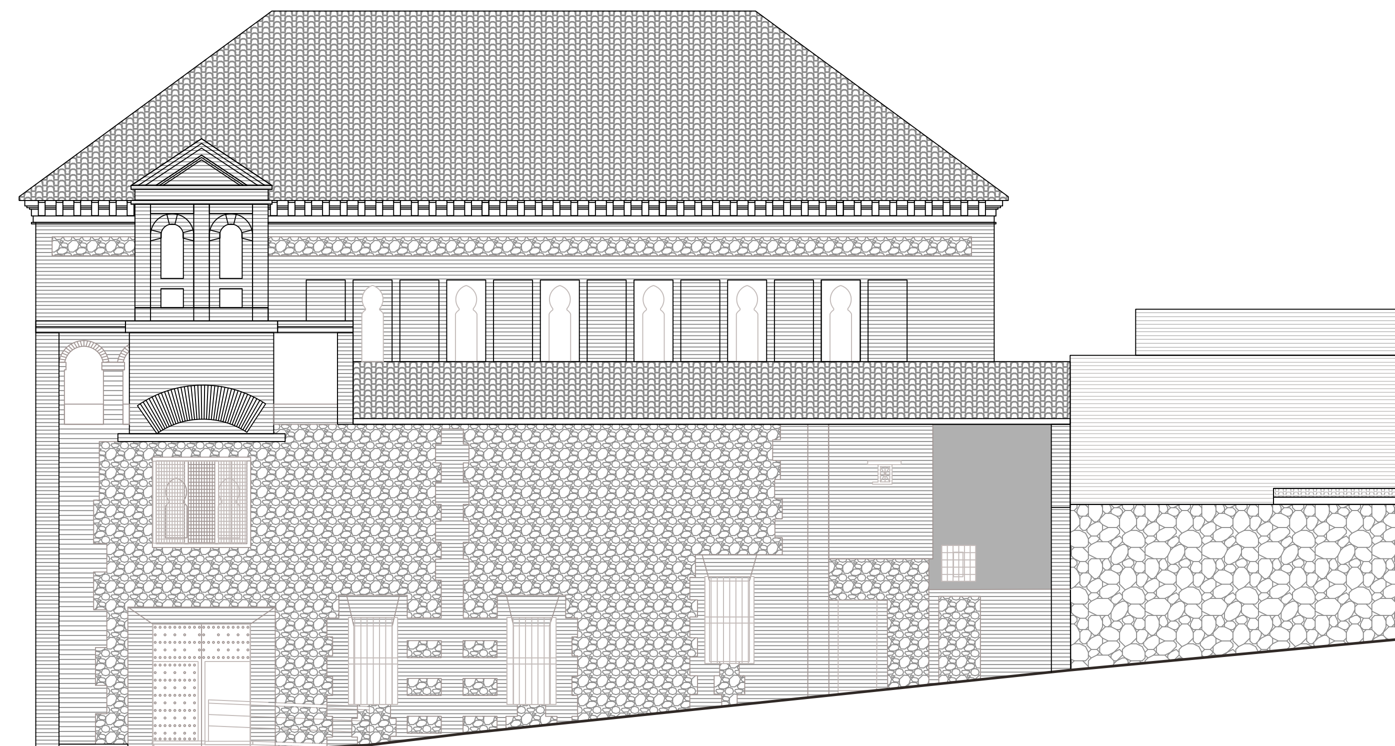

Fig. 20 Southern Façade, 1:200

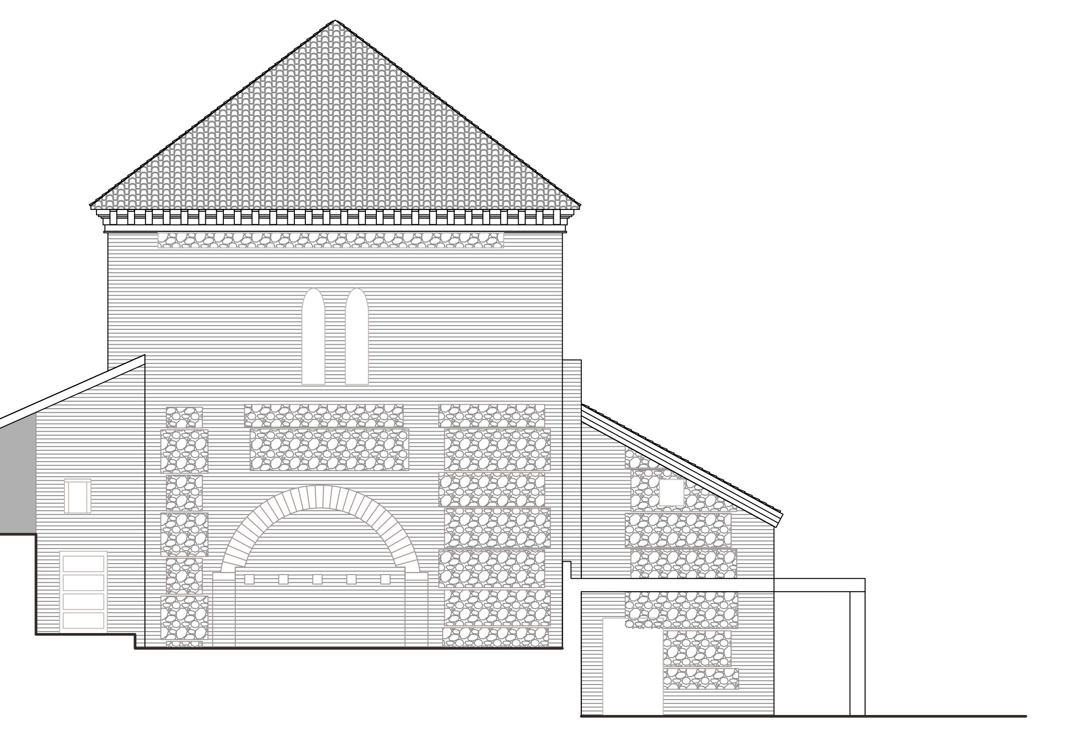

Fig. 21 Eastern Façade, 1:200

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Samuel Halevi served King Pedro I at a difficult time for Iberian Jews. Shortly after the construction of the synagogue, he was imprisoned and taken to Seville, where he died under torture. Even though the exact reasons are still unknown, it is widely believed that the Christian aristocracy, the rivals of the treasurer who held the wealth of the Kingdom in his hand, had plotted against him to convince the King of his treason. Flesler and Pérez Melgosa suggest that the history of Samuel Halevi and his synagogue exemplifies the fragile situation of Iberian Jews: They could acquire power and privileged positions in medieval Spain by rising as far as to the court, but they could also suddenly turn into scapegoats and disappear from the public realm.

In the following years from Halevi's death, as a result of the conflict between King Pedro and his half-brother Enrique of Trastámara that raged a civil war and also blaming Jews for the spread of Black Death since 1348, Jewish life had been exposed to a wave of violence. In 1391, a widespread massacre in the Peninsula had destroyed most of the Jewish communities and their cultural artefacts in Spain.

Flesler and Pérez Melgosa criticize especially how museums deal with this part of history, in which, like other institutions I elaborate on in the following chapters, "have difficulty narrating the complexity of the history of violence toward this community, as well as its banishing." (2020: 145).

Today, similar to the museum's text on its website that the authors mention in their work, this drastic change in the history is still referred to on the official website, parallel to Spain's policy of refusing to acknowledge and assume responsibility for the violence that had occurred, as such:

> *"El Museo Sefardí se encuentra ubicado en el interior de la Sinagoga de Samuel ha-Leví o como popularmente se conoce Sinagoga del Tránsito. Sin embargo, desde sus orígenes, esta sinagoga ha sido objeto de <u>diversos vaivenes y modificaciones</u> ofreciéndonos un apasionante testimonio de la historia de nuestro país."*
>
> [Museo Sefardí is located inside the Synagogue of Samuel Halevi, widely known as the Synagogue of the Transit. Either way, since the beginning, this synagogue has been subject to <u>various vagaries and changes</u> which is an exciting testimony of the history of our country.]

In this way, the violent history is silenced and the events that occurred are reduced to inevitable vagaries that had occurred naturally. The passive voice in the contemporary narratives of these events liberate anyone who might have been held responsible (2020: 145), and the depiction

of them in a bygone era with no implications on the present fictionalizes the violence that had actually occurred.

The ‘various vagaries and changes’ that showcase an exciting testimony of the history of Spain, can be identified today in the building complex’s architecture.

The current building complex is divided into three main volumes, with the central volume being the highest and containing the Great Prayer Hall with the timber roof structure. On the northern side rises the vaulted structure from the 18th century, and on the southern side there is the two-storey volume that contains the Women’s Gallery with an annexed staircase house from the 16th or 17th century (Guía Museo Sefardí 2020: 35).

Fig. 22 In many cities in medieval Europe Jews were held responsible for the destruction that caused the ‘Black Death’- The Triumph of Death, Pieter Bruegel the Elder ©Museo Nacional del Prado

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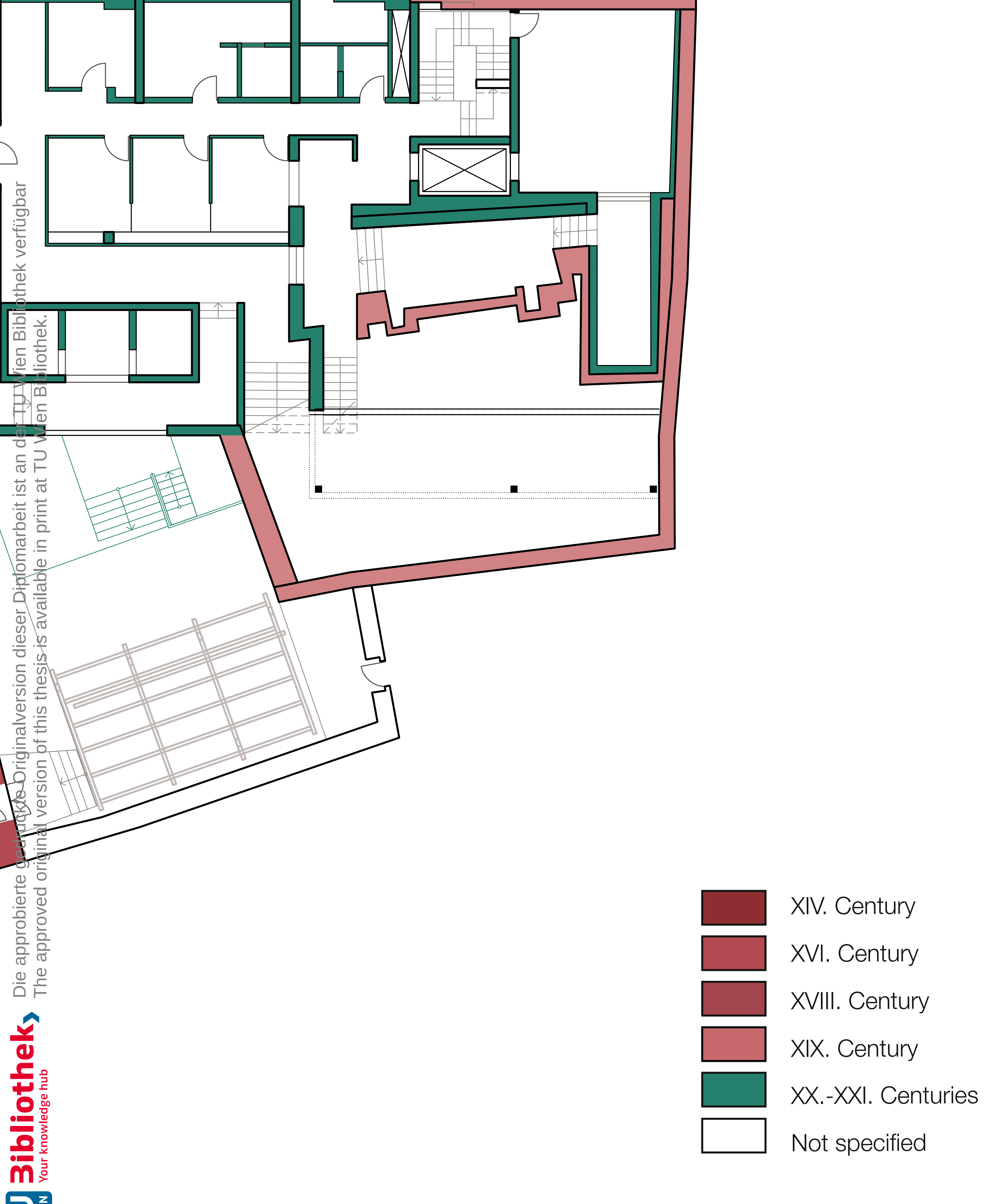
Fig. 23 Historical Evolution of the Synagogue, Plan 1:200



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The spatial layout is typical that of synagogues with a women's gallery (2020: 36), in which the prayer hall in the central volume with a rectangular form (23 m x 9,5 m) with a great ceiling height (17 m) is accompanied by a shallow lateral volume with a rectangular shape. The shallow volume - most probably - served for the access to the synagogue from the street level, with separated entrances for each sex as women and men - still in many Orthodox synagogues - could not pray together. The women's gallery contains five openings towards the prayer hall, which connect two spaces visually so the women can watch the ceremony from above without interacting directly with *minyan*.

The prayer hall stands in the centre of the complex as the main area around where other spaces are developed, including the Northern volume which was added in the post-1492 period. As for the central element, it consists of an extensive floral decoration that starts on the eastern wall just above the floor with polychromatic stucco work, and coronates the perimetral walls with scalloped arched windows. The timber frame roof with mudejar strapwork that resembles the stars in the sky with octagonal corners covers the prayer hall. The removal of the church altar in the 20th century has also revealed a small piece of the ceramic tiles on the floor that probably dates back to the construction period of the synagogue and decorated the *hekhal*.

Today, some of the stucco work in the women's gallery has also been restored, even though it has been subject to major interventions, as it was used as a dwelling up until the beginning of the restorations in the 20th century. The spaces beneath the gallery have been transformed drastically over the centuries and are a "minor" interest (2020: 38) in terms of conservation and restoration.

After the expulsion in 1492, the Catholic Monarchs handed the synagogue to the Military Order of Calatrava and in this way the synagogue acquired the name Church of San Benito. It was used by the military order as an archive, hospice, and burial space for the order's knights. During this period, many of the Catholic elements which can be seen today are added, including the ones like the choir and altar, removed after the renovations in the beginning of the 20th century. Today, the sacristy built by the Calatrava knights in the southern volume with a Renaissance style rib vault, as well as the arcosolium and the baroque gate to the sacristy in the prayer hall, are some of the traces that are left from these "Christian" elements.

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Fig. 24 The possible entrance that served for women on Calle Samuel Halevi: today covered with a historical photo of the synagogue

Fig. 25 View towards the eastern wall of the prayer hall

Fig. 26 Timber frame roof of the prayer hall

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Fig. 27 View towards Entrance/Giftshop

Fig. 28 Vernacci. n.d.: View towards the altar of the Church of the Transit

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Fig. 29 View towards Women's Gallery

Fig. 30 Moreno. n.d.: View towards Women's Gallery

Even though the building was converted into a church immediately after the expulsion, the Hebrew inscriptions inside the prayer hall that testified its primary function have always remained visible. Up until the 18th century, as it can be observed in the drawing of Fransisco Javier de Santiago y Palomares' from 1752 which shows the façade of the building, even the exterior Hebrew inscriptions on the wooden beams above the entrance form part of the decoration of the building.

Considering Palomares' depiction of the buildings, one can argue that the 'Christianization' of the building has been a longer process than just a couple of decades after the expulsion, as - for example - the steeple with two bells upon the entrance is an addition after the 18th century. The authors Flesler and Pérez Melgosa argue that the current steeple is one of the most visible elements of Christianization of the building as it reframes "an entry into a Catholic Church" (2020: 148).

Fig. 31 Tiles on the benches – One can still see upon visiting the Great Prayer Hall the 16th century mudejar tiles that was used in the decoration of the altar.

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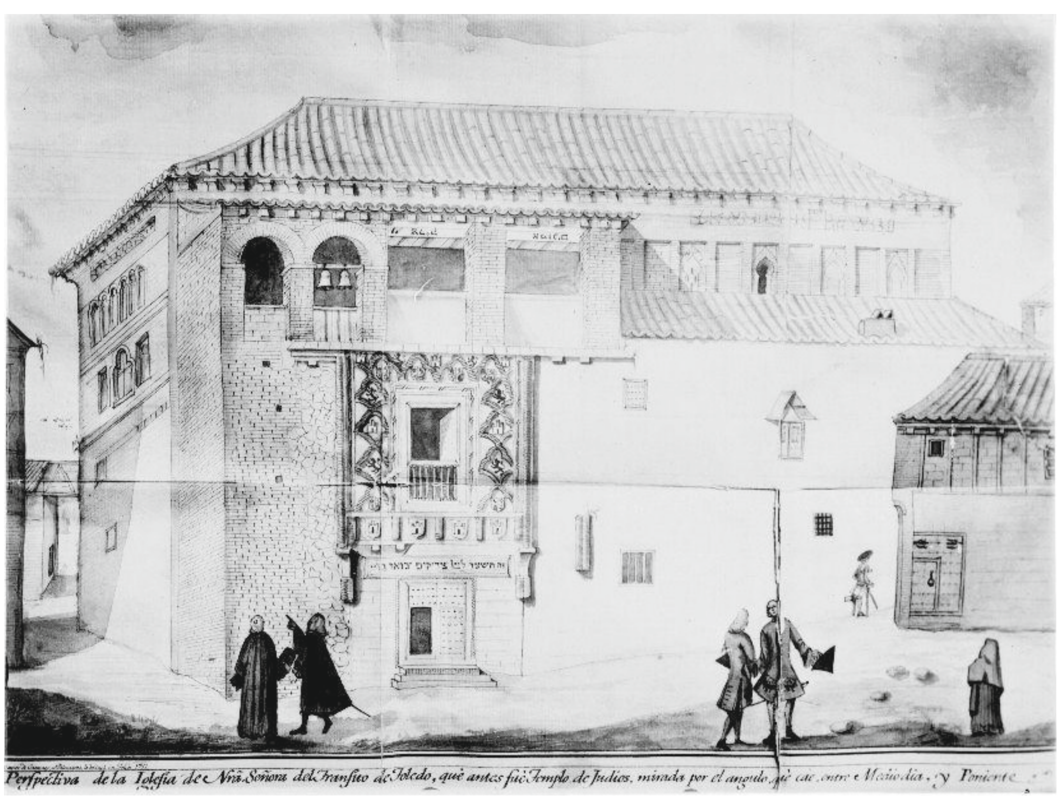

Fig. 32 Moreno. n.d.: View towards Women’s Gallery

Fig. 33 Moreno. n.d.: View towards Women’s Gallery

Following similar architectural contradictions of the building, the Flesler and Pérez Melgosa reveal the *'converso'* nature of the synagogue and couple it with the captivating story of the Calatrava Knight Don Iñigo de Ayala y Rojas, who built his crypt in the synagogue which has survived until today.

In 1547 Don Iñigo had obtained Emperor Carlos V's permission to build a small private chapel with a plateresque arcosolium and a niche into the southern wall of the synagogue. He also donated the painting of the Transit of the Virgin (which is displayed in Prado Museum, as a part of the state collection) to be hung in that niche, which gave the synagogue its new identity. The Calatrava Knight, who was from a converso family, wished to be buried in the chapel he constructed. His converso ancestry was so widely known that he had a defamation case in which his 'purity of blood' was questioned. Considering the intriguing story of a converso Jew buried in the synagogue, the authors criticize the fact that the museum characterizes the arcosoluim as the central piece of the building's Christian period but keeps its silence on the issues of the suffering of conversos and also identifies mistakenly as the knight buried in the niche as Don Iñigo's brother (2020: 155).

After having served as a sacred space to Calatrava knights, following the relocation of the capital to Madrid, Napoleonic wars and domestic instability, the building had been in decline for almost a century.

Only after the connection of the city to the railway in the second half of the 19th century, the studies and descriptions in illustrated travel guides popularized Halevi's synagogue again. Shortly after that followed the declaration of the building as a monument in 1877 by King Alfonso XII.

Between 1910 and 1964, the building became a part of *Patronato del Museo del Greco*, which was directed by Marquis de la Vega Inclán, who took a special interest in restoring and transforming the building into a place for public exhibition (2020: 156-157).

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Fig. 34 Don Iñigo's Arcosolium - Mariano Moreno García, n.d.

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Fig. 35 Correa de Vivar, 1546-1550 – The Transit of the Virgin © Museo del Prado

Flesler and Pérez Melgosa define this period at the turn of the century as the beginning of the "reclamation of the building's Jewish identity and removal of most of the elements associated with its life as a church" (2020: 156).

One of the first interventions in the 20th century was the demolition of the partition walls in the Women's Gallery to convert it into a "small Museum of Mudejar Art and in the annex rooms the Library of Hebraic Studies" (Guía Museo Sefardí 2020: 28). In 1913 King Alfonso XIII inaugurated the museum and soon followed visits of many high-profile international visitors like the Prince of Monaco or the Shah of Persia during their trips to Spain. Until the Spanish Civil War, the museum occasionally hosted events and exhibitions that attracted many visitors.

In the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, in 1941, the Centre of Hebraic Studies of Toledo was founded, which can be considered as the antecedent of the museum (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 157). Only 23 years later, in 1964, the government of Franco inaugurated the museum in an attempt to improve Spain's image abroad, especially with the United States for economic reasons. (2020: 158).

The first museum was set up in the northern volume with the central pieces being the tombstones which were excavated from different archaeological sites in Spain. The pieces of the exhibition didn't have neither chronological nor thematic order and upon entering "the visitors found themselves in a hall that was called the synagogue, and they could neither understand its use nor its name; the Synagogue of the Transit"[*] (Guía Museo Sefardí 2020:29).

Upon the inauguration of the museum, followed by the donations of prominent Jewish families of Spain and Jacques Pinto Coriat, a renowned businessman from Tangier, was named as co chair in 1965 in the museum's board of trustees (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020:158). For the inauguration, the Pinto Coriat family donated silk tapestries which were hung on the walls of the Prayer Hall until 2015. Later, in 1979, they also donated the land next to the museum, where the museum's administrative offices were built. The donated building has recently re-opened after the adaptation of Pardo & Tapia Arquitectos to house the administration offices for the El Greco and Sephardic Museum, as well as its archive and library.

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* The Transit in Christianity is the death of Virgin Mary and her being taken up with her body into heaven.

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Fig. 36 View towards the Northern Volume – Vernacci, n.d. : The exterior wall of the annex building in north was stayed with cables and the partition walls were formed following the vault to unify the three exhibition rooms after the restauration work in the beginning of nineties

After its first inauguration, until the second half of the 1980s, the museum expanded its collection, especially through many pieces donated by Jewish families like Pinto Coriat, and had started organising cultural activities for the public to reach out to a wider range of visitors (Museo Sefardí Guía 2020: 30).

After 1986, an intensive period of renovation started, in which the structural elements of the building were improved, the stucco work, the roof and the tombs were restored, and a new museology and museography project was developed. During this period, excavations under the synagogue were also executed, which can be observed today in the Eastern patio (2020: 30-31).

The growing interest of the general public in the Sephardic Museum was established only after the end of the dictatorship, as Flesler and Pérez Melgosa argues, when the new socialist government targeted the synagogue as a symbolic place to showcase the new modernity project of Spain, which would place the country on the same page as other Western democracies (2020: 159).

As the interest grew and restoration works followed, the museum was inaugurated for the second time by King Juan Carlos I in 1994, and later, after another set of restoration projects, it was inaugurated again in 2003 by Prince Felipe. This high political interest shows the weight of symbolism that the building incorporates, which idealizes religious coexistence and *convivencia*, converting the museum into the perfect medium to propagate the democratic project of Spain.

Over the last few years, the museum has been trying to strengthen its connection with Jews living in Spain by interacting with the communities in cultural events such as celebrations of festivities, commemorations and in educational events like lectures and book presentations, where they invite members of different Jewish communities. They intensively organize public outreach events like children and family workshops to bring the Jewish culture closer to a wider range of the public. Since the coronavirus pandemic, the director of the museum Carmen Alvarez Nogales has also intensified online activities and exhibitions to increase the outreach, even though most of the events are accessible only to Spanish speakers.

The presence of contemporary Jewish culture through such events in the Spanish cultural landscape are "offsetting the impression that Jews and their culture are things of the past, only accessible through fragments rescued through careful archaeological work—an impression that visitors might be left with by the ethnographic/historical sections of the museum." (2020: 186).

These impressions, their contradictions and the museum's impact on the public and the space are the driving forces of this work, which led me to explore the process of [de]exoticization in the first place.

Fig. 37 The new extension project for the offices and library © Pardo Tapia Arquitectos

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Methodological Questions

The beginning of the questions that gave birth to this work started in 2019, when I first visited the Sephardic Museum of Toledo for a restoration class during my exchange semester. I went into the museum with no particular expectations at all, as many Jewish museums in Europe tend to repeat similar narratives, and I went out mesmerized by the architecture. As an architect and a Sephardic Jew, I found in the building a part of my own cultural heritage similar to what Flesler and Pérez Melgosa argue upon accounting on different layers of appropriation of the building (2020: 162). After a while, as I landed on my feet, I was astonished by the fact that in a building which I assumed to be a part of my cultural heritage, I saw a culture on display that seemed almost unknown to me. The objects behind the display were no strangers, and neither what I read surprised me, but I was left with a strange feeling which I couldn't fit - the content of the museum - in any familiarity.

Departing from such a feeling that felt 'out of place', the first questions I asked myself were "Why do most of the Jewish museums in Europe feel so distant? Is it something to do with how we construct the museums, or is it about the Jewish space?"

After a short period of living in Spain, I encountered traces of possible answers in my daily life, as I realised that I was being treated as an "exotic" human being. For many people in Spain, Sephardim was a medieval chapter of their national history. When they asked me how I could learn to speak their language like that in such a short time, many of them were amazed by the answer: "Soy sefardí".* Each time I felt that it was a very positive but naïve reaction, that overshadowed the fact that most of them had barely met a Jew, since they haven't been in the country for centuries.

Accompanied by my experiences in situ, when I finally decided to start my research, I initiated the journey by asking, "Are museums spaces of exoticization?". With this question on my mind, I landed in the books of renowned cultural theorists like Sharon Macdonald, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Rodney Harrison, Norah Sternfeld, Boris Groys and Tonny Bennet, who introduced me to the principal questions of museum and cultural theory which contextualized heritage, memory work and identity politics in the museum space. Upon discovering the theories of the authors, I realized that the museum was intricately related to the democratic ideals that emerged towards the end of 18th century with the French Revolution, but also developed strategies that served

* I'm Sephardic.

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colonialist and nationalist myths that still haunt us today. As an architect, I wanted to discover how such agendas are materialized in the museum space, which led me to contextualize the history of the museum architecture in shifting socio-political relations over the last few centuries. Upon studying the museum architecture since the first conversions of palaces until today's clean cut white cubes, I discovered the materialization of cultural ideas through spatial theories such as Hillier and Tzortzi's 'Space syntax', Schinkel's ideas of Romanticism in Altes Museum Berlin and Carlo Scarpa's spatial construction of seeing in Castelvecchio Verona.

When contextualizing the museum space in the constraints of identity politics and idealistic ambitions, I stumbled upon Jewish museums as a genre that was studied specifically amongst many cultural theorists that are mentioned in this work. However, the Jewish museum still remains as a relatively undiscovered territory for architects, possibly due to the fact that most of the Jewish museums are built in existing spaces that didn't require big-scale interventions.

With a desire to draw a consequent path, I decided to advance in my research with a critical gaze on the otherness, nostalgia, and exoticism in the Jewish space, in which Ruth Ellen Gruber's book *Virtually Jewish*, as well as articles of Reesa Greenberg and Tamara Sztyma, helped me extricate the socio-spatial parameters of Jewish spaces, especially that of Jewish museums, in relation to museology and museum history. They accompanied me while I was asking: how do the national self-identification patterns and exoticization manifest themselves in European Jewish museums?

By asking such a complicated question, I decided to test the arguments of the authors on the ground and went on field trips to different Jewish sites in Spain.. As I started living there shortly after starting the research, it had become easy to organise several trips to different sites. Along these journeys, I interviewed cultural activists, historians, and museum directors in order to comprehend the complexities that surrounded the institutions and their cultural politics, as I believe that it would be not possible to make conclusions without getting into contact with the actors of the local cultural scene. Therefore, I also intended to engage as much as possible with Spain's history - as that was almost foreign to me - with the help of the works of Daniela Flesler and Adrián Peréz Melgosa, Jane S. Gerber, Tabea Alexa Linhard and Jonathan Ray, in which I limited myself to the historical and current relations of Spain with Jews.

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Lastly, through many visits to the 'site of interest', Sephardic Museum of Toledo, and with the help of the theoretical articulations, I tried to identify the whats and whys that had produced the 'out of place' feeling I mentioned in the beginning.

Parallel to the extensive scientific research period, I developed an architectural project that concentrated on rethinking the exhibition spaces of the Sephardic Museum, in which I was guided by the question: "Is it possible to [de]exoticize -and democratize- the museum space?"

Throughout the design practice that accompanied the research, I realized that both processes, [de]exoticization and democratization (of the museum space) are entangled and refer to the same action. Thus, in the project, I intended to point out as many aspects as possible within the limits of these terms, in which design issues such as accessibility, coexistence of different uses as well as questioning of the permanence of the collection and provoking contradicting thoughts through spatial interventions have become central issues of the design practice.

As a result, a multidisciplinary research and design practice have emerged; in which 'unlearning' the cultural otherness externalized in museum space challenges the traditional ways of storytelling and remembering, without merely relying on aesthetically derived design decisions and without generating clear cut answers on multi-faceted cultural issues that goes beyond a singular perspective. On the contrary, such practice ends up generating new questions which are grounded on both practice and theory:

What is the way to [de]exoticize 'the other'? How can we rethink the traditional spaces for contemporary society? In what ways do cultural spaces challenge political agendas? How do different stories engraved in architecture change our perception of the space?

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A Critical Reading on the Museum as a Democratic Space

What is a Museum?

The quest to find a proper definition for the museum has been sustaining cultural debates for over 224 years in Europe (Lehmannová 2020). Today, as the ongoing debates show, none of the definitions have resulted in being satisfactory, as evidenced by the constant change of perspective in defining the museum as an institution. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has updated the definition of the museum on different occasions since it was founded in 1946 and shaped a definition in 1974, which has undergone very few changes until today:

> *"A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."*
>
> (Lehmannová 2020: 2)

In 2018, ICOM decided to look for a new, extended definition of what represents a museum. Among the 250 proposals presented by the members of the council, concepts, and representations such as "*dialogue, discussion, plurality of voices, exchange of ideas, socialization, education, equality, process, the past is here for the present, the future*" came forward (2020: 3). The re-shaped definition aimed at including all types of museums and covering the vast diversity of the museum-work:

> *"Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality, and planetary wellbeing."*
>
> *(ibid.)*

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However, the latest proposal caused even more fractions amongst the members, especially among the directors of the European museums, as it"[de]defined the essence of the museum's existence, that of the collection" (Lehmannová 2020). Consequently, the committee has worked on finding the most adequate definition for the museum since the beginning of 2021. On the 24 August 2022, they came up with a final definition in the extraordinary general assembly in Prague:

> *"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing."*
>
> *(ICOM 2022)*

Comparing the existing and the following definitions, one can see that the museum, as an institution, has expanded its functions beyond 'acquiring, collecting, researching, communicating, and exhibiting'. Specifically, It gained a political dimension as an inclusive and democratic institution. However, this recently added dimension is neither new, nor a result of the latest social and political developments. The museum has been a political institution thriving for a more democratic society, ever since the Frenchmen occupied the Louvre and converted the royal palace into a public museum (Sommer 2014, Sternfeld 2018). The proposed definition appears to merely revive the essence of the ideal museum in a contemporary sense and leaves space for the versatility of the museum practice in a society that is constantly under pressure to evolve and adapt to new situations. The ongoing debates and questions as to the boundaries of museum's definitions are prerequisite and plays a central role in the definition of museum itself, contributing thus to the openness of the institution which is adapting its solid structure to a dynamic 'cultural flow' (Groys 1997, 2013).

The Austrian curator Nora Sternfeld raises concerns about a very critical issue in the quest of defining the museum in her latest work "*Das radikaldemokratische Museum": * Understanding the museum as a western institution. The first confrontation derives from her experience as a teacher, when one of her students asked on a trip to SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin to Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (2018: 86): *"Isn't a museum a western institution?"*.

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The answer of Ndikung is far more interesting: *"Is museum a western idea, or the idea that the museum is a western idea, a western idea?"*. Through an intense reflection about this counter-question, Sternfeld realizes the fact that museums can legitimize the colonial hegemony and exoticization exercised by the West, as its institutional structure is deeply rooted in the codes of the western self-definition (2018: 89). Even though the many definitions of the museum almost never hint specifically to the Western identity, the canon of knowledge on museums references four turning points in history which "provincializes" the institution in the West, as all of the turning points take place in Europe (Sternfeld 2018: 88).

The majority of the accounts on the origins of the museum begin with the etymological explanation of the museum in the ancient Greek from the word "museion", which means the site of a cult dedicated to muses, or the legendary Institute of Alexandria c.280 BCE (Abt 2013: 115). The museum theorist Monika Sommer also begins with the same provenance when accounting on the museum history in her article "Museums- und Ausstellungsgeschichten" (2013). Sommer points out that the institute of Alexandria could be considered as the origin of the museum, if we consider the museum as a place of "systematic collection" of things. Otherwise, she reminds the reader of the cabinets of curiosities in the Renaissance, when we think about the museums as "places of storing and presenting the collections, and that of ordering and categorizing" (Sommer 2013: 13). In the Renaissance, the singular objects lose their individual meanings by becoming part of a series. Through these series, the cabinets are transformed into scientific entities, instead of representing the power and glamour of each individual object like in antiquity.

According to Sommer (2013: 14), the modern museum begins with the foundation of Museé Français, when the Frenchman occupied the royal palace and made its collection public, as mentioned in a similar fashion by many authors when accounting on the history of the museum[*]. Following the foundation of Museé Français, museums all over Europe started showcasing their 'national' treasures and histories, which culminated a new socio-political practice, that of "restoration and at the same time historicizing of historical events"[**] (2013: 15).

* Nora Sternfeld, Monika Sommer, Boris Groys and Sharon McDonald describe the foundation of Museé Français as a turning point in the history where the museum acquires a political dimension and turns into a 'public' institution.

** Translated directly from the original text: "Die Aktualisierung von historischen Ereignissen bei gleichzeitiger Historisierung wurde zu einer völlig neuen geschichtspolitischen Praxis."

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This nationalisation of the exhibited treasures resulted in institutions deeply connected with the political agenda of the nation state. Despite all the democratization process that society has been going through, it is still a difficult task to overcome nationalistic patterns when telling stories and presenting objects.

By acquiring a national perspective, the museums of the 19th century have become a source of pride and cultural reputation, which can still be observed in the old imperial cities with museums such as the Prado Museum in Madrid and Kunsthistorisches Museum (The Museum of the History of Art) in Vienna. Apart from housing extensive collections, both museums also had a direct impact on the urban fabric by carving the cityscape with glamorous boulevards around them.

Fig. 38 Remps Domenico, Cabinet of Curiosities, oil on canvas, c. 1689, Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence

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Fig. 39 Kunsthistorisches Museum (Museum of History of Art) Vienna © KHM Vienna

Fig. 40 Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

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A further turning point that Monika Sommer underlines in the history of the museum, is the ‘museumization’ of the present. She tracks the phenomena back to the First World War, when the War Museums started to appear (Sommer 2013: 17). As Harisson also (2012) points out, this phenomenon is still a widely used practice by the museums, as we constantly come across parts of our lives in the museums*.

Through the Second World War, both museums and exhibitions were converted into a medium of propaganda. The Nazis, in particular, used the exhibitions for their political agenda (e.g., the exhibitions of the Degenarated Art and the Great German Art) and for the purpose of imposing and spreading their ideal models of culture and society. Around the same period, on the other side of the Atlantic, with the foundation of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1929, the museum practice was discovering new possibilities to integrate the museum into modernity through contemporary art.

After the Second World War, in the reconstruction period, the European museums started to decontextualize the artwork and present them as pure aesthetical objects “which presented and transmitted the humanistic values” (Sommer 2013: 18). This decontextualization led to the depoliticization of the museum, and confined it in an elitist sphere, in which the “white cube” built a perfect silent background for the collections. This led to louder voices for a more democratic and political museum in the late sixties (2013: 18), and the intentions to re-contextualize the exhibited objects through extensive texts and inclusive strategies towards marginalized groups, such as women, (2013: 18), gave the museum back its function as a place of learning and educating.

Two decades later, especially in Germany and Austria – later also in other central European countries directly affected by the Holocaust like Poland and Hungary – the Jewish museums were established. Parallel to dealing with a violent past and coming to terms with the collective guilt, these museums have also been places of self-identification, according to Ruth Ellen Gruber (2002) and Reesa Greenberg (2003). The Jewish museums had to deal very often with the absence and loss of material, which led the curators to look for new expression methods and display strategies in the exhibitions.

* Harrison exemplifies this situation through exhibitions with topics such as the eighties, nineties etc. We can see our lifetime being musealized.

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Fig. 41 I Grew Up 80s, Leicester Museum (2022)

Fig. 42 Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Over the last few decades, debates on how the big museums acquired their collections, within the decolonization process, and the inclusion of the marginalized groups, extended the borders of the museum's activity, followed by the call for a more democratic cultural space. The great western museums had to acknowledge that robbing had become a general practice for expanding their collections, which brought up the questions on ownership of the objects and how different ethnic groups and cultures were represented within them. Sommer calls this change of the wind as the "reflexive turn" (2013: 20), in which the museums were not merely isolated from time and context, but rather they became active in the cultural production of the society.

Bearing in mind the new proposal for the definition of the museum, one can see clearly that the members of ICOM intend to include the dynamism brought by the reflexive turn, which transforms the museum into a progressive, open institution that has to renew itself constantly. In a pluralistic and highly interconnected society, the museum cannot be understood as a static institution. More than perhaps any other institution of our democracies, the museum should remain subject to the dynamic cultural evolution, or "flow", as Groys calls it (2013). And "deprovincializing" the museum from the West and "unlearning" the idea of museum as a Western institution, as Nora Sternfeld suggests (2018), is an important step to complete the reflexive turn and democratize our cultural institutions at full scale.

Fig. 43 Holograms on display in the former permanent exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Vienna

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Fig. 44 Protesters in British Museum, 2021

Fig. 45 Biennale Pavilion in Giardini, Venice

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Museum architecture: From palaces to white cubes

As museums evolved and repositioned themselves socially and politically, the spaces they inhabited also changed. The variety and dynamism of museum spaces have made it difficult for scholars and architects to identify a unified spatial typology as the covered topics and the exhibited objects in museums have become infinite over the last decades.

The valued objects in antiquity were stored in temples for muses (museions), as mentioned previously, to serve for religious activities. They were also the objects of reputation and demonstrated the power of the sovereign city or state. In the Renaissance, when the interest in collecting these objects from antiquity flourished, showcasing them became a central issue. Spaces like the galleries of Italian palazzi and the halls of French chateaux became ideal places for displaying the antique treasures. The common point of these new spaces were being part of domestic interiors, as Michaela Giebelhausen accounts on the history of the museum architecture (2006: 24).

While unfolding the evolutionary history of architecture, Giebelhausen positions the museum between being a container and a monument, mentioning the following situations: In the first place, Giebelhausen addresses the first museums as containers that reflect its collection. Then, she focuses on the museums as monuments that accelerate changes in culture and in the built environment. By the second half of the last century, she depicts the museum as a neutral space (white cube) which is a passive container. Finally, she regroups some of the contemporary museums as the ones that intend to be both a monument and a container, in a postmodernist sense. It is of course difficult to draw a straight line in the history of this role playing, as the evolution of museum architecture is a rambling journey that includes backs and forths , but also a certain circularity.

Departing from the ‘royal’ domestic spaces, the palace architecture has significantly affected the origins of the museum architecture. Following the opening of the royal collections for a wider public in the 18th century of France, the palaces have become places to enjoy art and natural artifacts. But even so, it was still a privilege to access these places and there were few buildings in Europe, like Museo Prado in Madrid, which were solely designed to house nature and art collections. By the time “the political legacy of Musée Français” (Giebelhausen 2006: 25) established itself, the

collections were seen as sources of national pride and richness; and a search for new spaces to exhibit these collections began.

Most of the spaces that originate the modern museum, as it can be observed in the case of Louvre, or the gallery of Ufizzi, and many more examples of baroque palaces and villas to count, are converted spaces, which were not originally designed as exhibition spaces (Milojkovic & Nikolic 2012). Consequently, the very first examples of the museum architecture are strongly influenced by these types of spaces. The visual connections and the pace of the movement that the palaces create, still dominate the museum architecture today, even though the museum spaces are very diverse in terms of their forms and scale.

One of the first schemes that architecture historians elaborate, when accounting on the typological evolution of the museum architecture, is Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand's blueprint for the ideal museum design (Giebelhausen 2006: 225; Milojkovic & Nikolic 2012). The blueprint depicts a building with four wings arranged around a Greek cross and a central rotunda that resembles two "shallow cores" (Giebelhausen 2006: 225) intersecting each other. The layout developed around the Greek cross certainly is a reminder of Renaissance villas, developed into a dynamic sequence of galleries. The design has four elevated entrances from each side and each module of galleries is divided into a wider central space and lateral smaller galleries which can be accessed from the central one. Durand imagined his museum to house painting, sculpture, and architecture, but he also placed artist studios within the galleries. According to Giebelhausen "Durand's lucid and logical design" as well as the political potential that created Musée Français "established the ideological motivation and architectural framework for the creation of a wide range of museums across Europe." (2013: 225).

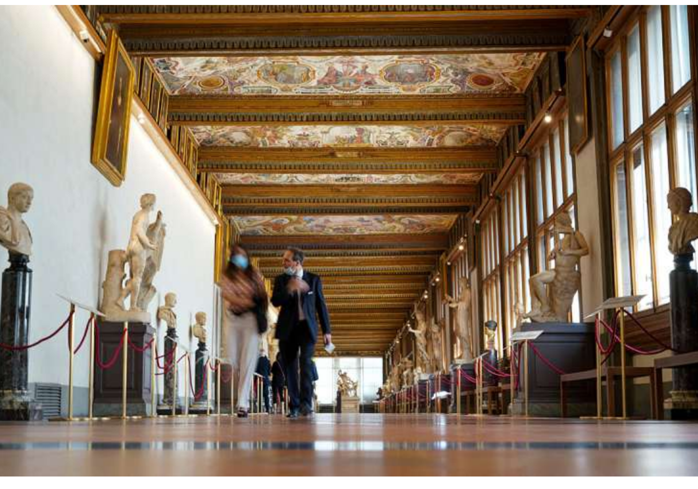

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Fig. 46 Ufizzi Gallery, Florence

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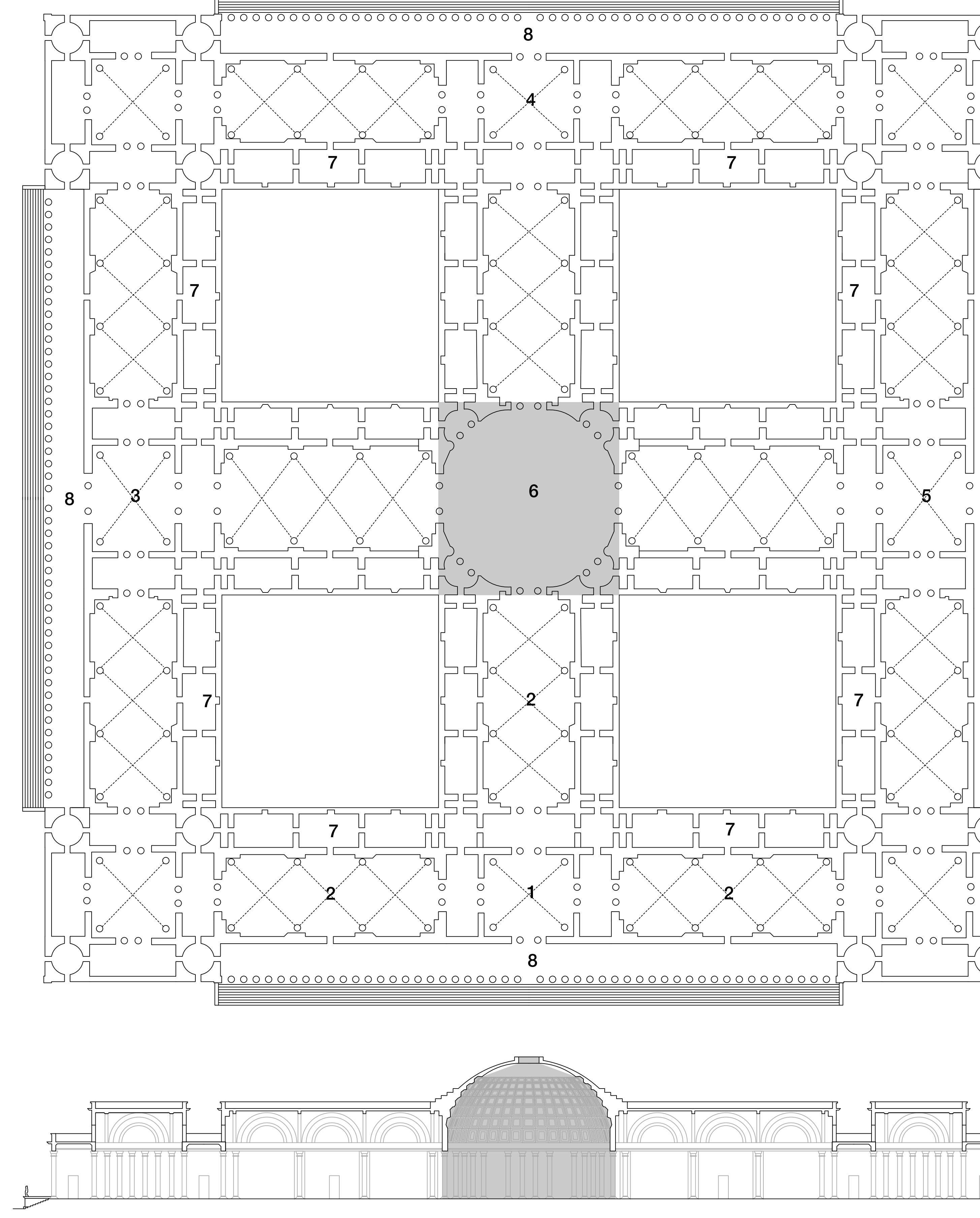

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1. Entrance-Vestibule
2. Anual Exhibition Halls
3. Painting Halls
4. Sculpture Halls
5. Architecture Halls
6. Meeting Hall
7. Artists' Rooms
8. Private Entrances

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Fig. 47 Floor Plan and Section of Durand's Blueprint

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In order to demystify the social impact of a museum layout and reveal their potential of change, I will elaborate on the methodology of *space syntax*, which is "a theory of space and a set of analytical, quantitative, and descriptive tools for analysing the layout of space in buildings and cities" (Hillier and Hanson 1984; Hiller 1996). Hillier and Tzortzi investigate the museum through space syntax as a socio-spatial entity, in order to demonstrate its potential to articulate design intentions on both levels. Through space syntax theory, the authors suggest "that the museum/ gallery constitutes a more or less well-defined spatial type, with varied potential to act both as a pedagogical device for communicating knowledge and narrative, and for transmitting a non-narrative meaning in the form of an embodied spatial and social experience." (Hillier and Tzortzi 2006: 282). They underline the spatiality of human behaviour and the importance of the relations between different spaces in a layout by arguing that it is possible to understand socio-cultural relations embodied in architecture as well as the design intentions through decoding the space syntax.

The spatial layout is both a dependent and an independent variable in architectural configurations, which can manifest social, cultural, and pedagogic ideas, but it can also generate patterns of movement and co-presence amongst the users of that building. (2006: 287). The authors imply that the space syntax theory has two basic ideas:

> *"The first is that space is not just the background to human activity and experience, but an intrinsic aspect of it. For example, human movement is essentially linear, in that movement traces are line patterns; interaction between two or more people is essentially convex, in that it requires a space in which all points are visible from all others; and we experience ambient space in buildings and cities as a series of differently shaped isovists, or visual fields. Because human activity has its own natural geometry, we tend to shape space in ways that reflect this."*
>
> (2006: 283)

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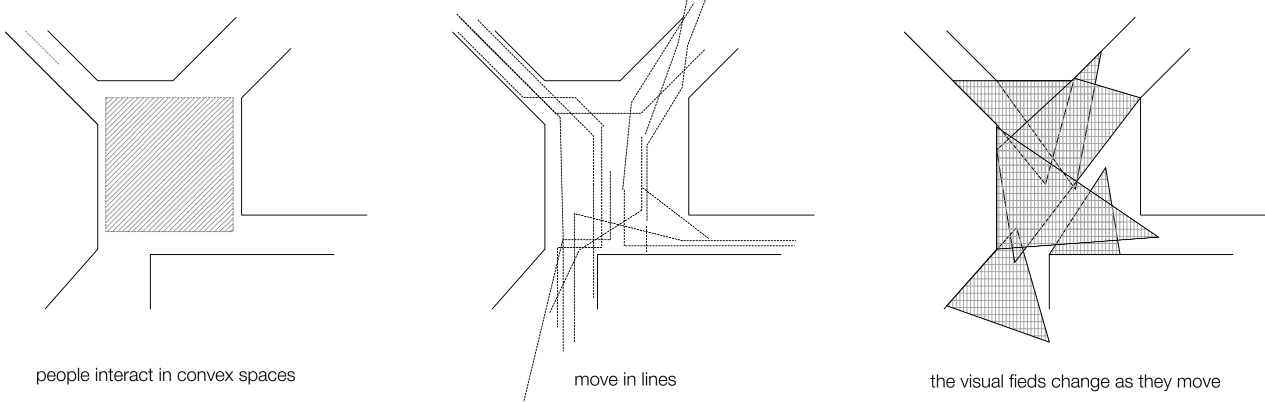

Fig. 48 Changing visual fields by the movement in a built environment: drawing of the author based on the illustrative graphics of Hillier and Tzortzi

The second idea that the authors present is the relation between different spaces within a layout. Hillier and Tzortzi suggest that one can read social and cultural phenomena through analysing the "depth" of the spaces, meaning the degree of integration of a space with the other spaces in a certain layout. The more integrated a space is, the less one has to pass through other spaces in the layout in order to arrive there. On the contrary, if the space is segregated, one must pass through more spaces to get into the other spaces.

The authors also introduce "the abcd typology", creating a vocabulary to analyse the spatial layouts in terms of their integrity and to attribute sequencing qualities to each separate space of a museum that are connected in a layout. According to this system, an a-space is a dead end. A b-space is a way which leads to a dead end and so requires the visitor to go back the same way. A c-space is connected to two spaces and has one alternative way back, and a d-space is connected to more than two spaces and lies on at least two rings. In addition to the abcd typology, the depth of the spaces can also be codified through gradient colours to distinguish them visually in diagrams and plans (2006: 296-300).

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Hillier and Tzortzi exemplify the cultural articulations in the space with a brief analysis of the spatial layout of a rural French house. The analysis strikingly demonstrates how the culture is spatially exercised: for example, the *salle commune*, a space used for everyday living, is the most integrated part of the house (is shallow) in comparison to the bureau of the owner or the *grande salle*, which is a reception hall on special occasions.

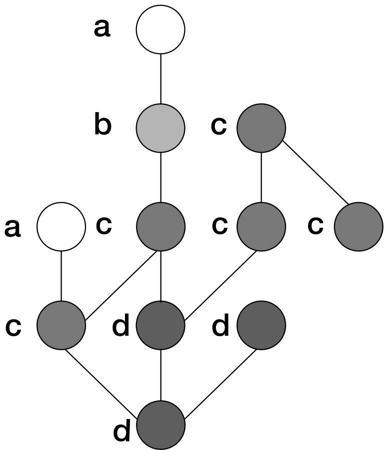

Fig. 49 Diagram of abcd typology and the depth of the spaces (redrawn by the author based on the graphics of Hillier and Tzortzi)

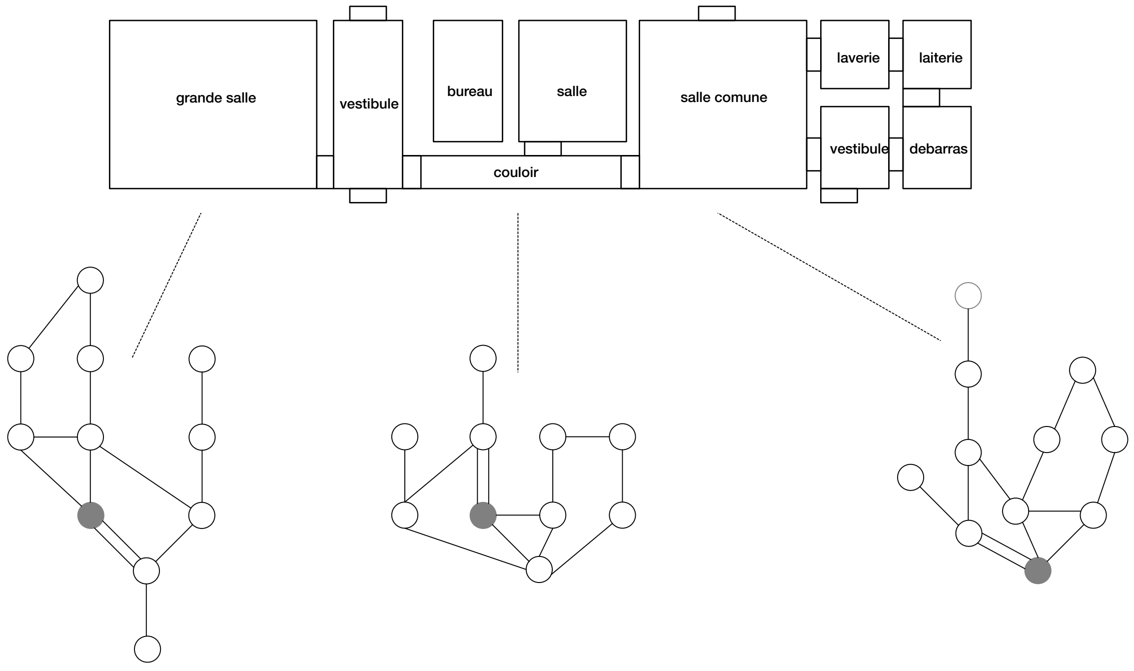

Fig. 50 The layout of a traditional French rural house (redrawn by the author based on the graphics of Hillier and Tzortzi)

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By analysing the museum space with a similar method, the authors claim that an increased division of the space into clear visitable sequences like in an enfilade, where the gallery tends to be read exactly as it is intended to be, favours an organized movement. It facilitates a narrative which will guide the visitor easily though the space and the content, but it also risks turning the narrative into an imperative one. On the other hand, an increased spatial interconnectedness facilitates probabilistic movements, free thematic associations, and unique experiences. However, an exaggeration can cause disorientation and confusion on the visitor's side. Acknowledging such strategies might help in decoding the museology and spatial qualities of a museum, discovering the intentions behind the design of the spaces and their narrative, but also it can help to define one's own strategies when designing an exhibition or a museum.

As one of the first museums in Europe, Leo von Klenze's Glyptothek is the perfect example of a proto-museum architecture which is a modification of the palace design, "with exception of a brilliantly constructed staircase" (Milojkovic & Nikolic 2012: 71) as it was not designed just to be a museum. The building included rooms for state ceremonies (Ziolkowski 1987: 22); the clearly sequenced enfilades intended to serve for displaying sculptures in an evolutionary linearity and continuity on both sides of its courtyard.

The Glyptothek exemplifies a museum layout that generates a circular movement within the building. The enfilades can be considered as "c spaces", with an increased depth of each gallery towards the back as the visitor finds oneself in a well-defined arrangement of exhibition rooms around the courtyard. In such spatial layouts, the movement is constrained in a bidirectional circularity that does not allow probabilistic movements where the chronological narrative is supported spatially and realized as a kinetic story.

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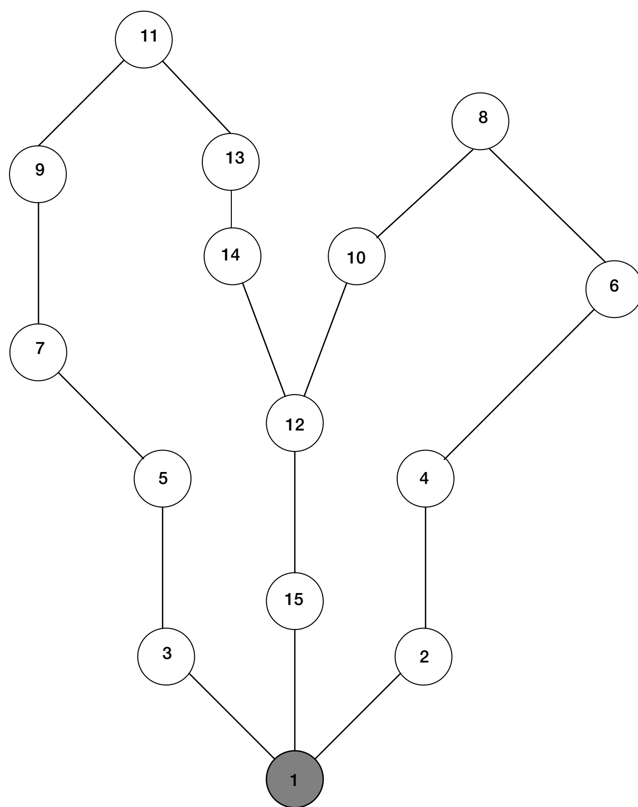
Fig. 51 Glyptothek in Munich, reopening after 3 years of renovation (Simon,2021)



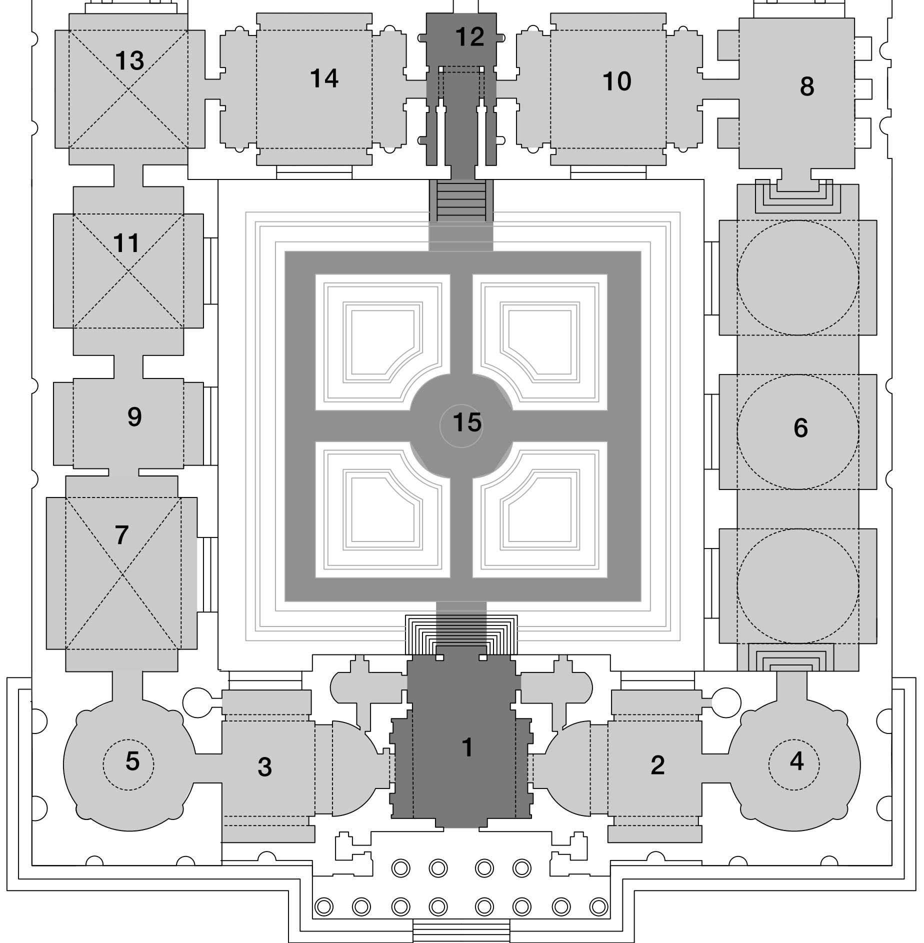


Fig. 52 Floor plan and depth analysis of Glyptothek

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A further important example of the early museum architecture is the *Altes Museum* of Schinkel, which Giebelhausen describes as an extensive reworking of Durand's blueprint (2013: 228). Schinkel's *Altes Museum* is considered by some scholars (Ziolkowski 1987 and Spiero 1934) to be the very first building in Europe that was solely designed to house artworks, which makes the museum one of its kind in the history of architecture. Schinkel contained the central rotunda like in Durand's blueprint upon the entrance, which served as a transitional space where the visitor left the daily life behind and entered another time and space (Giebelhausen 2006: 230; Ziolkowski 1987: 375).

Schinkel's design constitutes an elevated ground floor with interconnected galleries which are distributed around the central rotunda. The ascending stairs by the entrance leading to the central rotunda creates a transitory moment, in which the visitor slowly distances oneself from one's surroundings and leaves everything behind to enjoy the art on display. This transitory moment is crowned by an overview to the city from an elevated ground, that also contributes to the mental isolation and distancing from daily life.

The ground floor is designed to house the sculpture collection and the upper floor is designed to host the painting galleries. Here, like in von Klenze's *Glyptothek*, the sequence is linear, however the positioning of the artworks is ground-breaking for its time: instead of aligning the sculptures along the perimetrical walls or niches, Schinkel positions them along the central columns of the galleries, which divide the space into three equal units. Furthermore, each sculpture is supported by a unique base which would facilitate proper height of vision and perception of the artwork to underline its integrity (Ziolkowski 1987: 376). This positioning allows multi-angular approaches to - three dimensional - sculptures and constructs new spatial relations between the spectator and the object, but at the same time creates individual scenes in which each object can be observed separately.

Another important aspect of Schinkel's design regarding the interrelation between the spectator and the artwork appears in the painting galleries on the upper floor. Here, as well, Schinkel prefers to create a scenery in which every painting can be observed individually, in small niches. He constructed wooden screens perpendicular to the perimetrical walls that facilitate the observing of each painting without any visual distraction. As Ziolkowski states: "This device (the wooden

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screens), which anticipated the moveable walls common in twentieth-century museums, provided intimate spaces in which the visitor, not overwhelmed by too many works of art all viewed at the same time, could contemplate single paintings in tranquillity." (1987: 376).

Even though Schinkel's design like von Klenze's *Glyptothek* follows a circular approach and exercises a narrative of evolutionary linearity, the constellation of the artworks facilitates relatively more dynamic movement patterns in a rigid layout. However, one can also observe here a low interconnectedness and high depth, as there are few possibilities to transit from one exhibition hall to the other. Both designs reflect the spirit of their time, and the pedagogical approach to the art can be read from the spatial organization of the buildings. Giebelhausen defines these museums as buildings "which codified the new building type" and displayed art "as a linear, progressive history", creating "a close relationship between the content and the container" (2006: 230).

In addition to the spatial sequence and the relation between the artwork and the spectator in Schinkel's museum, Ziolkowski underlines a sublime aspect of the architect's design by arguing that in *Altes Museum* romanticism as a cultural aspiration is deeply rooted in its architectural configuration. Constructing his arguments centred around this hypothesis, the author sheds light onto the design project on every scale: from its relationship with the built environment to the positioning of the artworks. Parallel to the storyline of Giebelhausen, Ziolkowski states that Schinkel imagined the museum to be a place for educating the public (Ziolkowski 1987: 370) when the ideals brought by the opening of Musée Français reached Central Europe; the collections plundered during the Napoleonic Wars were regained, and there was an urge to display them in new spaces. The author links the museum to the romantic ideal "that art exists on a par with church and state" (1987: 372) by demonstrating the positioning of the museum in today's *Museumsinsel* between the royal palace and the cathedral. Additionally, the visual language of the Greek temples that Schinkel applies to his design reflects another romantic claim that "art itself is analogous to religion" (1987: 374).

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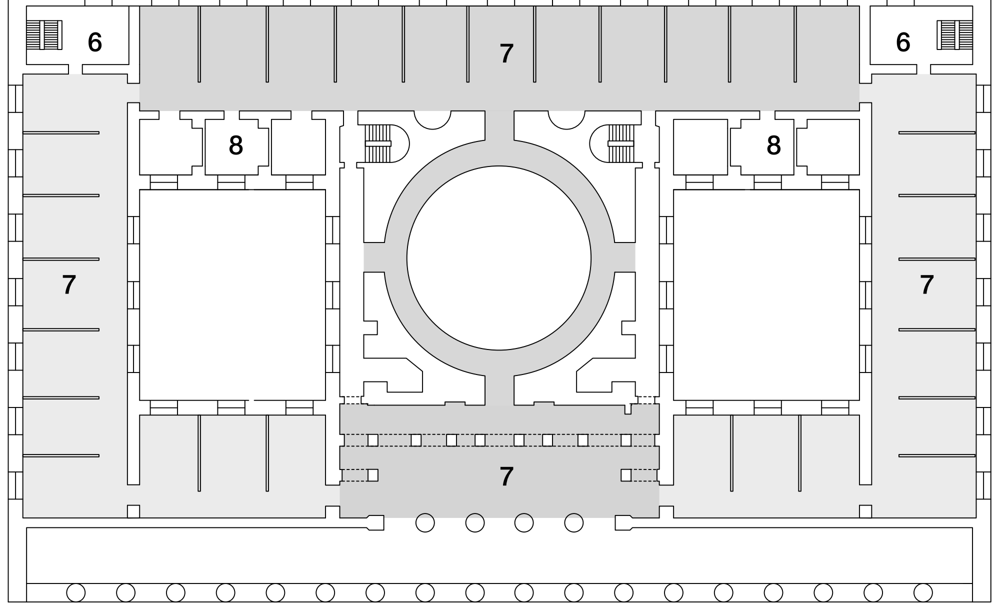

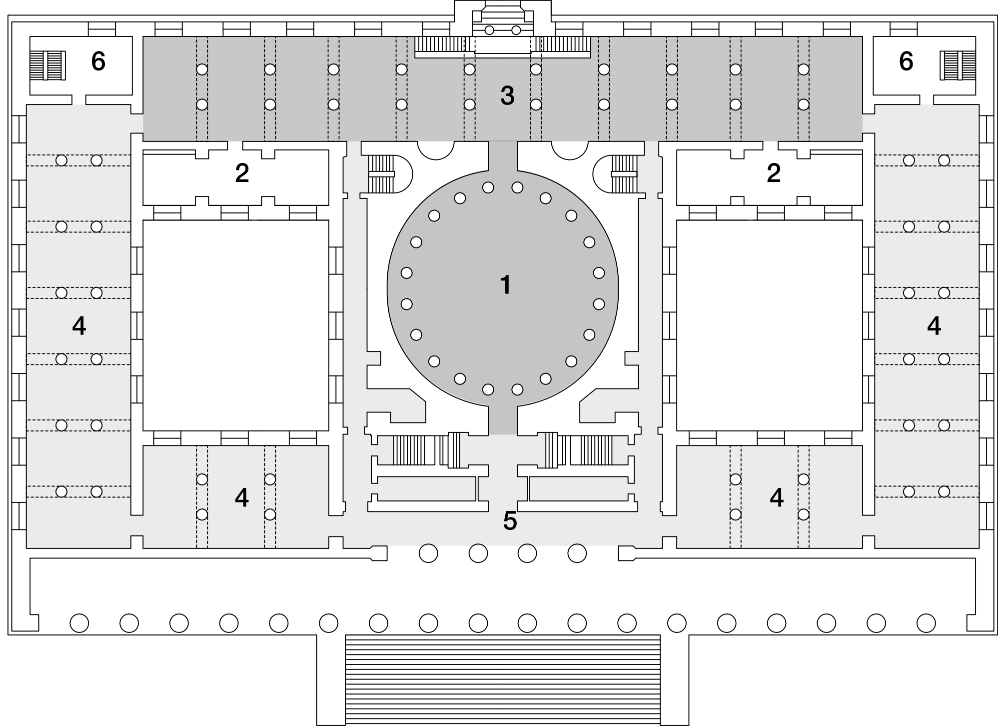

1. Pantheon of antique sculptures
2. Antique medallion and stone collections
3. Gallery of antique sculpture casts
4. Gallery of sculpture casts of the Royal Art Chamber
5. Vestibule
6. Storage
7. Painting galleries
8. Restauration and study rooms

Fig. 53 Floor plan and depth analysis of Altes Museum

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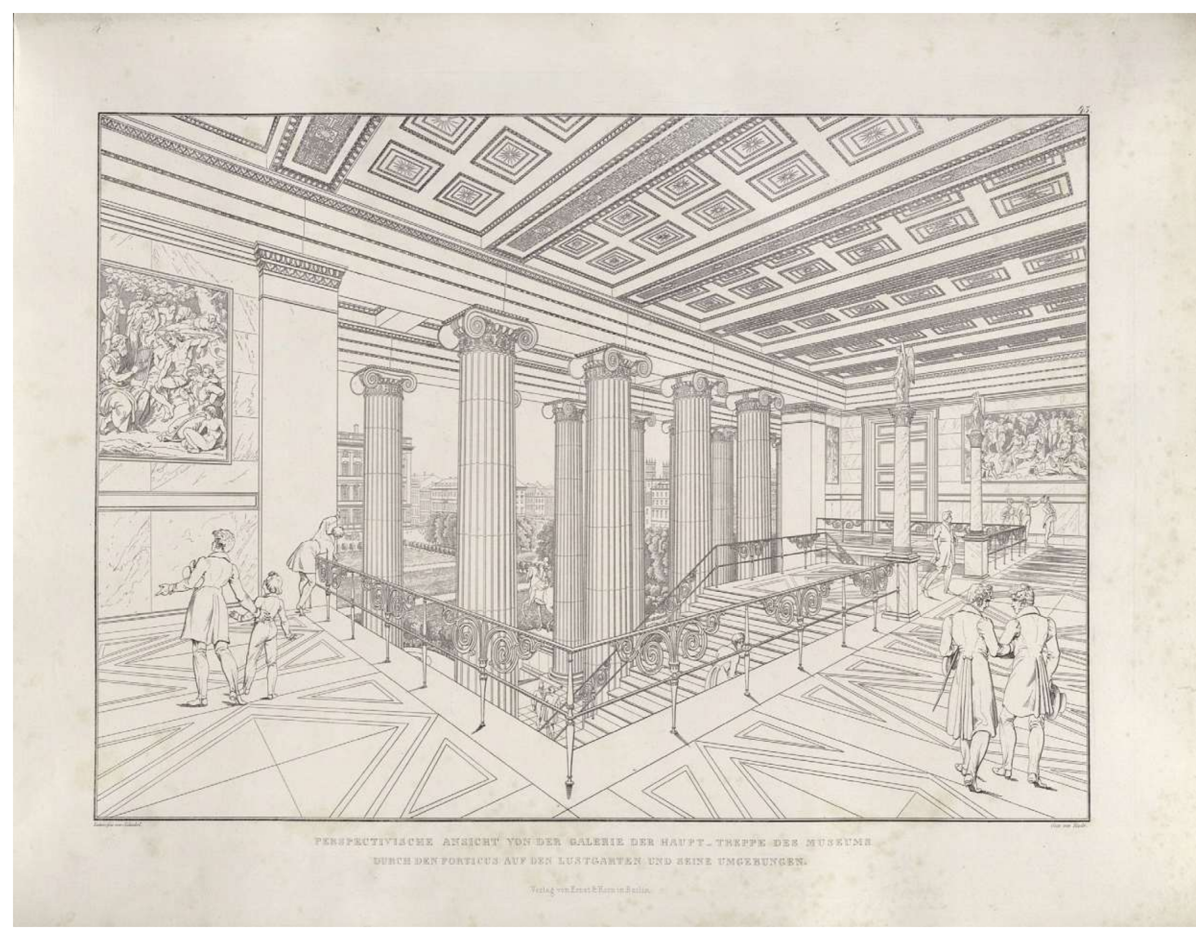

Fig. 54 Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe (Collection of architectural design), Berlin, Altes Museum am Lustgarten, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett

Fig. 55 Aerial view of Museum Island, Berlin © B. Settnik

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A further interesting example that demonstrates the museum's social potential as a public space, analysed specifically by Hilliert and Tzortzi in their article on space syntax in museums, is Tate Britain. Tate Britain is a museum designed with a strong neoclassical language; yet today, it generates dynamic movement sequences and an informal visiting experience, in comparison to the museums that were analysed previously (Hillier and Tzortzi 2006: 291).

In 1996, Tate Britain commissioned the Space Syntax Laboratory in the University College of London "to ascertain the likely impact of major additions and changes that were then being proposed to the existing layout, and how they might affect the patterns of visiting and, more importantly, the spatial culture of the gallery." (2006: 290). During the investigation the researchers recorded the movement of the visitors in the first 10 minutes upon entering the museum. The recordings showed that the layout of the building is very determining in shaping the museum experience and its social atmosphere.

The exhibition spaces of Tate consist of an integration core with a rotunda, similar to Durand's layout and Schinkel's design, with an access through the entrance connecting deeper parts of the building. The galleries lie on both sides of the integration core, and they are also connected with each other in various parts of the building. The connections generate an "intelligible layout as a whole" and "organize movement both in and out of the gallery and within the gallery" (2006: 292). The authors name this element as a "shallow core" and the social phenomenon it creates as "the churning effect", which separates the visitors upon entrance and then brings them together in random parts of the building with a certain probability. Thus, the visit becomes "socially more exciting" (2006: 292) than an over-sequenced exhibition, in which visiting the museum becomes an individually shared experience that provokes spontaneous social interactions.

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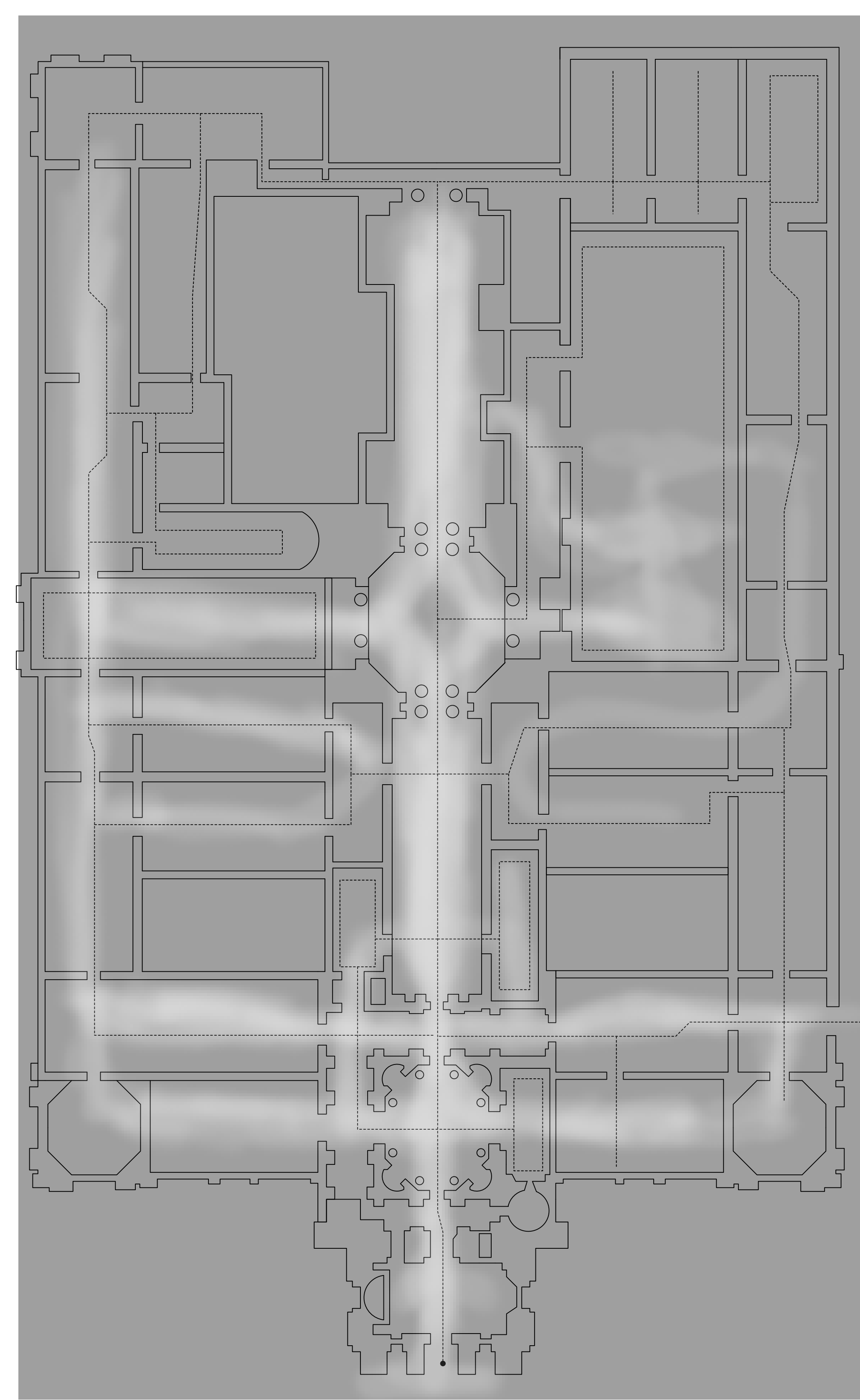

Fig. 56 The results of the investigation on the plan of Tate Britain, redrawn by the author as in Hillier and Tzortzi 2006

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Fig. 57 Tate Britain, Rotunda © Hélène Binet

Coming towards the contemporary museum in the storyline of the history of museum architecture, the great Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park becomes an important stop in the journey. The Crystal Palace changed the architecture fundamentally in the 19th century and introduced "two significant features to the architecture of display: impermanence and flexibility" (Giebelhausen 2006: 232) through industrialization of the material production. These two features have become - and still are - determining factors in contemporary museum design.

The impermanence and flexibility were translated later in museums like the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York into neutral "white cubes", which has created a unified image of contemporary art museums just like the enfilades and galleries of palaces that set up the codes

of museum design up until the 20th century. In contrast to the monumental architecture of the 19th century that reflected the hegemonial power and linearity of history, the white cubes acted as passive containers which housed art works, and distanced themselves from the political structures.

Fig. 58 Interior view of the Crystal Palace, 1851. © paristeampunk.canalblog.com

As modernity accelerated in the West, the destruction caused by the Second World War brought up the question of "conversion" back to the centre of museum design (Milojkovic & Nikolic 2012: 72). In Europe, architects from Italy such as Carlos Scarpa and Franco Albini contributed with their sensible design ideas which converted old palaces and villas to house "recollections" after the plundering of the Second World War, parallel to the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars which gave birth to the first museums across Europe. Carlo Scarpa's intervention in Castelvecchio in Verona became a celebrated museum of late modernism, which accentuates various questions that arise from the task of conversion and showcases the potential of spatial organization in creating a dialogue between the artwork and the spectator.

Castelvecchio, a former 14th century fortified castle in the city of Verona, which was transformed into military barracks during the Napoleonic wars, was converted into an art museum in 1926.

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In 1956, following the change of the museum direction (Canadian Center for Architecture 1999: 68) Scarpa had begun collaborating with the museum director Magagnato intensively and radically changed the museum in the next 20 years.

The intervention in Castelvecchio embodies the key architectural features in Scarpa's design methodology. The play of levels and the idea of bridging, "the use of water and its sport with the light", the concept of semi-transparency with perforation, screen, and layer are present in the materialization of Scarpa's design intervention (Canadian Center for Architecture 1999: 11).

Apart from Scarpa's sensibility towards the historical building and his gentle architectural language, the intervention points out two major themes that are essential for the museum design: the relation between the object and the spectator, and the sequenced movement the architecture generates within the space. The cleverly intertwined design intentions in Castelvecchio's architecture have been discussed by many scholars (Hillier and Tzortzi 2006; Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003) as it demonstrates the potential of the museum space to be "a pedagogical device that transmits a non-narrative meaning" (Hillier and Tzortzi 2006: 294) "which complement the overt pedagogical aims of interpretative labels, exhibition catalogues and other related documents." (Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003: 2).

Fig. 59 The sculpture gallery, Castelvecchio © Sira Gadea

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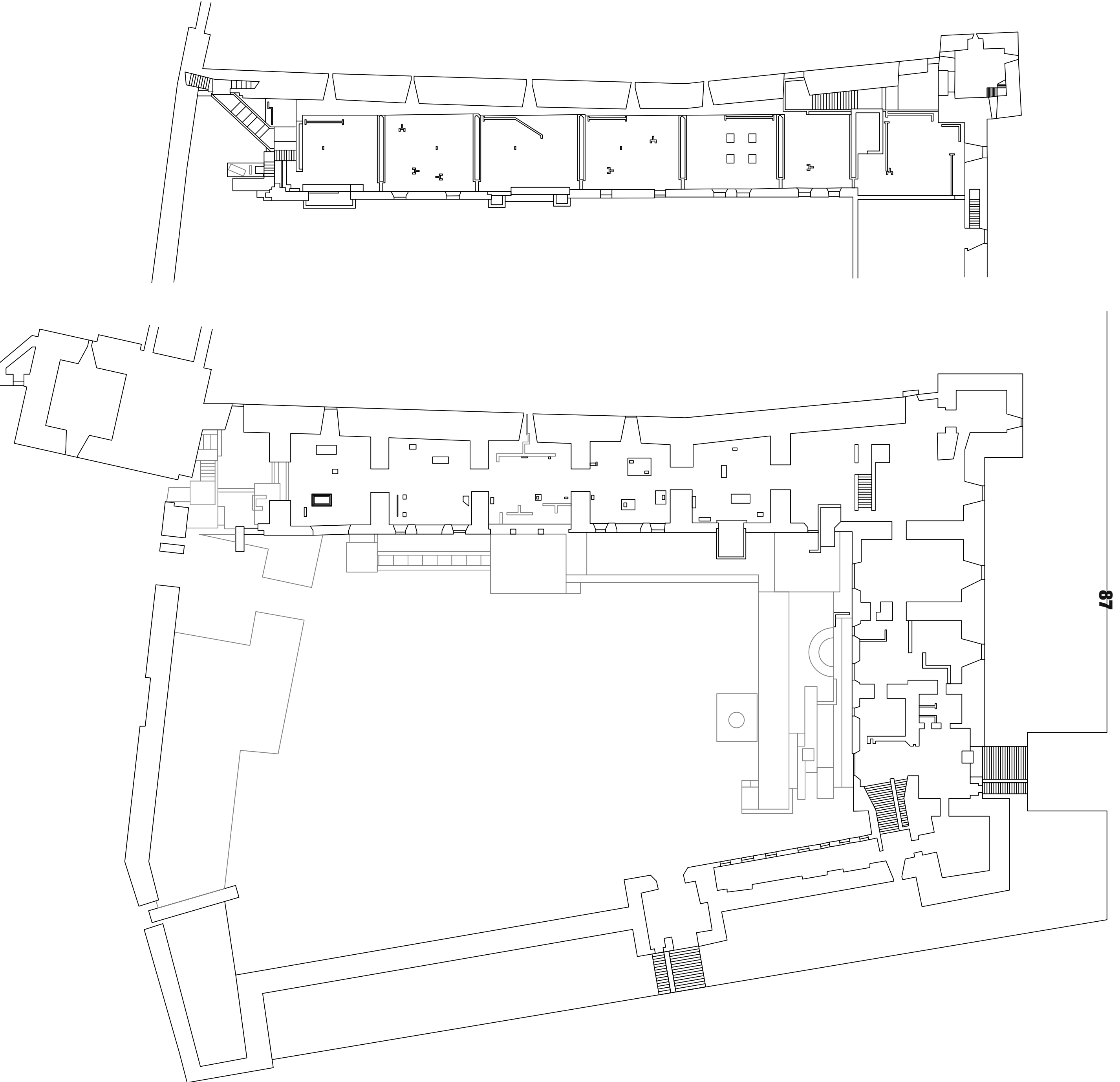

Fig. 60 Castelvecchio Napoleanic Wing. Ground Floor (Sculpture Galleries) and First Floor (Painting Galleries)

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The sculpture galleries in Castelvecchio's Napoleonic wing have mostly been the centre of these studies because of the intricate visual relations that are constructed between the sculptures, the sculptures and the visitors, and the movement of the visitor within the constructed metaphysics of Scarpa's intentions.

The rooms of the sculpture galleries are aligned in a linear sequence in a "skewed square shape and sculptures, mostly statues, are free standing in an apparently free arrangement which, seen in diagrammatic plan, suggests no particular viewing sequence or pattern of exploration." (Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003: 3). However, as Stravoulaki and Peponis analyse Scarpa's design by investigating the positioning and orientation of the sculptures in the gallery, they reveal the architect's intentions.

Upon entering the galleries of Castelvecchio, the visitors have an overview of all the sculptures, and none of them are positioned frontally. This positioning forces the visitors to change their direction when moving within the galleries and thus they are confronted with the direction of each statue's gaze (2003: 3). Some of the sculptures' gazes are directed to other statues that are positioned in other parts of the gallery, "as if pointing visitors towards them" (2003: 3); in some cases, the gazes of the statues meet at a certain point which is neither marked nor accentuated visually. This way, the visitor realizes upon wandering in the galleries that the positioning of the statues is not incidental and there is a certain tension - or intention - within the space constructed by the exhibited objects. At this point, the visitor is not involved in this relation and is still an outsider. These set of relations constructs a certain pattern of movement which can be rich in variety and become individual. In the other case, according to the authors, where the gazes of more than two statues meet each other, the standing point of the visitor plays a crucial role as it "is entirely dependent upon the visitor occupying the point of intersection and noticing the convergence of the gazes." (2003: 5). Therefore, the visitor has to acknowledge the statue's relationships, in which the gazes of the sculptures and the visitor becomes a part of the spatial configuration that the authors describe as a "network of reflexive composition" (ibid.). Within this composition, the movement becomes a device for exploring shifting relationships in the space, converting the museum visit into "a process of discovering the structure of a field of gazes" (2003: 6). The authors call this reflexive experience a field of co-presence, between the objects and the spectator.

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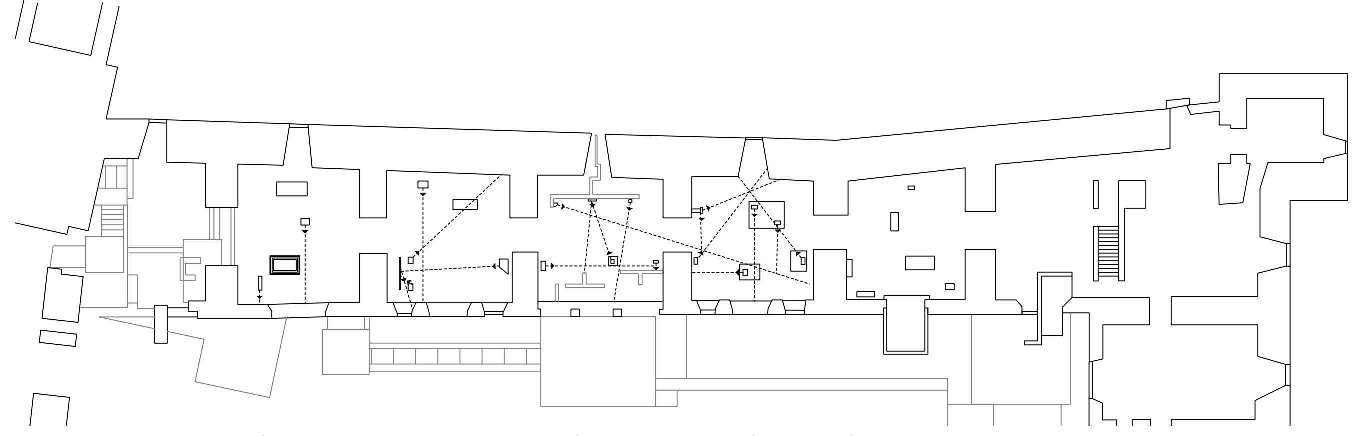

Fig. 61 Castelvecchio Napoleanic Wing. Ground Floor, The Sculpture Gallery – Visual relations between the spectator and the exhibits based on the drawings of Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003

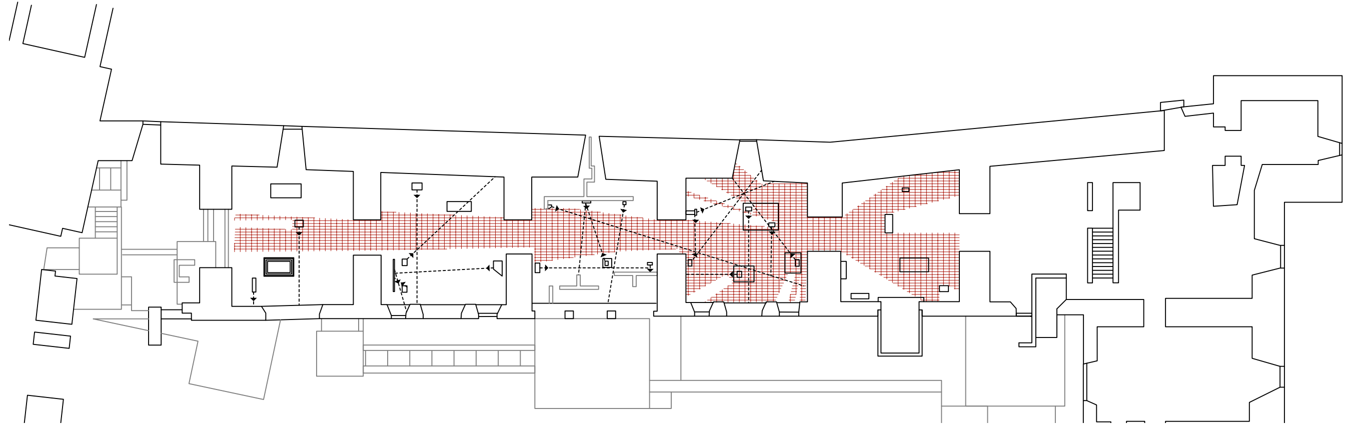

Fig. 62 Castelvecchio Napoleanic Wing. Ground Floor, Sculpture Gallery – Visual fields of the spectator based on the drawings of Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003

Fig. 63 Sculpture Gallery, Castelvecchio © Riccardo Bianchini / Inexhibit

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In the sensory field of co-presence, which is also a mediation method used in religious buildings, the romantic ideas of the museum as a temple continues to live in Scarpa's work. The visitor does not merely have a visual experience of the object, but it becomes the spectator of a theatrical scene, which can be compared to the mediation methods of performances and installations in contemporary art museums.

Ultimately, Scarpa fine-tunes his intentions to construct the visual relationships through the pavement of the building. He uses the paving as one of the key elements to define the geometry of the space (Canadian Center for Architecture 1999: 72). The floor of every room is individually designed "as if there were series of platforms" (1999: 72). Stavroulaki and Peponis also mention the paving in the painting galleries of the Napoleonic wing, in which the finishing of the pavement accentuates the one-point perspective constructed by the lateral positioning of the openings between the galleries. The authors interpret this accentuation on two levels, in which the architect alerts the visitor on how "perspectival effects can modify our perception of visual depth" and "introduces visitors to questions of representation that are inherently involved with post Renaissance painting" (Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003: 11). In a similar fashion to the intention in the sculpture gallery, Scarpa positions the paintings not always frontally and the visitor is confronted with the side and back of the paintings, therefore breaking the linear movement in the galleries. On the other hand, the architect also implies the perspective strategy when positioning the paintings as in front of one another, where the question of depth and scale arises. Thus, the visitors are encouraged to see the paintings from different distances, take a closer look and compare the scales as seen from the perspective.

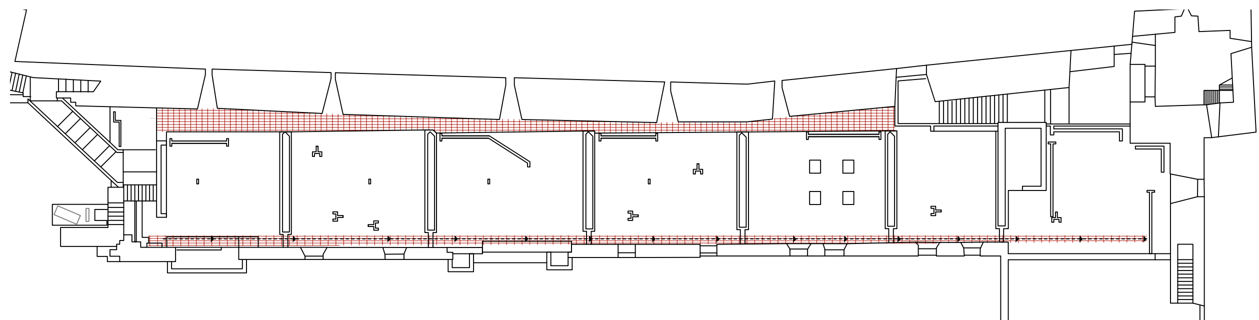

Fig. 64 Castelvecchio Napoleanic Wing. First Floor, Painting Gallery – Visual fields of the spectator based on the drawings of Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003

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Fig. 65 Photos of the authors from Castelvecchio to illustrate the constructed perspective in the painting galleries, Stavroulaki and Peponis 2003

"While the sculpture galleries are designed as fields of intersecting gazes, that are perceptually activated as a function of visitors' movement, the painting galleries are designed as fields of intersecting optical frames of reference, alternatively constructed by the paintings, the placement of the paintings and the disposition of architectural boundaries. In the former case, the embodied experience of movement virtually animates the statues, while immersing the visitor in an almost theatrical stage of expressions. In the latter, the embodied experience of movement intimates' perceptions of overlapping spaces; or, to be more precise, the embodied experience of movement leads to a perception of overlapping optical frames of reference making intersecting claims over the same space. In both cases, however, the arrangement of the displays works integrally with the architecture, in order to suggest that the conjunction of movement and seeing, understanding, and perceiving is brought under the authority of a design intention"

(2003: 11)

Scarpa's immensely intentional design proves that a rigid layout like Castelvecchio's does not always have to imply a linear and imperative narrative. The configuration of basic architectural elements and the careful positioning of the objects within a space can create a highly dynamic and reflexive museum experience, extending the mathematics of the space syntax. On the other hand, a sensitive exhibition design, and architectural interventions, can expand the potential of the museum space, both as a device of narrative and as a cultural experience. However, such intertwined and object-specific relations can limit the dynamic input required by the contemporary museum, in an age where the information flow is out of scale.

All in all, Castelvecchio has become one of the most discussed museums of the last century, successfully finding the balance between a monument and an instrument, a binary equation that occupies every aspect of the museum design task.

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By the second half of the 20th century, while new renovation strategies were emerging, the inheritance of Crystal Palace in terms of impermanence and flexibility reaches its zenith: The frequent world expos and international exhibitions urged the exhibition spaces to be receptive to a multitude of different situations. Le Corbusier's "Museum of Unlimited Growth" in 1939 can be seen as an early embodiment of these ideas, in which the renowned architect of modernism "extended the notion of the museum as time's arrow, an instrument designed to show the cumulative progress of humanity's achievements and nature's transmutations" (Giebelhausen 2006: 232). He arranged the galleries in a spiral constellation, in which the museum can be expanded infinitely as the collection grows. Le Corbusier's simple and expansionist idea underlines the modernist approach to the museum architecture as an instrument, in which the architecture becomes a functional backdrop for the artwork to be appreciated in peace.

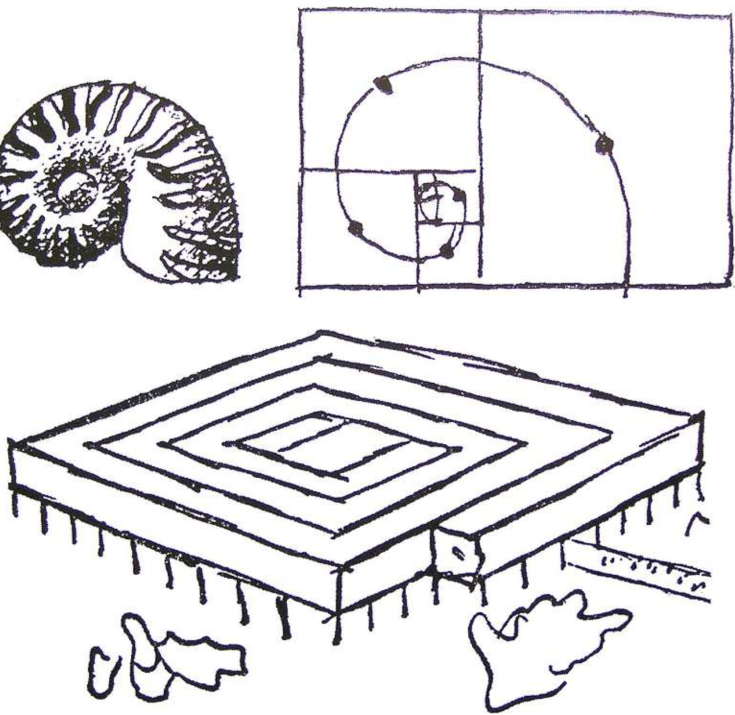

Fig. 66 Le Corbusier's Museum of Unlimited Growth

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Following the reconstruction period, between the sixties and the seventies, the museum architecture begins to span itself between the politically neutral white cubes and bold architectural interventions. While the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York “successfully extended the art museum’s traditional remit to include a wide range of contemporary practices” (2006: 233), the design of Centre Pompidou by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano in 1977, extended the functions and “helped to redefine the traditional museum” (2006: 233). Centre Pompidou became a cultural centre, in which the exhibition was just one of the many programs that was integrated into the building. The building includes spaces for theatre performances and concerts, cinema, a visual library, a library, bookshops, cafés, and restaurants. In contrast to Giebelhausen’s praising description of Centre Pompidou’s revolutionary high-tech architecture, Milojkovic and Nikolic describe such architecture that contains elements of shopping malls and great infrastructures as “faceless facets of modern globalized society, adjusted for careless, craving for gratification.” (2012: 74). By expanding the functions of a museum, Centre Pompidou and its followers also expanded the ideas on the ideal museum space, as museum architecture became an agent to produce and consume culture collectively. Giebelhausen describes this process ambiguously as the “democratization of culture”, as if the ideal enters for the first time in the museum’s political agenda. On the other hand, contemporary artists like Hito Steyerl see these ideals as “an unfulfilled reality of the contemporary museum” (Steyerl 2009: 7). Despite all of Centre Pompidou’s contradictions, the high-tech building has become a modern institutional monument and a playful instrument for contemporary culture to flourish.

As the museums were blossoming in the whole world at a fast pace, the declared war on the white cube throughout the sixties and the seventies resurfaced conversion one more time in the field of museum architecture (Milojkovic & Nikolic 2012: 74). However, this time, the conversions were not merely a necessity like after the Napoleonic Wars or the World Wars, but they rather served as refuges to the alternative, anti-institutional spaces like the PS1 Contemporary Art Centre on Long Island, in Queens NY, or Saatchi Gallery in London which used to be a disused paint factory. These conversions had so much success and called the attention of many visitors, that the big institutions decided to acquire a similar strategy, in which they converted the underused industrial

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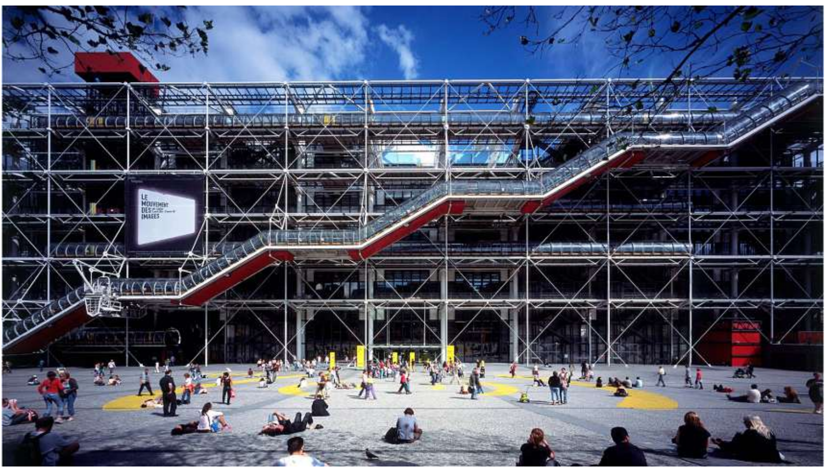

Fig. 67 Centre Pompidou, Paris © David Noble

buildings to contemporary art monuments. Tate Modern in London and Musée d'Orsay in Paris are the prominent examples of the new wave of conversions, in which the great dimensions of industrial buildings and infrastructures create almost limitless possibilities in which to display a vast variety of artworks. As a result of such interventions, museum architecture expanded its operation field into urban regeneration processes and today finds its place in most of the projects that are concerned with it.

Fig. 68 Saatchi Gallery's old premises

Fig. 69 Tate Modern in former Bankside Power Station © Hufton + Crow

The creation of contemporary monuments through conversion, however, did not detain the freshly erected museum-monuments. Two of the most prominent examples are the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao, which raises many different questions from the relevance of corporate identity to the position of the museum as a (public) institution within the market economy, and its potential in the image making of the city. These structures shaped the identities of the cities and became landmarks; especially, the Museum in Bilbao became an instrument to deploy and promote strategies (Giebelhausen 2006: 237) that extended the effects of the museum beyond its walls. The museum has changed Basque Country's capital from a small industrial town to a touristic highlight rapidly and contributed to the city's economic growth, which gave birth to the term *Bilbao effect* "a phenomenon whereby cultural investment plus showy architecture is supposed to equal economic uplift for cities down on their luck." (Moore 2017).

In addition to their contribution in image-making, Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, as well as the museum designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in New York, challenge the neutral white cube through their architectural forms. The New Yorker museum, with its spiral configuration of the central exhibition hall, inherits the initial architectural features of the 19th century museum with its sky lit atrium-dome and the ceremonial entry (Giebelhausen 2006: 234). On the other hand, Milojkovic and Nikolic describe the architecture of both Guggenheim Musuems as an architecture that "caused inconvenience to artists and fear that the container will side-track visitors from art contained within." (Milojkovic & Nikolic 2012: 80).

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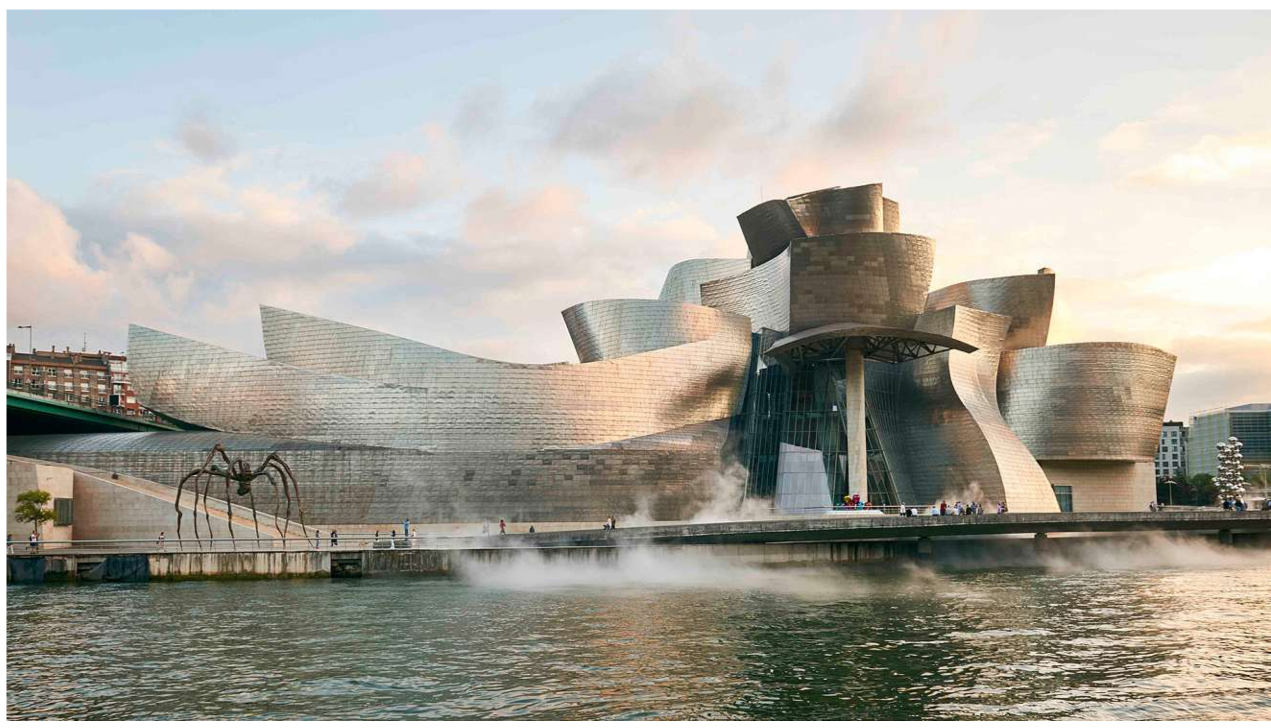

Fig. 70 Guggenheim Bilbao, Frank Gehry

The contemporary museum, as one can see through its evolution, has expanded the functions of the traditional museum, and adopted a wide range of spatial strategies to house different cultural activities in the same place. For today's museums, both having an attractive architecture and a program has become inevitable, as they are turned into factories of cultural consumption where they must meet certain criteria to achieve the expected 'numbers'. Even though museum architecture has constantly evolved throughout the last two centuries, the contemporary museum still conserves the primary architectural forms and ideological agendas of its ancestors while adapting to the ever-changing conditions of contemporary society.

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Fig. 71 Guggenheim New York © Memo

Manufacturing Heritage, Identity and Memory

In 1987 Robert Hewison came up with the term "heritage industry" to draw attention to the sanitisation and commercialisation of a version of the past which is produced as heritage in the United Kingdom. However, this phenomenon has not limited itself to the shores of the island, it has become global as mass tourism, media, and consumption has dominated the production of culture. It has created "an all-pervasive industry in contemporary global societies" (2012: 69) like Rodney Harrison argues in his work, where he illustrates critical approaches to heritage.

Harrison and many other scholars in the field of cultural studies (Kirschenblatt 1995, Gruber 2002) underline the fact that contemporary citizens of society are overwhelmed with the past. In our daily lives in bustling cities, we are constantly facing vulnerable traces of the past which need protection and special attention; we see constantly plaques reminding us of the violent wars, victories or massacres that happened in that very same place, which are, according to Harrison, a "product of the experience of modernity." (2012: 23). The modernity that Harrison refers to is the set of philosophical, social and political relations and movements that has shaped our way of understanding the world, not limiting it only to the beginning of the Enlightenment and foundation of the nation states. In other words, it is the "modernity project" (2012: 24) which caused the

rupture from tradition and alienated contemporary society from its roots.

The rupture from tradition has put modern societies in such a delicate position, that everything which has become subject to the materialistic flow (Groys 2013), has caused a general anxiety for losing and getting lost. So, we ended up labelling, protecting, and restoring every material trace we could protect from the violence of the flow. Over the last few decades this anxiety became so excessive that contemporary societies have been overexposed to protecting and remembering the past.

Harrison hints to "heritagisation" as the cause of this overwhelming process of protecting and remembering, which is a term coined by Kevin Welsh in 1992 to refer to the process in which "objects and places are transformed from functional 'things' to objects of display and exhibition (2012: 69). As heritage is a vague term that can be interpreted in many ways, the process[es] that come along also appear arbitrarily: everything can be the subject and object of the heritage. The objects and subjects that we put up on the stage as heritage were not destined to be products of the industry in the first place, as Barbara Kirschenblatt says, we give them a second life, a new value (1998: 149).

Museums emerge in contemporary culture as an ideal home for objects and places which deserve to be given a second life. Sometimes, like in the case of the Sephardic Museum, the place itself can also be an object which is re-born from its ashes.

Today's museums offer its visitors a trip to the past and a unique experience which cannot take place in our daily lives. In a museum the distinction between the past and the present has become clearer than ever, while the interest in the past is accelerated by contemporary information technologies, increased mobility, flexible capital flow, and movements like new conservatism (Harrison 2012: 79). Thus, the general interest in the past turned heritage into an infinite resource where museums assumed their roles in the chain of production.

This set of relations , which Harrison refers to as super or hyper modernity, generates a spatial practice that segregates museums and other places of remembering from our daily lives in the built environment:

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“…the hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which … do not integrate the earlier places: instead, these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of a ‘place of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position.”

(Augé 1995: 75-78 as cited from Harrison 2012: 78)

Non-places are spaces which are isolated from the daily urban life, and they become spaces of leisure, fun and experience. In these places the perception of time and space is distorted, subjective and excessively dense. Sometimes the perception of time becomes so dense in these places that we see our lifetimes being exhibited, like the eighties, nineties, or the beginning of the new millennium. The de-sensibilisation, exoticization, and defamiliarization of time caused by this “abundance of the past” (2012: 78) is a result of hyper-modernity. In hyper-modernity everything becomes the past after a second.

But how did museums fall into this anxious state, considering that they have always been sites of interest for the past?

For Harrison, one of the main reasons is the shifts in leisure, tourism, and travel through the exponential expansion of international tourism amongst the new Western middle class. This shift has been created by the so-called “experience economy”, in which the value of a thing is not measured by its production costs but rather the sensations and emotions that it generates through its use (2012: 84-85). Museums are the perfect fit for these sensations and emotions to surface and they are utilized efficiently since they incorporate in their nature a certain admiration and fascination for things. It is the very same nature of museums which also gave them a crucial role in this production chain of experiences.

The experience economy that resulted in massive “disneyisation” (2012: 86) created places which offered different thematic experiences. It categorised and confined these experiences in certain spaces, preventing them from existing in others. Similar to the museums’ operative strategy, in which they reveal the connections between things that could not have been seen with bare eyes in our daily lives, it is also impossible to encounter these experiences in ‘ordinary’ spaces we inhabit in the cities.

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Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett sums up the relationship between the museum and tourism as a product of the experience economy as such:

> *"…tourism stages the world as a museum of itself, even as museums try to emulate the experience of travel. Indeed, museums—and the larger heritage industry of which they are part—play a vital role in creating the sense of "hereness" necessary to convert a location into a destination. "*
>
> *(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 7)*

Hence, the contemporary museum evolves into a place where the culture is produced and consumed at the same time by a wider spectrum of the society than in the past. The visitor becomes both the worker and the consumer (Steyerl 2009), as the museums generate unique experiences that require participation of the visitor. The intertwined relationship between culture and the economy puts the museum in a delicate position, where it cannot simply avoid the accelerated progression of hyper modernity. It becomes subject to a necessity of creating a marketable image that will bring profit to the region, and assuming a role in the production of regional identity becomes obligatory for the institutions to survive under these circumstances.

As premiere attractions of a regional and global recreational network, museums may sound very playful and joyous. However, as mentioned in the previous chapters of this work, the Enlightenment project also has a strong political agenda:

> *"The modern museum is a symbolic space of otherness inside the relatively homogenous context of the modern national state. And at the same time the museum is the place where the cultural identity of this state is formulated because there is no possibility to define your own cultural identity other than in comparison with other cultural forms. The modern national state needs the space of otherness. It needs the museum to be able to articulate its own cultural identity."*
>
> *(Groys 1997: 99)*

The origins of this agenda, as well as many other aspects of the modern museum history, canonically lies within the occupation of Louvre. Boris Groys (1997), as well as Sharon J. Macdonald (2003), who both elaborate on the intricate relationship of the museum with identity work, point to the fact that the conversion of the royal palace into a museum was a breakthrough in Western society (Groys 1997: 99). It accelerated a secularization process and a democratization of high culture, in which the museum and its collection had become accessible to the masses. The idea of *Musée Français* - and in general the political and social developments that followed the French revolution - was “a symbolic attempt to generate a public” (Macdonald 2003: 1-2) that identified itself as a sovereign collective where everybody has equal rights and share a sense of belonging to a wider community, which is the nation.

Following the model of the Louvre, many museums that came afterwards “exported” (2003: 2) this model and the museum has become a perfect place to put the identity work in practice, in which the sense of belonging was expressed on many occasions. According to Macdonald, as transmitting this sense of belonging was not possible through social experiences on a daily basis, it had to be a cultural experience (2003: 3). The museum was the most adequate place to generate such experiences and it has since become a strong agent to articulate national belonging and pride by representing history.

Having a history has become the collective equivalent of having a memory (2003: 3), by replacing the eternal memory of God that the pre-modern society had been relying on (Groys 1997: 100). And therefore displaying that memory in a museum turned itself into a performance of national identities. The urge to display objects has brought within the act of collecting, in which the collections have become a clear representation of the identities. As Groys cites from Susanne Sonntag “we are what we collect.” (1997: 100). Therefore, the nations have started expressing their identities through the collections they possess - especially the colonialist nations - where they showcased their mastery on the ‘other’. As a result, the other and otherness found a stable place in the museum narratives, in which the culture was showcased through differences with the ‘other’ that stabilised one’s own identity.

The construction of such a narrative fomented a Hegelian historical consciousness, that reflected on history as an outsider without having a specific identity (Groys 1997: 101-102). This Hegelian

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vision of an identity-free curator still exists in the narrative of national museums, even though paradoxically it is also used to describe one's own identity.

he narrative produced by the identity-free curator in the West presents the world as an exhibition, in which the spectator is given a privileged external view to an order that cannot be seen otherwise with bare eyes in real life, outside of the museum (Macdonald 2003: 3). Consequently, culture becomes a materialised entity, which can be analysed and studied objectively. This materiality, according to Macdonald, reflected itself in the collections as well as in the museum buildings, resulting in the "objectification of culture" (Handler 1988 as cited in Macdonald 2003) where a thing presents itself unambiguously and thus assures the stability of the cultural identity.

Parallel to Macdonald, Groys describes this process wittily: In pre-modern society, being part of God's eternal memory was free of charge and a disciple could have a place, a stable sense of belonging, just with faith and good deeds. With the Enlightenment and secularisation, the stability of God's eternal memory was shaken and therefore it had become impossible to maintain stable any kinds of identity, including cultural identity Respectively, the quest for stability was translated into "cultural archives" in the form of "books, pictures and other historical documents" (Groys 1997: 100). The materialisation of culture brought economical questions within, where storage and conservation became central to the museum's work. Today, cultural archives depend on economic conditions, in which the necessary sources - money - are almost never available. Subsequently, this situation obliges the museum to position itself as a manufacturer of culture, not only because of ideological reasons as mentioned above, but also, for solely economic reasons.

The role of the museum as a manufacturer of culture results in an intertwined relationship between identity and economy, in which every museum constructs narratives that underline the cultural differences and exoticness. Otherwise, it would be "dull" (Groys 1997: 103) to see similarities, which would then dissatisfy the highly globalized tourist and the "nationalist dictator-curator" (1997: 103) who wants to underline the uniqueness of their identity. In these terms, the museum is given the potential to be a factory that brings both economic and political profit.

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Another aspect to consider is that museums have become places where the brutality and atrocities of mankind tends to be staged as a part of the offered experience. In response to profitable mass tourism, many national museums have become 'destinations' where tragedies are being marketed alongside a proud national image. They offer intense experiences which will enrich the visitors' minds and help them to form a collective identity, a sense of belonging. The attitude of museums becoming service oriented (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 138) desensitizes the spectator by isolating the tragedies contextually and spatially, leaving a blurry line between fiction and reality which comes to life through 'the experience'. Thus, the objectivity of Hegelian historical consciousness ends up being alienated from the harsh reality of the past, and strengthens the fiction of national narrative.

From this particular point of view, in Europe, Jewish museums tend to portray an adequate example because they all have to deal with tragedies (Holocaust, expulsions, pogroms etc.). These museums are also linked to different national stories, which has become more important than ever for political image making over the last decades.

Before contextualizing the abstract set of relations that construct the narratives of Jewish museums, it is important to emphasize that these narratives alter and expand the conventional identity work in museums which has been previously discussed.

First of all, the Jewish museums are a relatively new phenomenon in Europe in which Jewish culture is mostly subject to an objective narrative from an outsider perspective. On the one hand, it is displayed as 'the exotic' within the national territory, counterculture as Ruth Ellen Gruber (2002) states, and on the other hand, it mediates the modernity and openness of Western society (Gruber 2002, Greenberg 2003). Furthermore, the majority of the Jewish museums in Europe have to deal with traumatic experiences such as Holocaust, pogroms, and expulsions, which often result in alienation through dramatic scenography and language put out by the curators. Additionally, these museums mostly lack material collections as most of the artifacts are destroyed throughout history. Lastly, in some particular cases like Toledo, museums are established in cities where there is no Jewish presence, which is also one of the reasons why these museums adopt an outsider perspective.

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There is also a spatial aspect to consider which unfolds the museums' identity politics: The location of Jewish museums and how they are integrated into the cultural landscape of a city play an important role in defining the museums' intentions. Many of the Jewish museums in Europe are established in abandoned synagogues in historical city centres, for example in Prague, Amsterdam, and Toledo, where they reveal the absence of the Jews. In the meantime, these museums blend Jewish history into the city's memory and identity. By exposing Jewish spaces to a network of places that consist of museums, monuments, libraries, and cemeteries, such museums intend to enhance the visibility of local Jewish history, which would otherwise be confined between museum walls.

Considering these facts, it is crucial to expand the notions of identity work, exoticism, and nostalgia in the museums to a Jewish space, as they create a unique field within museum studies.

The Exotic and Nostalgic Jewish Space

In 2002, the Jewish scholar Ruth Ellen Gruber expands in her work *Virtually Jewish* the phenomenon of the 'Jewish space', a term coined by Paris-based historian Diana Pinto "to describe the place occupied by the Jewish phenomenon within mainstream European society today" (Gruber 2002: 12). According to Pinto, the Jewish space does not solely rely on the physical presence of the Jews, but it is rather a strategy to integrate Jewish history and memory "into an understanding of their (the country's) national history, regardless of the current size, visibility, or activity of the local Jewish population." (2002: 12). Gruber describes this phenomenon as Pan-European and concentrates mainly on Central European countries that have experienced Holocaust, however, through my personal experiences and observations, it had become clear that this model is exported to many countries around Europe, including Spain, Portugal and Turkey, independently from their proximity to the atrocities of the Shoah.

According to Gruber, all Jewish museums around Europe have to face a common theme: the absence. These museums are mostly public, are "political places of memory" (2002: 156), and they provide "an institutional definition of memory, just as their exhibitions may, in turn, define Jewish culture." (2002: 156). Moreover, the absence represented in these institutions is not merely the lack of collection pieces to be exhibited, but it is also the absence of an active Jewish community.

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This “Judaica minus Jews” (2002: 8) brings up a very controversial issue to the centre of the cultural discussion: The people who promote Jewish culture in Europe are mainly non-Jews, and they determine in a way the contemporaneity of Jewish culture. This is the point where Gruber expands this phenomenon and adds the adjective “virtual” into the discussion. The cultural scenery in Europe creates virtually Jewish spaces, without the presence of actual Jews.

Gruber characterizes these spaces as such:

> *“Old Jewish quarters are under development as tourist attractions, where ‘Jewish-style’ restaurants with ‘Jewish-sounding’ names write their signs in Hebrew or Hebrew-style letters, use Jewish motifs in their décor, and name their dishes -sometimes even dishes made from pork or a nonkosher mix of meat and dairy products- after rabbis and Old Testament prophets”*
>
> (2002: 6)

Fig. 72 The pavement of a street in the Jewish Quarter of Toledo

For Gruber, there are many motives behind this phenomenon: some being as simple as a form of philosemitism, some as a consequence of the neoliberal economy’s heritage production, or some led by the urge to search for one’s identity, be it personal or collective (national). According to the author “the motives behind this activity and interest are as varied as the manifestations themselves. Often, they are not fully clear, and the end results are yet unknown. It is easy to dismiss much of the phenomenon as opportunistic Shoah business or a debased form of folklore, and some of it obviously is exploitative kitsch.” (2002: 8).

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One of the motives that Gruber, as well as Reesa Greenberg (2002) agrees on, is the fact that the Jewish museums have become agents of confrontation with the past, especially in Eastern and Central European countries after the fall of the Iron Curtain. This confrontation has been seen as the barometer of the openness of the particular society, embodying the degree of tolerance in all levels of local culture. As Gruber elaborates, commemorating Jews and their "annihilated world" turned into a performance of "demonstrating democratic principles and multicultural ideals, regardless of how other contemporary minorities are treated." (Gruber 2002: 10). Furthermore, according to Reesa Greenberg, after a brief analysis of Jewish Museum scenery in the capitals of Europe, the challenge to enact tolerance both in and outside of the museum undergoes a simplistic nationalist identity work, as the nation states and their citizens mostly rely on clear-cut definitions of the Self and the Other (Greenberg 2002: 136).

So, how do the national self-identification patterns and exoticization manifest themselves in European-Jewish museums?

It is crucial to underline that self-identification in museums - as described previously - and exoticization are not always two different approaches, they mostly go hand-in hand adding a bitter taste of nostalgia. Some Jewish museums may delineate Jews "as a part of national or local whole; they can represent Jews and their traditions as a living part of today's society, or they can consign them to a bygone era." (Gruber 2002: 126). In any case, these institutions enhance the limits of the virtual Jewish world through exhibitions, concerts, lectures, and many other similar events, mostly without the presence of the Jewish community. Gruber also laments that the exhibitions on Judaism and Jewish practice eventually exoticize the culture by "giving the impression of something far removed from present-day reality, of strange customs of a strange people who suffered a strange and horrible fate" (2002: 162). Hence, she also refers to de-sensibilization of the visitor through an objectively constructed narrative in past tense, accompanied by ancient imagery and objects, which foments cultural exoticization in the eyes of a spectator who is a complete stranger to the culture. Lastly, the author adds:

> *"And if only figurative representations of Jews are old pictures or mannequins (sometimes faceless and featureless) in odd-sometimes discriminatory-historical costume, or representations of Jews as skeletal Holocaust victims or death camp inmates, what does that say about Jews, Judaism, and the Jewish phenomenon?"*

(2002: 162).

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Fig. 73 Mannequins in traditional Maghrebi clothes in Museo Sefardí

Fig. 74 Mannequins in traditional clothes in The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews

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Franchising Jewish Spaces

In addition to the theoretical discourses elaborated on in the previous parts of this work, I would like to reflect on the first-hand experiences that I gathered in different Jewish museums and cultural events in Spain and in other parts of Europe, as they materialized and solidified the understanding of the abstract relationships between museums, identity work and culture.

Ruth Ellen Gruber exemplifies some 'best practice' of Jewish museums as such:

> "*Many museums make sections of their exhibition's primers on Judaism, explaining customs and traditions, holidays and life cycles to accommodate the interest of a non-Jewish public... Ritual objects are often set up as installations that aim to explain Judaism and Jewish practice by simulating scenes of Jewish life. These installations may be as simple as an open prayer book and a kiddush cup placed next to Shabbat candlesticks with candlers ready to be lit or as elaborate as fully laid Sabbath or Seder tables. The mannequins or cutout figures employed in some installations to set the scene are often shown dressed in 'Jewish' attire of centuries ago*".
>
> (2002: 161)

Fig. 75 Ritual objects and menorah on display in Sephardic Museum Toledo

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This practice is still present after twenty years in European Jewish museums, including the Sephardic Museum of Toledo, although many of them have undergone museological transformation, and have been trying to “update” themselves.

I would like to start my journey from the East and end it in the West, on the Iberian Peninsula, following the exact opposite way that Sephardim took on after the expulsion in 1492.

The first museum I would like to mention is the *500. Yıl Türk Musevileri Müzesi* (The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews) in Istanbul. This museum portrays a slightly different profile in comparison to the other Jewish museums around Europe, mainly for two reasons: Istanbul is a city with an active Jewish community, and the museum is established and governed by the Jews. Even the latest design of the museum was executed by a local Jewish architect, Rivka Geron Shild, when the museum decided to abandon its old premises, Zülfaris Synagogue, and moved into a new building which formed part of the great Neve Shalom Synagogue.

The narrative of this museum differs from the other European museums, as it is controlled by the Jewish community itself, in relation to the policy of silence, ‘kayades’*. Such customs of silence and a strong fondness towards nationalistic and republican ideas create a censored narrative in the museum. It repeats the well-known national history phrases in which it is said that the Turkish society ‘welcomed’ the Jews after the expulsion from Spain, and has always been a good ‘host’. The museum makes very few accounts on the Thrace Pogrom in 1934, Citizen Speak Turkish Campaign or the 6-7 September Pogroms of Istanbul in 1955. In contrast to ‘Judaica without Jews’, here the Jews roll up their sleeves for an intense identity work, to establish a neutral ground in the identity politics of a conflicted country, in which the fractions get deeper day by day.

Even though the Jews are in charge of this museum, the standards set by European Jewish museology are noticeable to the eye of the museum visitor. The best practice, as described by Gruber, reveals itself here through faceless mannequins in epochal clothes, installation of religious objects in a ritualistic scenography, and demonstration of the life cycle in the exact same order as any other Jewish museum that adopts a third-person perspective. It is clear to

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* Kayades in Judeo-Spanish meaning silence, discretion, which the Jews in Turkey attribute to describe the general reaction towards antisemitism and other political developments in the country that affects the community.

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the eye of a Jewish visitor that the museum targets non-Jews who have almost no knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture. This is strikingly materialized in one of the hallways of the museum, where the visitor has a direct view to the synagogue of Neve Shalom behind a glass wall, so that they are able to observe a ceremony if it's taking place at the moment of the visit. Otherwise, it is very difficult for a non-Jew to enter and visit the synagogue unless they are invited, as the synagogues of Istanbul were subject to three terrorist attacks over the last few decades.

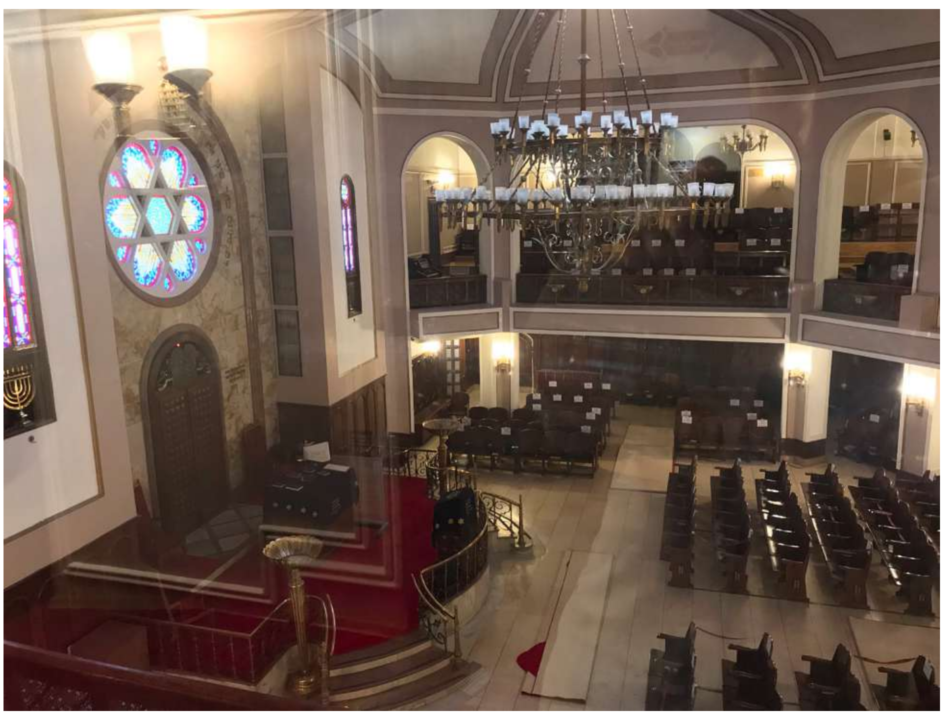

Fig. 76 The view from the museum into Neve Shalom Synagogue, Istanbul

As we cross the border between the East and the West, the Holocaust memory becomes central in the narratives of many Jewish museums. However, the museums in Berlin, and recently the one in Vienna, have been adapting new strategies to overcome the stifling presence of the violent memories of Shoah. The Jewish Museum in Vienna, being the oldest Jewish museum in Europe (it was opened for the first time in 1891), has recently changed its permanent exhibition with a gloomy narrative that depicted the Jews solely as victims of violent atrocities (Greenberg 2013). The new exhibition adopts a diversified storytelling which includes the post-war Jewish community of the city, as well as very recent social and political events of Austria that concern the local Jewish community. The collection of the museum does not only consist of historical objects and documents; it also includes personal objects such as notes, photos and letters from community

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members that help to give an insight about Jewish life in post-war Vienna. Thus, the museum puts the Jewish community into the centre of the narrative and gives visibility to its members as a part of the city's history and present.

Fig. 77 Display of ritual objects and digital archive of photography in the Jewish Museum of Vienna

In contrast to other conventional Jewish museums of German-speaking countries, where Jewish life is mostly confined to museums' walls (Offe 1997: 98), the Jewish Museum of Berlin also constitutes a slightly different experience in terms of its architectural and curatorial design. The design of Daniel Libeskind materializes the absence of the Jews through a dramatic spatial experience. Amy Sodaro describes the museum as a screen "onto which visitors are able to project and read their own experience, memory and attitudes toward the destruction of Europe's Jews in the Holocaust; architecture, especially abstract, highly conceptual architecture like Libeskind's, has the ability to open up the space for multiple interpretations." (2013: 85). In Berlin Museum, in contrast to other Jewish museums that adapt what Jeffrey Olick calls "the politics of regret", Sodaro sees the "politics of nostalgia" (2013: 78). She argues that an ideal German society is reflected through a nostalgic vision of the pre-war era, when Jews were still present in German society, "in the hope that this image will redeem the present and shape the future" (2013: 79). In both cases, the author emphasizes the power of collective memory to legitimize the contemporary political agenda: by showing horrific examples from the past, the museum warns the public on

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what might happen in the future when there is lack of values such as democracy and tolerance.

In other museums in Central Europe where the Holocaust is a central element of the narrative, such as the ones in Czech Republic, Poland, and Netherlands, the victimization in Holocaust becomes an instrument not only to define Jews, but also the self (Gruber 2002, Greenberg 2003). Hence, the violence and crimes are attributed to external powers, which otherwise would not have occurred in the country. Consequently, the victimization becomes a part of a self-identification process, and independently from the tolerance of these societies to other existing migrant communities today, the museums adopt a narrative that portrays an "open and tolerant society" (Greenberg 2003, Sztyma 2019).

Even so, the Jewish museums around Europe that commemorate Holocaust, has set up "a global memory imperative that shapes how and what groups, societies, and nations around the world remember and that helps to apply the universal lessons of the Holocaust to particular situations and context" (Sodaro 2013: 82).

Fig. 78 Permanent exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Berlin © Gretacre

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The Iberian Phenomena

In the Western end of the continent the narrative stays intact in most of the cases, even though the historical relations with the Jews are slightly different than the countries of Central-Eastern Europe.

The recent interview (2021) in El Amaneser* with the director of the future Jewish Museum in Lisbon, Esther Mucznik, exemplifies the general perspective on Jewish cultural spaces as heritage products in the Peninsula:

> *“La lokasyon del tereno es maraviyozo: se topa en una zona ande munchos de los museos mas vijitados de Lisbon tambien se topan. El lokal es efektivamente un lugar de grande atraksyon turistika portugeza i enternasyonal.”*
>
> *(The location is marvellous: it is located in a district where the most visited museums of Lisbon are also to be found. The location is therefore a great touristic attraction for Portuguese and international [tourists].)*
>
> *(Cruz 2021)*

The future location of the museum is presented as ideal because of its proximity to other ‘touristic attractions’, or museums. They are part of the heritage network and thus reinforces the commodification of the Jewish heritage as a tourism product, particularly bearing in mind the importance of Portugal, especially Lisbon, in terms of tourism in South Europe. This type of commodification also appears in the case of Toledo, where the medieval town comes up as an exotic playground for tourists - ‘disneyitised’ as Bryman calls it (Harrison 2012: 85) - and the Sephardic Museum is to be found in the heart of this marvellous place, which is encircled by the river Ebro.

As Mucznik continues the interview, explaining how the exhibition will be curated, a well-known narrative, as exemplified by Ruth Ellen Gruber (2002), reveals itself again:

> *La primera parte de la egzibisyon sera dedikada a la kultura djudia, sus tradisyones i kostumbres. Las partes sigientes tendran un perkurso kronolojiko i tematiko. Aserkaremos a la vida djudia en el territoryo ke oy es Portugal desde la epoka romana asta muestro diya, ma el foko sera en el periodo ke yamamos “la konvivensya” …*

* El Amaneser, a monthly published newspaper in Judeo-Spanish in Turkey.

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En sigiente tendremos el espasyo dezinyado "intoleransya" en kualo sera kontado la istorya del Edikto de la Ekspulsyon, las konversyones forsadas, i la Enklzisyon… Por fin tendremos la seksyon ke puedemos yamar komo el "retorno" o el "resurjimiento del djudaizmo en Portugal" empesando en los finales del siglo 18, de muevo konsentrando en la kontribusyon pozitiva de la komunidad djudia en la sosyedad i el payis.

(The first part of the exhibition will be dedicated to Jewish culture, its traditions, and customs. The following parts will be organized chronologically and thematically. We will take a closer look at Jewish life from the Roman period up until now in the territory which is Portugal today, but the focus will be set upon the period which we call "Convivencia" …

Subsequently we will have a space designed for intolerance, in which the story of the Edict of Expulsion, forced conversions and the Inquisition will be told… Finally, we will have a section which we can call the return or resurgence of Judaism in Portugal, starting from the end of the 18th century and concentrating again on the positive contribution of the Jewish community for the society and the country.)

(ibid.)

The standardized Jewish - especially Sephardic - narrative seems to be continuing exactly as it is in the future museum. This comes as a result of the recently adopted cultural and political policies in Spain and Portugal. Parallel to discovering the Jewish heritage as a profitable heritage product, the two countries established "laws of coming back" (Linhard 2014) for the descendants of the Jews expelled from Portugal and Spain, as mentioned previously. Such policies and the promotion of Jewish culture improved the two European countries' image in the international arena, as open and tolerant members of the Union.

The year 1992, the fifth centenary of the expulsion from Spain, marks the beginning of the resurrection of Jews in a country which aimed to fill in the gap with other democracies in Europe, after four decades of dictatorship. According to Dominique Tomasov, a Jewish architect from Argentina who has been living in Barcelona since the beginning of the nineties, the Jews living in the country were at the beginning very enthusiastic about the sudden interest from the Spanish public. They gave the "free pass" to all the initiatives that concerned Judaism and closed their eyes to some errors, which has grown like a snowball until today and trivialized the Jewish culture in the Spanish cultural scene. Tomasov said that at one of the events, in the beginning of the 2000s, she mentioned to the Israeli Cultural attaché several misleading presentations of the Jewish tradition, to which he replied: "These are the first steps, it will improve in time. For now, it is very important that Jews and Judaism are part of the historic and cultural scene."

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Looking from the Spanish side, many cultural activists, historians, and academics that I came across over the last years agree on one fact: the tourism boom that began in the last years of Franco's dictatorship (Linhard 2014) saw Jewish heritage as an extremely profitable product. This resulted in the emergence of virtual Jewish spaces even in towns where there was no Jewish heritage to be seen to the naked eye. In 1995, with the establishment of *Red de Juderías de España (RED)*, the franchising of Jewish spaces in Spain was institutionalized. *Caminos de Sefarad-Red de Juderías de España* (Network of Jewish Quarters in Spain, RED), is an association which is formed by several municipalities of Spain "that contains in their medieval built environments an architectural, historical, environmental and cultural heritage of Jewish communities who inhabited these places." (Red de Juderías n.d.). The association includes highly frequented touristic cities like Barcelona, Córdoba, Segovia, and Toledo but as well as smaller cities like Béjar, Jaén or Ávila. The member municipalities have been working over the past twenty years in 'improving' and 'valorizing' the tangible and intangible Jewish heritage in their cities by fomenting 'conservation, signalization and recovery' of the streets, houses, and palaces of the old Jewish quarters. The NGO "provides to its member cities not only organizational and consulting services but also acts as a destination marketing organization." (Krakover 2013: 143). Following the establishment of the network, many spaces labelled as Jewish popped up in the Peninsula, which had been unrecognized for centuries to the eyes of the public (Krakover 2013, Linhard 2014).

According to Shaul Krakover, who studied Jewish heritage as a tourism product in Spain, the cities who promote their Jewish heritage contain a set of specific elements, which he listed in "descending order in their appearance: Jewish quarter, Jewish museum, a synagogue, a local Jewish persona, other artifacts, square or garden named after a Jewish persona, and Jewish cemetery." (2013:161). However, this does not mean that every city that promotes its Jewish heritage contains all the elements that are mentioned above. Depending on the elements and their scale, the product becomes more in demand. As a result, Toledo has become the highlight of the Iberian Peninsula for Jewish heritage, as it contains two well preserved synagogues that enhance the product's quality 'visually'.

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After an extensive observation of Jewish heritage sites in Spain, Krakover summarizes the similarities between these spaces as such:

> *"Communal assets include Jewish quarters composed of streets and alleys lined-up in the past by dwellings of Jews, structures used for synagogues and ritual baths (Miqwe), and hillsides used as Jewish cemeteries. Private and minor relics are composed of such diverse artifacts as private houses of prominent Jewish figures, Hebrew inscriptions or symbols curved on stone, Mezuzah holes in the doorpost, and more. Jewish quarters are most often signposted, Jewish symbols such as Menorah and Star of David are used for decoration, and streets and squares are named after historic Jewish personas or simply as Juderia (Jewish), Synagogue, or Jerusalem. In some places these features, among other things, constitute collection of artifacts exhibited in a Jewish museum. All Jewish quarters share placement of special bronze symbols (about 10x10 cm. designed by RED) carrying the word Sefarad (Spain) in Hebrew, fixed on the Jewish quarters' street pavements."*
>
> *(Krakover 2013: 150)*

I could verify these aspects in person throughout my visits over the last years to Toledo, Barcelona, Córdoba and Béjar, even though not all of them were intentionally planned for research purposes. Bearing in mind the theoretical discussions on museums and heritage that I elaborated in the previous parts of this work, I would like to reflect on my personal experiences, first in Barcelona and Bejár, then specifically in Toledo, as it is the site of the project which is the subject of this work.

Fig. 79 The symbol of RED on the pavement in the Jewish Quarter of Toledo

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In September 2021, I took a bus to visit a friend in a remote village in the Castilian plateau and I reached the city of Béjar, since it was one of the major urban centres close to the village that I intended to go to. The name of the city that was familiar to me belonged to the network of RED. My friend offered to take a short break and take a walk around the city, which would not take so much time as Béjar is a small town. As we went on and dived into the old town, we came to a junction where the '*Judería'* (the Jewish neighbourhood) was signalled. Only after that I remembered that Béjar was a member of RED and disposed of a Jewish museum – David Melul Jewish Museum - in the heart of *Judería*. It is, like many other Jewish museums in Spain, founded through a collaboration of public and private initiatives, in which David Melul, a Jewish citizen from the city of Melilla, had contributed economically to establish the museum in a building purchased by the city council (Museo Judío Bejar n.d.).

We took the road leading us to the Jewish neighbourhood and confronted a familiar scene like in most of the smaller Castilian towns that promoted their Jewish heritage: the absence. I recognized the bronze symbols that I saw in the other cities on the pavement, with the *'Sefarad'* label on it. The Jewish Museum was closed, as the World was still fighting off the pandemic and cities like Béjar which became more dependent on tourism over the last years were suffering economically. Therefore, the melancholy of absence was not just present in this virtual Jewish space, it was rather extended to the whole city.

"The museum is located in a building from the 15th century, with three floors above the ground, in which each floor is dedicated to a certain theme, ordered chronologically. The first floor is dedicated to the history of Jews in Spain, with a focus on their presence in Béjar and its surroundings. The pieces from Béjar Charter are *"items of particular importance"* as it includes *"the rules of cohabitation (Convivencia) between its Christian, Muslim and Jewish residents".* On this floor the gravestone of Doña Fadueña from the 12th or 13th century is exhibited, alongside other relics and objects of daily life from the Middle Ages, such as coins and documents. The last stop on this floor, rounds up the history with "*an audiovisual media exhibit about the Order of Expulsion of 1492"* (Museo Judío Bejar n.d.).

The first floor of the museum is dedicated to the Spanish conversos, in which the visitors can appreciate "*a beautiful scaled reproduction of the city of Béjar in the 15th century"* and "some documents related to inquisitorial trials, a 17th century Megillah Esther, examples of anti-Semitic

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Fig. 80 The Jewish Museum of Béjar © RED

books about so called purity of blood and works related to a most curious resident of Béjar, of probable Jewish origin: *"Mr. Frances de Zuniga, who served as Court jester for emperor Charles V and is well known as the author of a scathingly burlesque court chronicle.*" And on the last floor, the museum ends the cycle dedicating it to the exile of "*the faithful who chose to maintain their faith aware therefore forced to abandon Spain".* This part of the museum includes "*maps of their paths into exile through Europe, Asia and America, as well as audio-visual reproductions*

Fig. 81 Tallet on a mannequin

© David Melul Jewish Museum, Béjar

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about their language (Ladino)". Also, there are *"photograms and objects from all over the world sent by Jewish families from whose last names are Bejar, Behar, Bejarano, Bicerano…" (ibid.)*

Béjar's Jewish Museum emerges as a virtual Jewish space in a town where there has been no Jewish presence for centuries. The Jewish space is claimed back through virtual elements in form of signages and symbols on the pavements. The museum and its collection confine the Jews mainly to the period in which they lived in the city, exoticizing Judaica to the visitor with little or no-knowledge as a culture that existed in the territory long ago and continues to exist in a place far-away. The museum adapts on the one hand the national narrative of *convivencia* and foments nostalgia for a time that was not actually as peaceful as it is told. On the other hand, it reinforces local identity by including into its collection memories from families who are named after the city, intending to re-establish sentimental and cultural ties with the descendants of the Jews who were expelled from the city centuries ago. However, this strategy still fails to include the contemporaneity of Sephardim in Spain, by confining them outside of the national territory, even though the patron of the museum is a Sepharad, born in the Spanish territory.

The weight of the self-identification process present in the Jewish Museum of Béjar, becomes more obvious in the museums of Catalonia; in Barcelona and Girona.

Even though I have been in Barcelona many times, the Jewish neighbourhood, "Call" in Catalan, has passed almost unnoticed to my eyes, apart from some signages and plates that described the Jewish life in the medieval town. After moving to Spain, which coincided with the beginning of my research, I came across the article of James Nadel, titled *Rediscovering Sephardic Catalonia: Heritage and the Museum of Jewish History in Girona*, that called my attention to the northern part of the Peninsula.

In his article, James Nadel elaborates on the Catalonian identity work in the Jewish Museum of Girona, referring to the city as a "heritage boomtown" like in Harrison's description. According to Nadel, the establishment of the Jewish Museum was a part of the process in the early 1980s, when the mayor of the city initiated the regeneration of numerous heritage sites as a result of "ideology-driven program of conservation with a specific goal: to rediscover and promote a regional Catalan and local Gironan identity after their repression under the 40-year dictatorship of General Francisco Franco." (2016: 2).

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Nadel identifies some characteristics of the franchised narrative also in the Jewish Museum of Girona. First of all, the museum is located in a town where "the only Sephardim left in the city are on the walls of the museum, which are decorated with life-sized enlargements of medieval paintings and manuscripts." (2016: 2). The Museum of the Jewish History of Girona, like the museum in Béjar, consists of three floors and is divided into 11 thematic sections (Patronat Call de Girnoa, n.d.) that range from explaining fundamental spaces of the Jewish culture, like synagogues and cemeteries, to the local ties of the community with the city, like the Jewish quarter and *Aljama*[*].

The curators of the museum chose to "evoke for its visitors the setting of Sephardic life in medieval Catalonia" where they "take advantage of three-dimensional displays, audio-visual materials and replica objects to place the visitor in a recreated environment." (2016: 7). The absence is also a defining parameter for the collection here, which led the curators to use technology to to mediate basic elements of Jewish culture.

In the museum there is also a room dedicated to very basic aspects of Jewish life "including holidays and festivals like Hannukah and Shabbat dinner" which indicates that the targeted visitors are mostly gentiles who have limited knowledge about Jewish culture (2016: 7). Again, as many other Jewish museums in Spain, the section "Cultural Heritage" is dedicated to the co-existence of Sephardim and the Christians in Catalonia, where in a room the Barcelona Debate and the Expulsion is depicted dramatically. According to Nadel, the short hallway that separates the room of the Debate and the Expulsion, decorated with black and white images of a cloud, symbolizes the turbulent times between the expulsion and today's attempt "to restore the Sephardic memory in Catalonia". After this stormy journey in time, the visitor enters a room dedicated to the life in diaspora, in which one is confronted with a finalizing text titled as "The Exile".

> *"Today, there are few remains of the Catalan Jewish people who had to leave that which had been their land for so many centuries. Even so, we maintain its memory and its legacy because they comprise part of the essence and essential intrinsic wealth of our past, our history and our memory."*
>
> (as cited in Nadel 2016: 8)

* Aljama was the juridical organizational structure of the Jewish community in the Kingdom of Aragon.

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Nadel interprets these final words of the text as an "invocation of the Catalan obligation to maintain the history" (2016: 8) and argues that Jewish history is mediated to solidify the Catalan identity by victimizing oneself along with the Jews, as the oppressed ones under the Spanish rule.

Fig. 82 Tombstones on display © Museum of Jewish History Girona

Motivated by Nadel's arguments, I took a train in May 2022 from Madrid to Barcelona, to verify if a similar strategy can be observed in the city that can be the perfect example of an "heritage boomtown". This time, I had planned to discover the Call of Barcelona and also got the chance to meet Dominique Tomasov in person, who has been organizing Jewish routes and programs over the past 20 years in Barcelona, and in addition has been advocating for the official recognition of the medieval Jewish cemetery in Montjüic, a hill named after Jews just beside the city centre.

As I arrived in Barcelona and started wandering in the streets of the medieval old town, it took me only a few minutes to realize the undertaken Catalan identity work in a cultural centre that had nothing to do with Judaism. *El Born Centre de Cultura I Memória* (El Born Cultural and Memorial Centre) "is a centre dependent on the Barcelona Culture Institute, assigned to the Memory, History and Heritage Directorate of the Barcelona City Council, a polyvalent space of conservation and valuation of heritage and a space of transmission of knowledge regarding memorial expressions." (El Born Centre de Cultura I Memória n.d.). The centre is located in the old building of El Born Market, designed by Josep Fontserè in 1876. Upon entering the museum, the visitor is immediately confronted by the archaeological excavations which revealed the destroyed neighbourhood in the 18th century by the Spanish troops of King Felipe V. While reading the exhibition texts on the archaeological findings and the history of the district El Born, I was presented with a narrative that was centred around the Catalan suffering under the Spanish rule and Nadel's words echoed in my

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thoughts. Ironically, at the time I visited the centre, alongside the permanent exhibition of the archaeological findings, the central space of the market hall was dedicated to a temporary exhibition about Primo Levi, an Italian-Jewish writer who survived Auschwitz and dedicated his life to keep the Holocaust memory alive.

Fig. 83 El born Market, Barcelona

After leaving the El Born market with lots of questions, I headed to *'Call'*[*] of Barcelona to explore the virtual Jewish spaces I had imagined seeing. In contrast to most of the European cities that I mentioned over the course of this work, Barcelona has thriving and diverse Jewish communities that range from orthodoxy to reformism. Over the last few decades, since the re-establishment of democracy in the late seventies, the Jewish population grew rapidly, especially through immigration from Latin American countries. However, to a visitor who has no knowledge about it, the old Jewish neighbourhood feels like any other resurrected *Calls* or *Juderías* on the Iberian Peninsula.

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[*] Cat. Jewish neighbourhood

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Similar to *Juderías* in Béjar, Córdoba, Toledo or Girona the Jewish neighbourhood of Barcelona is marked with signages and plates on the streets which inform the visitor on the history of the Jews of Barcelona until the expulsion. Trusting the mental map of *Call* I drew in my head, I walked towards an imagined centre and found myself in Placeta Manuel Ribé, a small square at the crossing point of the narrow streets, where the entrance of the *El Call Museum* was. As I waited for Tomasov, I sat down in a café by the museum, which had outdoor seating facing the lateral façade of the building on Carrer de l'Arc de Sant Ramon del Call, and started observing a couple of tourist groups that looked like they were on a scavenger hunt, talking excitedly in small groups, which made me curious. After less than a minute, one of the tourists found the hint: it was the mezuzah mark on the windowsill of the museum's façade that I was facing while drinking coffee. Suddenly, the group by the window got bigger as the tour guide summoned the group in front of the window and explained that it was the only mezuzah mark in the old town that dated back to the Middle Ages.

The Museum of Call is one of the many locations of MUHBA (*Museu d'Història de Barcelona*) which is dispersed throughout the city. Through integrating a museum about the Jewish history into the municipal museum organization, the city intends to claim Jewish culture as an integral part of its heritage.

The museum consists of three parts, in which the first part that can be accessed directly upon entering the building from Placeta Manuel Ribé, is dedicated to temporary exhibitions. Here the visitor can also find an exhibition dedicated to the history of *Call* which is explained through maps, interactive screens, and projections. Just beneath the exhibition archaeological findings of the foundations of the building are also exhibited. The upper floor, with a central table that contains a touch screen, is dedicated to the cultural legacy of the Call, which concentrates on three medieval Jewish scholars of Catalonia: Abraham bar Hiyya, Salomón ben Adret and Hasday Cresques. As one can imagine from the thematic division of the exhibition, there is absolutely no mention to the contemporary Jewish communities of Barcelona. The Museum of Call, like many other Jewish Museums, also confines the Jewish culture to a bygone era and mediates the nostalgia of *'convivencia'* to enhance the city's own cultural richness and societal openness.

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Fig. 84 Tourists in front of a plaque with Hebrew letters in Call, Barcelona

Fig. 85 MUHBA El Call, Barcelona © Udeu

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After the short visit of the museum, I finally met Tomasov and she took me on a walk in the Call showing me what is left of the Sephardic presence from the era before 1391, when almost 400 Jews (10% of the Jewish population) were killed by an uprising and many were forced to convert to Christianity or leave the town. Just around the corner of the museum, on the façade of the neighbouring building, there was a plaque with an inscription in Hebrew which is a replica that is nowadays exhibited in the museum. The plaque is about a donation that is made by Samuel Hasardí, a wealthy merchant who died in 1255. A few steps later, as we passed by the plaque on Carrer de Marlet, there is the entrance to the Sinagoga Mayor of Barcelona, a metal door which is difficult to notice, covered by graffiti

The alleged synagogue is located in the basement of a 17th century building, in the same block as the plaque and the Museum. It was opened in 2002 as a museum and a synagogue, in which religious "services" such as Huppah and Bar-Mitzvah are also offered. The synagogue was bought by a member of the Jewish community of Barcelona and put into service depending solely on private initiatives as Tomasov commented, and recent findings reposition the synagogue that dated back to the Middle Ages on the plot next door. The building at the time of my visit was also closed, due to the pandemic, even though the tourists had returned to the city at full pace.

To round up the tour in the Call, Tomasov took me to the shop *Call Barcelona Wines & Books*, where I got the chance to meet the owner, who is also a rabbi. It is a shop where one can find objects of Judaica, books and kosher wine, but it is also a place for book presentations, exhibitions and even *Sukkah* celebrations. When Tomasov introduced me to the rabbi and I had the chance to explain my interest on the Jewish heritage of Barcelona, he exclaimed: "We are the only attraction nowadays!". He mentioned that he had suggested that the municipality and the museum should collaborate and make offers for the tourists interested in Jewish culture, but he lamented that his suggestionss were ignored every time he came up with one. Tomasov has experienced a similar silence over the last years from the municipality's side, as she has been raising her voice as a cultural activist for officially recognizing and signalling the medieval Jewish cemetery in Montjüic, which is partially occupied by a shooting polygon constructed right after the Civil War.

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During my short visits in these virtually Jewish spaces, I realized that, unfortunately, after twenty years of Gruber's observations, most of her arguments are still valid and it has become obvious that the reflexive turn that Sternfeld and Sommer attributed to the contemporary museology, seems like still out of sight in the municipal Jewish museums. However, despite the bureaucratic silence and the massive disneyisation of the historical sites, there are a handful of cultural activists and historians in Spain that raise their voices to expand the narrative beyond the nationalist myths and well marketed historical legends.

Fig. 86 Major Synagogue Barcelona © Dominique Tomasov

The situation of Toledo

Toledo, like the other cities I mentioned before, is part of the "network" of *Red de Juderías de España* (RED) and is one of the cities that includes most of the elements that a Jewish tourism product can offer (Krakover 2013). It has a well-studied and documented *Jewish quarter* (Passini 2014), *a Jewish museum* being one of the most visited state museums in Spain (Ministery of Cul-

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ture and Sports 2022), two *synagogues*, various *local Jewish persona*, and *squares and streets* named after a Jewish persona.

Today, Toledo's medieval city has become a massive, monumental playground, and Jewish heritage is one of the themes that plays a crucial role in its marketing. As in the other Jewish neighbourhoods, the *Judería* is marked with stones on the pavement and signages on the walls of the buildings, and the street just beside the Synagogue of the Transit is named after its patron Samuel Halevi. The two synagogues of Toledo: Santa María la Blanca and El Tránsito, still stand in good shape. The former synagogue is owned by the Catholic church and the latter one, the museum, is owned by the state. There are also the remains of a third one (Shofer Synagogue) just a few meters away from both synagogues which is today open for visitors after extensive excavation work.

Fig. 87 Santa María La Blanca Synagogue, Toledo

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As a part of its annual program, the municipality of Toledo has been celebrating *Semana Sefardí* (Sephardic Week) over past years, to which I had the chance to attend in 2021. During the weekend, the municipality organizes concerts, guided tours, and theatrical tours in the Jewish neighbourhood related to the Jewish culture and the city's Jewish past. I managed to participate in a guided tour by the Toledano historian Felipe Vidales, who gave a critical insight on the myth of *convivencia* in Toledo by reflecting upon the historical and contemporary relations between the three religions, and building up the interrelation between the history and today's identity politics. While walking in the streets of the well-known historical centre of the city, Vidales went back and forth between the purity of blood, feminism and witch hunt, Inquisition and Islamophobia. Later on, after leaving the tour impressed by Vidales' reflection on the local history and today's global realities, I attended a theatrical tour which had a very different tone. It was a tour that was organized by an art historian, who most probably had very little insight on Jewish culture, as she recommended the Netflix show "Unorthodox" * to understand the Jewish and Sephardic culture better. As we walked in small groups around the Jewish neighbourhood of Toledo, actors in medieval dresses appeared around the corner and performed as Jews who were residing in the era of *convivencia.* The Jewish characters of the play repeated antisemitic representations such as being stingy or shrewd in trade. After a while I couldn't follow the event anymore and left the tour as I felt confused and disappointed.

Even though there were not such intentions in the organization, the lack of involvement with the culture, as we can see in this case, can foster centuries long prejudices and incite misinformation for people who have no other insight on the culture. The "Judaica minus the Jews" (Gruber 2002: 8) thus brings ethical problems in which philo-Semitism "an idealization of Jews, sometimes linked to a fascination with what is perceived as an almost familiar exotica" distorts the reality "to suit specific local and personal needs" (2002: 9).

Within these controversial cultural representations in the Castilian heritage Disneyland, Museo Sefardí takes a very distant and scientific approach that mostly concentrates on an object-based representation which is beneficial for various types of visitors.

---

* Unorthodox is a drama series that debuted in Netflix in 2020. Adapted by Deborah Feldman's book of autobiography, the series centres around a Jewish ultra-orthodox community in Brooklyn. The orthodox communities in the US are mostly Ashkenazi and have a very different culture than Sephardim. In the series, the protagonist is a woman who suffers under the extreme pressure of the fundamentalist Satmar sect whose practices do not reflect the majority of the Jews who live around the world in different countries.

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Fig. 88 A scene from the theatrical tour in Semana Sefardí 2021, Toledo

When visiting the Sephardic Museum of Toledo for the first time, the narrative and the exhibition is dwarfed by the impression that the historical architecture causes. Correspondingly, the museum acknowledges the synagogue – the prayer hall and the women's gallery- as "the most important piece of the collection" (Ministerio de Cultura 2011; Palomero 2007) and dedicates a great part of its publications and online presence to the history of the building.

Over the last three years, I had the chance to visit the museum on many occasions, each of them producing contradictory feelings and thoughts at the moment of the visits. The first time I visited in 2019, I was really overwhelmed by the architecture of the synagogue and paid little attention to the exhibition, as I did not have the expectation to be surprised by the information I would find there. I saw for the first time in my life such impressive and powerful 'Sephardic' architecture that did not conform with the synagogues that I knew and visited over the course of my life. Flesler and Pérez Melgosa refers to this feeling as a "reappropiation of the site" that in most cases "replaces the museum's official narrative of respect for the diverse historical heritage of today's Spain." (2020: 162).

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However, the next time I stepped in the medieval oldtown, I visited the museum as an investigator and had the chance to make observations in relative serenity.

The main - and only - entrance to the museum is from the southern façade through a small square by *Calle de los Reyes Católicos*[*], where the visitor has to pass through a security check within a small space and access to the vestibule to buy the tickets for the museum. Upon entering the vestibule, one confronts a wooden beam with an inscription that was discovered during the restoration works, as mentioned previously, which gives the impression that it is misplaced due to the lack of exhibition space. After purchasing the ticket, the visitor moves directly into the prayer hall and mingles with the elegant stucco work of the *heikhal*[**] and the outstanding carpentry of the roof.

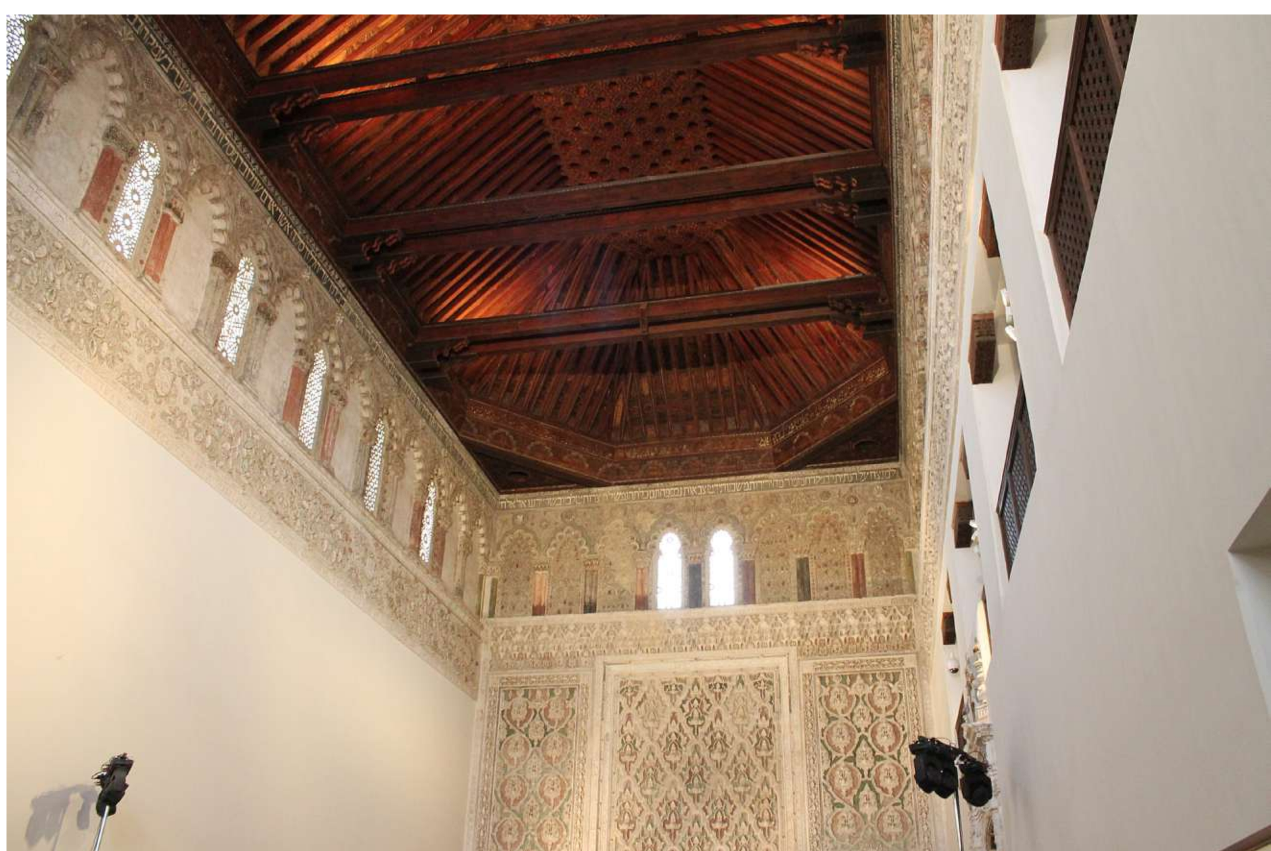

Fig. 89 Photo depicting the carpentry and stucco work in the synagogue of El Tránsito

* The street where the entrance is located is ironically called Calle de los Reyes Católicos (The Catholics Monarchs of Spain); a title which refers to Isabel I and Ferdinand II, who signed the Alhambra Degree on 31st March 1492.

** The enclosure -mostly- on the eastern walls of the synagogues that house the Torah scrolls.

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Fig. 90 Section Model of the timber frame roof

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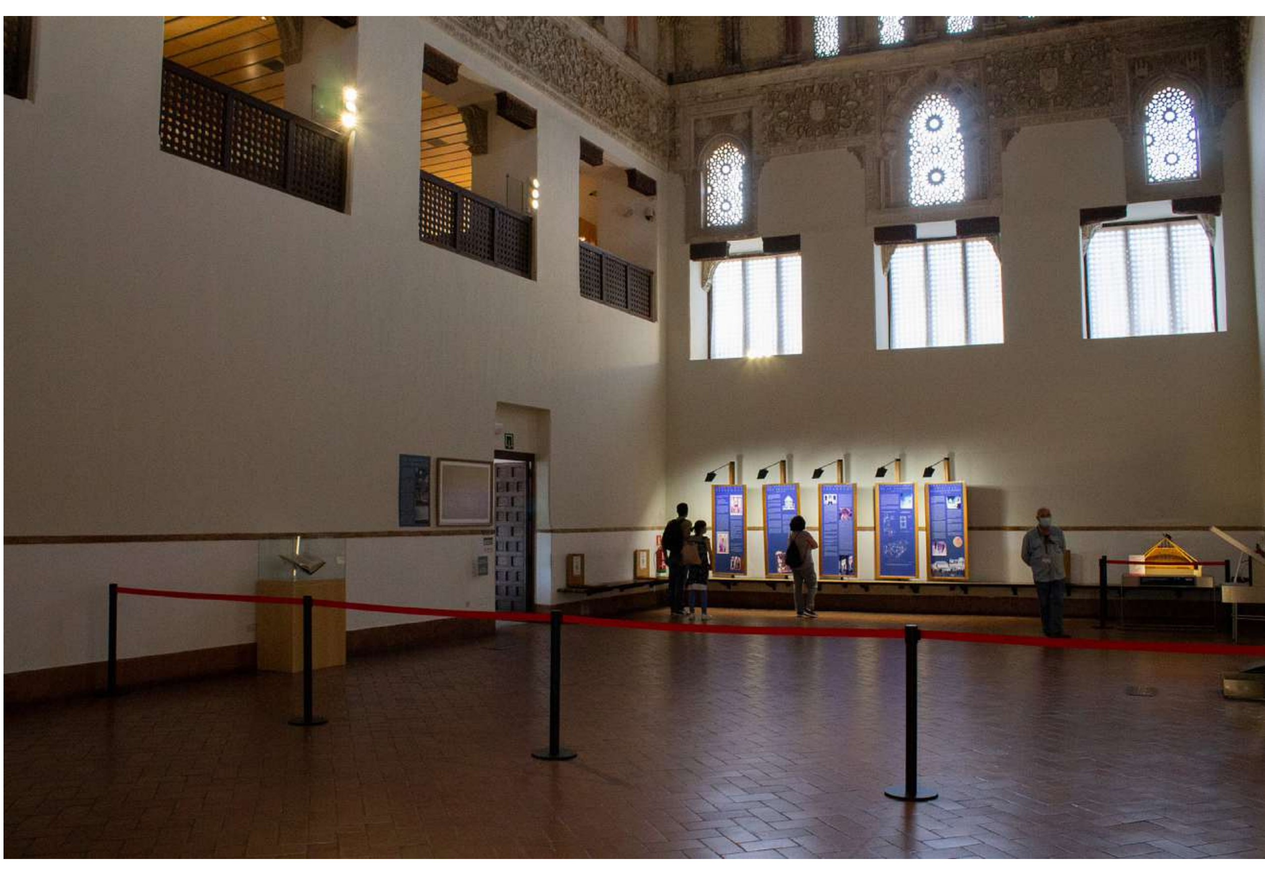

Fig. 91 Information panels in the Prayer Hall

The prayer hall has minimal interventions to maintain the powerful medieval “aura” (Walter Benjamin 1936) of the space. Only along the Western end of the room there is a monumental map of Jerusalem from the 18th century and there are five wooden panels with printed information posters in Spanish that cover the following topics: *What is a synagogue?, The Synagogue of El Tránsito*, *Other Spanish Synagogues*, *The Synagogue before the synagogue* and *the Christian Archaeology of the Synagogue of El Tránsito*. The first three panels serve to inform the visitor about the synagogue typology and the history of the building. In addition, it refers to several other synagogues in the national territory. The latter two panels give information on the existing structures in the Jewish neighbourhood of Toledo prior to the construction of the synagogue, which was discovered during the excavations in the beginning of the Millennium. Beside the information panels, there is also a section-model of the carpentry and a piece of the previous Damask cloth that used to cover the walls of the synagogue which was donated by the Pinto Coriat family.

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Fig. 92 Jerusalem Map

Fig. 93 Former clothing that was hung on the walls of the synagogue

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One of the first things that one can recognize upon reading the information on the panels of the museum, is that the language is constructed with an extreme scientific sensibility, almost as if the Hegelian historical consciousness (Groys 1997) has been put into practice. Santiago Palomero Plaza, the former director of the museum, confirms this when accounting on the history of the museum, in which he mentions the establishment of a committee to revise the texts that deal with sensible topics - both for Christianity and Judaism - such as the expulsion and interpretation of the biblical texts or the inquisition, in order to not to fall into the "traditional interpretation of the Spanish history as well as the fundamentalist Jewish history" (Palomero 2007: 152).

The next move of the visitor is towards the annex building in the north from the 17th century, where a semi-chronological exhibition is set up in three rooms that are connected visually through openings from the floor up until the vault of the building. Each room is dedicated to a certain topic following a chronological order.

Fig. 94 View from the second exhibition hall

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The first room deals with the geographical origins of the Jews, their history, and their traditions. The exhibition starts with a scale model of Jerusalem on the left upon the entrance, and continues with objects borrowed and acquired from Israel Antiquities Authority, that mostly does not have a direct relationship with the Jewish culture, apart from their geographical origins. The paganistic ritual objects and the daily utensils, from the perspective of a "gentile" who has little or no knowledge about Judaism, may make it difficult associating the objects with the customs and traditions of the Jewish culture. The occupation of the display in a small museum that lacks necessary dimensions for an extensive exhibition, raises questions whether this decision is related to the political agenda of the Israeli cultural institutions that take advantage of the material absence of museum's collection, and thus provincialize the Jewish culture in the Middle East.. Or rather, it is the result of an object fetish (Sternfeld 2018: 115) of the museum that prioritizes displaying objects in the exhibition. In any case, it challenges the visitor to contextualize the information coming from the narrative through the displayed objects.

The objects on display are supported by the information panels behind the glass vitrines with a multitude of maps and academic texts that certainly reduce the intellectual accessibility for a museum that has a wide range of visitors. In the same room, along the antique pieces, the visitor can also find a model of an antique synagogue in Israel based on the work of Zvi Ilan, as well as objects of ritual such as kippah, tefillin, mezuzah and Torah scrolls. Each object is numbered and ordered neatly behind the glass, not necessarily accompanied by the text behind. In these terms, merely displaying to display, make it most certainly difficult to contextualize the visual with the textual, leaving questions behind on the significance and usage of the ritual objects on display. On the other hand, the language of the "identity-free curator" (Groys 1997) contributes to generate a greater distance between the visitor and the culture on display by placing the contemporary ritual objects together with the archaeological objects that date back to 2000-15000 B.C., as if it belongs to a bygone era. The exhibit, moreover, as Flesler and Pérez Melgosa also argues, "implicitly compels us to look at these objects from a cultural distance, from an outside perspective" showing that "Jews are 'them,' not 'us,' and that 'their customs' and 'their celebrations' are not only distinct from ours but essentially homogeneous throughout history, regardless of cultural origin." (2020: 168).

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Fig. 95 Objects in the exhibition Hall I deposited by Israel Antiquity Authority

Fig. 96 A view from the display in the Exhibition Hall II

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As the visitor arrives at the second room with a similar layout and display strategy, the history of the Jews in the Peninsula begins. The second exhibition hall deals with the arrival of the Jews in Spain and how they lived under the rule of different groups such as Visigoths, Muslims and later Christians. There is also a section reserved for the synagogues in Spain, some of which are represented by scaled models, maps, and plans alongside the excavated pieces from the sites.

This chapter of the exhibition opens up with the title "*Los judíos en Hispania s II a.c.-d-c*.", where the visitor is confronted with, behind the glass, s different objects that are excavated from the Peninsula, ranging from coins and epigraphs to the tombstones with maps of Spain in the background, that give the impression of a national history museum. The visitor also encounters some copied objects that are displayed behind the glass, like the keys of Sevilla which were given to Ferdinand III by the Jews when he reconquered Sevilla in 1248. Such display methods go far beyond what Kirschenblatt-Gimblett calls "second life" (1998) as they are products manufactured to be displayed in the museum and brews the obsession of object-oriented display methods.

The second exhibition hall is connected to the northern patio, which is also called *Jardín de la memoria* (Garden of memory), where some of the oldest pieces acquired by the museum (Palomero 2007), the tombstones from different medieval Jewish cemeteries, are exhibited in open-air. In the garden, the traditions of mourning and death are dealt through information panels distributed around the tombstones. In the background, there is a wall erected with a poem of Mosheh ibn Ezra (1055-1136) on the fragility of life:

> *"Ancient graves weathered by time,*
> *where people now are sleeping forever:*
> *they have neither hate nor envy within them;*
> *they know no love or fear of their neighbour.*
> *And seeing them so,*
> *I couldn't discern The difference between a slave and his master."*
>
> *(as translated in Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 173)*

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This powerful statement, as well as the intertwined relation between the text, the space, and the object, becomes actually one of the most striking parts of the exhibition, as it refers to a universal topic through cultural artifacts and literature with such museological sensibility, encouraging the visitor to take time and interact with the assemblage as if in a multimedia installation in an art museum. With such few materials and a simple organization, the exhibition communicates directly and approaches the visitor innovatively in contrast to its rigid display strategy in the exhibition halls.

Flesler and Pérez Melgosa describe this part of the exhibition from a critical point of view in relation to the building's *converso* nature and as a constant reminder of the absence:

> *"...the very presence of these gravestones emptied of the human remains they were made to protect, so far away from the cemetery where they were originally placed, along with the traces of mutilations performed in order to force them into new uses, tells a story very different from that of the poet's gaze." … Their placement in this quasi-cemetery next to a quasi-synagogue in fact mimics the Catholic practice of placing cemeteries next to churches and reminds us of the Christian, or shall we say converso, post-expulsion period of the history of the building, when the Calatravan knights were literally buried under the Great Prayer Room of the synagogue. More than remnants of medieval Jewish life in Spain, these gravestones are indices of the interruption and transformation of that life and its memory."*
>
> (2020: 174-177)

After leaving the garden, the visitor has to go back to the second exhibition hall and continue to the third room, which is especially dedicated to the "Jews in the Christian kingdom (13th-15th centuries). As in the other exhibition halls, there are glass displays on each side of the room and they are titled with massive plates on the top.

In this room like in the previous ones, the visitor also sees a wide range of objects like stucco works from the synagogue of Cuenca to the Inquisition seal. They are all accompanied with numbers, labels and information panels in the background that contain visual information such as photos and maps. This part of the exhibition, like many other Jewish museums on the Peninsula, ends with the expulsion of the Jews, which is represented by a luggage displayed behind the glass.

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Fig. 97 The view towards the Northern Patio

Fig. 98 Inquisition Objects in the Hall III

After visiting the third exhibition hall, the visitor has two possibilities to continue visiting the museum: one can either go back to the main prayer hall and then reach the next exhibition hall, or continue towards the door to the recent extension that takes the visitor to the eastern patio. There, the visitor has access to the excavation site below the synagogue and can take a look at the area behind a metal fence.

During the excavation work various water deposits prior to the Synagogue from the 12th and 13th centuries, as well as the traces of the primitive *heikhal* were found. Some of the pieces are exhibited in the museum, however the excavation area is closed to the visitor. However, the visitor can take a glimpse of the site behind metal bars before going up to the centre of the eastern patio.

In the eastern patio, alongside the excavation site, there are sculptures of contemporary Jewish artists (D.Aronson and M.Lasry) and there is the tombstone of the knight Perafán de Rivera who was buried in the 16th century in the Synagogue. In addition to the aleatory combination of exhibited pieces, the visitor can rest in the patio underneath a wooden pergola, before taking off to the women's gallery.

As the visitor ascends to the women's gallery on the top of the southern extension, one enters a staircase house with paintings of Jewish artists, which gives the sensation that the museum directors intended to take advantage of every inch of the space that they possess. The exhibition in the women's gallery portrays a very generic narrative on the Jewish life cycle and festivities. It also includes a small part on the history of Sephardim in modern Spain, as well as Sephardic language and literature.

The ritual objects that are displayed vary from a set of circumcision to ketubah, clothing, tefillin and jewellery that are mainly North African descendant, bearing in mind that many Jewish families of today's Spain are of Moroccan descent.

In this part of the building the visitor can also appreciate the architecture from a different perspective through the openings to the prayer hall and take a closer look at the stucco work of the women's gallery that survived partially until today. After finishing looking at the women's gallery, the visitor can go back through the stairs to the last exhibition hall before leaving the museum.

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Fig. 99 Excavations in the Eastern Patio

Fig. 100 Women's Gallery

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Fig. 101 Stucco Work in Women's gallery

The fourth exhibition hall, which is actually the Renaissance sacristy (Ministerio de Cultura, 2011) is dedicated to 'The Sephardim', where one encounters two faceless mannequins with traditional North African 'Sephardic clothing' with a photo of R. Yishaq bar Vidal and his wife Rahel Badia next to it (with similar clothes to the ones in the vitrine). In the corner there is a small panel with a text about the *conversos* in Spain informing about how the Jews who converted to Christianity in the 15th century had acquired important positions in Spanish society and were persecuted by the inquisition. The text ends with underlining that the Spanish literature of *Siglo de Oro* cannot be understood without conversos -exemplifying Cervantes as there are rumours that he was a converso or descendants of conversos - just before leaving the last part of the exhibition and moving into the shop.

Upon leaving the museum, Flesler and Pérez Melgosa argue that the cycle that started with the objects representing death and absence, leaves its place to life and presence, resembling the democracy project of the post-Franco Spanish state:

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Fig. 102 View towards the Exhibition Hall IV

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> *"…the synagogue's transformation into a museum, a transformation that the museum identifies with democratic Spain, becomes resignified. The juxtaposition of the imagined original to the restored present form emphasizes once again, this time as knowledge born out of the visitor's experience of the space, the underlying narrative expressed throughout the visit; the museum wants to be read as a restorative gesture whose function is to undo the historic wrong to a Jewish culture that was persecuted and destroyed in the past and to revive the convivencia ideal as a myth useful to the present."*
>
> *(2020: 182)*

In spite of all the strings attached to a national institution, the legacy of the former director Santiago Palomero Plaza is taken on by the current director Carmen Álvarez Nogales, in which the museum adopted the mission to integrate the "Hispanic Jewish culture into the Spanish Heritage" (Palomero 2007: 152). Today, the new director Nogales is supporting this aim by converting the museum into a vivid space in which contemporary Jewish culture and Jews are given a platform to showcase collaborative events of music, lectures and exhibitions.

However, it is also clear that the legacy of national institutions goes beyond personal scientific and cultural efforts, in which decades-old, adopted policies determine the narrative and utilize culture for its own political agenda, hiding the atrocities of the country's own history without taking any responsibility.

The last words of the former King Juan Carlos I's speech in 1992, commemorating the fifth centenary of the expulsion, summarizes undoubtedly the policy of silencing the sad chapters of the national history, and looking forward to the future by reviving the joyous myths:

> *"Sefarad no es ya una nostalgia sino un hogar… Un lugar de encuentro para las generaciones venideras… paz para todos. Shalom."*
>
> *(Sepharad is not a nostalgia anymore, it's home… it is a place of gathering for the upcoming generations… peace for all. Shalom)*
>
> *(As cited in Palomero 2007: 156)*

The Question of [De]exoticizing the Museum

According to Jacques Derrida the democratization is an endless project (Sternfeld 2018: 19) and the reality is that we are still not living the most solidary and free form of democracy. Even though the "reflexive turn" (Sommer 2013, Sternfled 2018) has triggered the [de]colonization process, included feminist perspectives and destabilized racial hegemonies in the museum space, the museums are under constant threat of economization and [de]democratization, which may convert them into opportunistic institutions that exploit culture for economic and political ambitions.

And as we saw in the previous examples, Jewish museums are not immune to this. They distorted the reality by being converted into brick and mortar justifications of an open and tolerant society, despite the great wave of violence that surged in the continent not so long ago. They display pluralist, multicultural realities of our societies and project an ideal vision of a coexistence that we aspire to live in, by reminding what might happen when we lose those ideals. Thus, the Jewish museums show the potential of a possible radical-democratic space, where - following Sternfeld's definition of a museum - "people gather around things and histories to understand the present day and imagine a different future." (Sternfeld 2018: 41). However, the methods of remembering and projecting Jewish museums to the society have not protected these institutions from falling into opportunistic marketing strategies and identity politics. The "Judaica minus the Jews" (Gruber 2002) approach that is present in many museums of Europe weakens the autonomy of Jews in terms of performing their identity in their public sphere and hinders the creation of proactive cultural contact zones. Furthermore, the exoticization that holds on to the roots of the modern museum and that enhances such opportunities, does not only dominate the representation of the 'other' on a cultural level; it is also present in the recontextualization of 'things'.

At this point it is fundamental to define the 'exoticization' on both terms.

Exotic, deriving from the Greek word *exo*, which means outer, outside or outer part. In the broadest sense, exotic does not merely mean not native or mysteriously unusual or different, but it also refers to a thing that is "out of place". From this perspective, exoticization in museums is not limited to rendering a culture as the "other", but it also includes the status of all the objects that are on display, as every object in a museum is 'out of place'.

Sternfeld refers to this sense of exoticization as *Objekteffekt;* the special effect that causes fascination to the visitor in the museum. She compares the 'things' in museums with 'products'. Parallel to Marx' description of the moment in which a wooden table suddenly turns from a thing into a product, the displayed object gains a new value through a 'special effect' that is reflected in the architecture of the building and in the design of the exhibition. That special effect is defined by Walter Benjamin as the 'aura' which creates a unique sensation accompanied by a 'fascination'. Sternfeld sees in this moment of fascination caused by the exotic, the history of violence carved in the material:

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“Actually, we know how the violence behind the origins of ethnographical collections, we know the conditions behind the production of the shoes and clothes that we wear- and the Objekteffekt renders it as harmless. That is how the conflicts haunt the things, through which they are silenced.“

Sternfeld 2018: 121 (Translated from German)

Through these objects that silence the violence, the eternal collection of the 19th century museum intends to stabilize the identities, which is nowadays challenged by the contemporary practices changing the museum’s status as the site of the permanent collection “with the intention of designing a new order of historical memories, of proposing a new principle of collecting which constructs history differently and anew” (Groys 1997: 105), to which Sternfeld refers as the process of “unlearning” (2018).

Thus, the contemporary museum can become a “privileged place of change” (Groys 1997: 105) if the curators pay close attention to the exoticization process that lies within the nature of the museum, in which the objects that are out of place and the cultures that are represented embody new ways of reading history. Such a process [de]stabilizes the myths constructed by national identity politics. As a result, the museums can become fortresses of fluid identities in which a dynamic, reflexive involvement with culture and history is exercised.

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Towards a Democratic Museum

Curatorial Concept

Culture, like our bodies and other material traces that we leave behind, is simply a dynamic manmade construct that evolves and changes constantly. And museums try to take stills of it, which puts them in a very delicate position, between political agendas and economic desires, as we mentioned in the previous chapters. That is why the museums today are re-inventing themselves by building up an adequate performance stage for such flow, as Groys states (2020), in order to keep up with the pace of the technology and the ephemerality of our age.

Likewise Norah Sternfeld dismisses the relevance of cultural stills that traditional museums intend to take and argues on the fact of 'constant change' as such:

> *"…wo sich alles ständig verändern soll, kommt es längst nicht mehr darauf an, dass sich etwas verändert, sondern darauf, welche Veränderung der Gesellschaft und ihren Institutionen mit welchen Mitteln erreicht werden kann"*
>
> (Where everything is subject to constant change, it is no longer important that something changes; instead, it is important [to understand] in which way the change of society and its institutions can be achieved)
>
> (Sternfeld 2018: 59)

The new exhibitory concept of the Sephardic Museum focuses on questioning traditional historical narratives, spaces, and display strategies inherited by the production of 'cultural stills' to create a discursive cultural environment in which new perspectives on well-known and emerging issues can be acquired. Thus, the concept of the 'eternal collection' (Groys 1993:105) is questioned in the first place, in which the visitors of the museum are encouraged to discover, discuss, and "unlearn" (Sternfeld 2018) the Sephardic culture through a dynamic display strategy that [re]places and [dis] places the exhibited objects within different contexts.

Through the variety of the programs on the museum's premises, different spatial practices of cultural production are also investigated, as the proposal treats each space as an individual field of encounters, where the visitor is confronted with contemporary and historical issues through the lenses of Sephardic-Jewish culture.

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The history of Sephardim and the Synagogue of Transit unfold many of today's controversial issues: migration, multiculturalism and nostalgia are engraved deeply in the contemporary Sephardic identity as well as in the synagogue's architecture, despite many threats of an amnesia and erasure that was fuelled by severe identity politics and cultural dismantlement. Departing from these issues, the museum displays the Sephardic culture from a "Talmudic" perspective, in which the objects, the topics and the architecture are covered through four different perspectives to facilitate intellectual accessibility on different levels.

Talmud, a collection of rabbinical texts on religious law and theology which has been in the centre of Jewish cultural life for many centuries, contains countless commentaries from different rabbis and constructs conversations that span over centuries on different aspects of Jewish life. It is mainly studied in Yeshivas* and follows a discursive format, in which the proposed concept for the Sephardic Museum transfers into the exhibition space.

Like the commentaries on the pages of Talmud, the collection of the museum is interpreted through four different perspectives that will guide a visitor with different profiles and levels of knowledge on Jewish culture.

These guides - that of the fellow, the newcomer, the youngster, and the master - contain different levels of knowledge, in which the content of the exhibition is made intellectually available for a wide range of visitors. They are, like the collection of the museum, subject to change by the curators as new topics and constellations emerge throughout the exhibiting process. Besides from serving as a spatial and mental guide that helps the visitor to navigate within the museum, it also becomes a part of the collection that can be reproduced, extended, and distributed in many ways.

* Rabbinic schools

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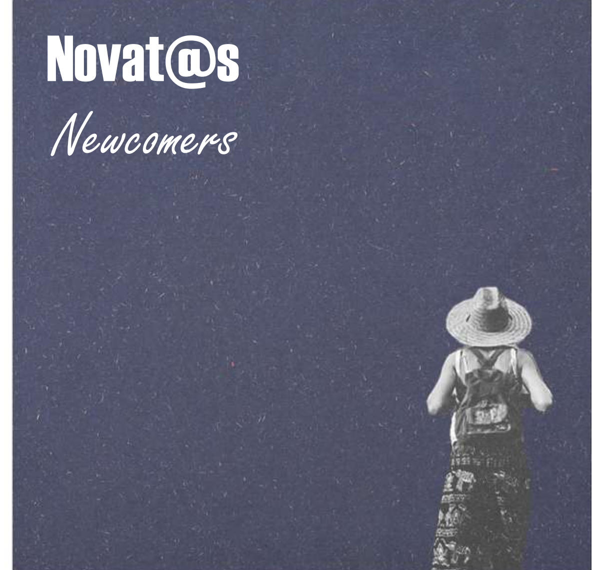

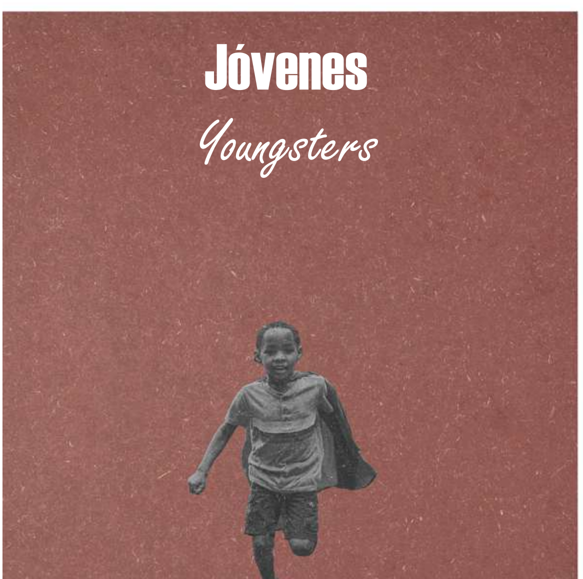

Fig. 103 The four visitor profiles

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The fellow is thought to guide the visitor through the eyes of an ‘insider’, in which one could grasp a more sentimental and informal perspective that intends to ‘shorten’ the distance between the exhibited culture and the spectator, to minimize the exoticization and othering created by traditional narratives.

The newcomer guides the visitor from the opposite perspective, that of an outsider. Through the gaze of an outsider, the visitor can acquire basic knowledge on the culture on display and familiarizes with the concepts specific to the Jewish culture. This guide is thought to serve for visitors who have little or no knowledge of the Jewish-Sephardic culture, which is a big percentage of the visitors that come to the museum.

The youngster opens up perspectives from a pedagogical point of view, which is directed to children as the museum collaborates with many local educational institutions and regularly organizes activities for children in school age. As history teaching is an integral part of memory work and consciousness, the museum bears the potential to address important issues such as multiculturalism and migration, to which children in Europe get acquainted in the early stages of school.

The last guide, that of master, is intended to provide a more scientific perspective, which would also address cultural discourses and theories that evolve around Sephardic culture, history, and the building. This way, the visitor can access a deeper level of knowledge and engage with the information on a more intense level if it’s the objective. Thus, the museum serves as a visual library that contextualizes different academic discourses, from which people with different knowledge can also benefit.

Accompanied by these guides in the hands of the visitors, the objects in the collection speak for themselves. They are described with basic data and numeration to facilitate the orientation of the visitor and contextualized through different thematic constellations in which they can appear in more than one section and address a variety of issues that are treated in the exhibition. Testimonies in form of video, sound and text also accompany the artifacts to clarify the usage, origins and acquisition process in order to raise the visitors’ consciousness on the contradictions of exhibiting a culture through objects that are almost never intended to land in a museum.

The exhibition also uses the space as a medium to support the discursive narrative, in which the visitor is invited to explore galleries and the objects by approaching them from different

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perspectives. Furthermore, different “wrappings” (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa:162) of the architecture of the synagogue become an essential part of the exhibition to challenge perceptions of this particular space, distorted by centuries long opposing cultural politics. Hence, through altering the perception and meaning of a well-known place, the museum generates an alternative space of cultural production.

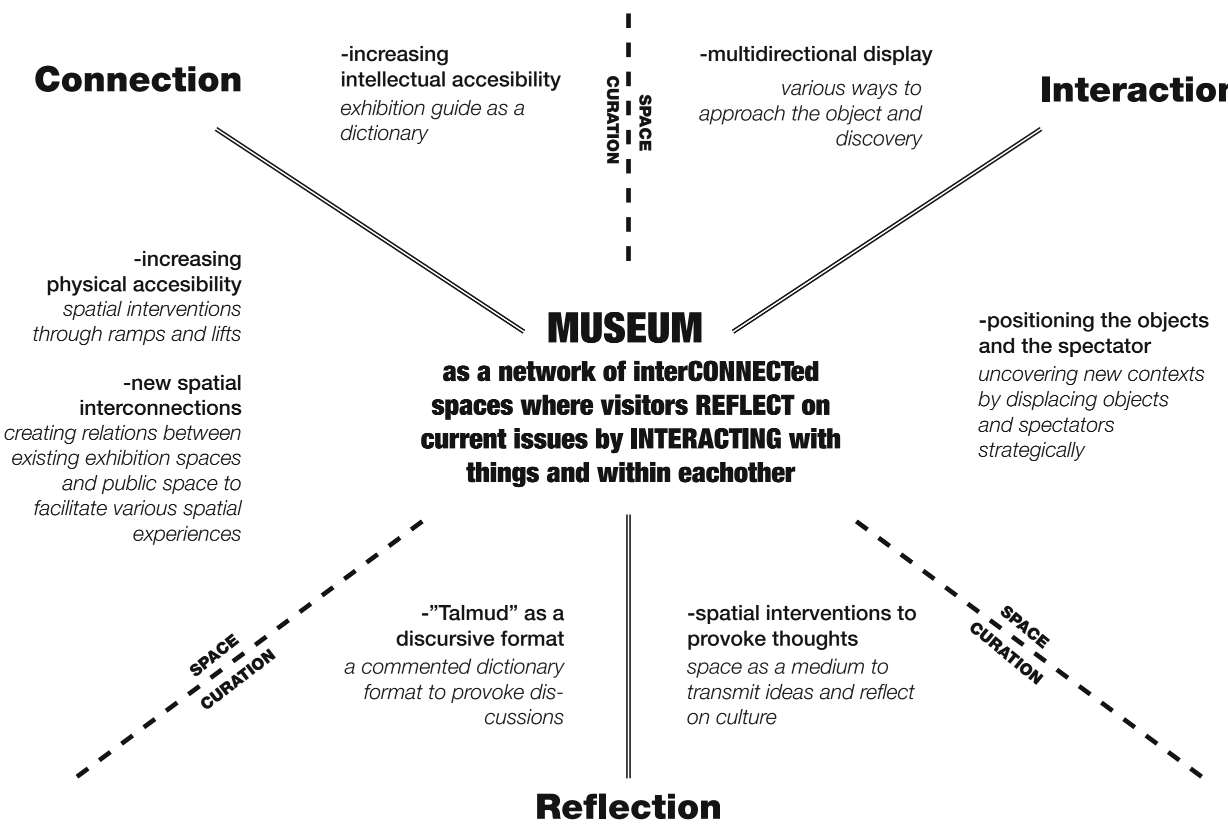

Fig. 104 The exhibition concept

To support a multitude of cultural production practices in this new alternative space - despite the government’s rejection to use the synagogue for religious activities upon the request of the Jewish community - the proposal considers the possibility of using the synagogue for religious ceremonies and Jewish festivities. This way, along its secular use as a museum, an alternate mode of culture practice is integrated into the building, in which momentarily the presence of Jewish communities in the city creates a place of direct contact with the culture and aims minimize the distance created by the exhibition narratives.

In addition to the multitude of programs that take place in the synagogue, the northern patio accommodates a space for tasting the Sephardic cuisine, in which the gastronomical knowledge

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can be shared through culinary workshops. On the other hand, such space can serve for celebrations of events and festivities which would normally take place in synagogues.

Lastly, the garden of memory is moved to the eastern patio where archaeological excavations took place, to make the small and dense space more coherent.

Following these objectives, the synagogues expand their already ambitious program (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa:164-165) and have to adjust their physical space to accommodate a multitude of cultural programs in a small and dense space. In accordance with its curatorial program, the proposal rethinks the existing spaces of the museum and introduces spatial interventions that would create a new reversible layer upon the existing structure.

Architectural Articulations of [De]exoticization

The existing volumes of the building complex are treated as independent entities since they form very different spatial configurations and contain various architectural qualities which need to be addressed separately.

Despite the division represented in the spatial proposal, the unification of all of the spaces within the museum are maintained through colours, materials and display elements. As mentioned before, every spatial intervention is thought as a reversible layer upon the existing structure to guarantee the accessibility and correct functioning of the building. The installation and dismantling of the below mentioned interventions are designed in a way which would not cause any alteration or corrosion in the historical structure.

During the design process, one of the first objectives upon rearranging and organizing the new spaces were guaranteeing their full accessibility, as I think that it is an essential aspect for a space to be considered as democratic. In the current situation of the museum, the access to the main entrance and to the northern garden are facilitated through aluminium fixed ramps, allowing full accessibility within the ground floor and the patio. However, the women's gallery and the eastern patio remain inaccessible to visitors with reduced mobility without the help of the museum staff.

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In order to grant full accessibility to each space where activities take place; the following interventions in accordance with the Spanish Technical Code (CTE DBSUA) have been proposed:

The entrance to the southern gallery from Calle de los Reyes Católicos was amplified through a platform which can be accessed both by a ramp and steps to facilitate a more comfortable circulation. Moreover, access to the Women's gallery is granted through an elevator by the southern perimeter walls. The installation of such an elevator is possible as the slabs of the southern block are a recent addition from the restoration work in the 1990s and are not of historical and artistic value (Museo Sefardí 2020:42).

A further intervention to increase accessibility takes place in the northern gallery, where the building is connected with the annex building that houses the offices. As of today, this part of the building remains inaccessible for the visitors with reduced mobility because of the existing level difference. The accessibility is resolved through a ramp on the southern perimeter wall of the gallery, so the toilets as well as the eastern patio can be fully accessible. Upon leaving the annex building, a further elevator is placed between the level of the patio and the excavation to also grant full accessibility to the excavation site, thinking of the possibility in the future to include the excavations into the premises of the museum.

The last intervention is placed in the northern garden to ease the access from the street level and to the northern gallery through a series of ramps that bridge a height of almost one meter.

Thus, each space designated for the public functions of the museum is made fully accessible for the visitors and meet the requirements of the local regulations, while supporting the curatorial ambition to democratize the museum space.

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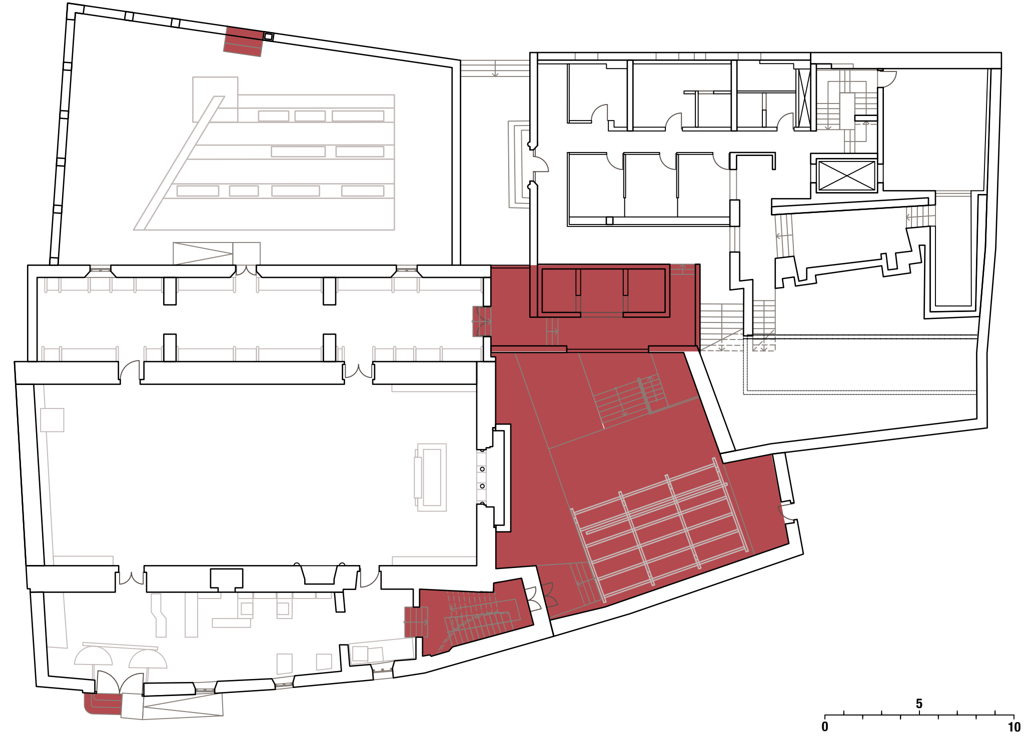

Fig. 105 Current inaccessible areas

Inaccessible areas

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Fig. 106 Plan of interventions to increase accessibility

Interventions to increase accesibility

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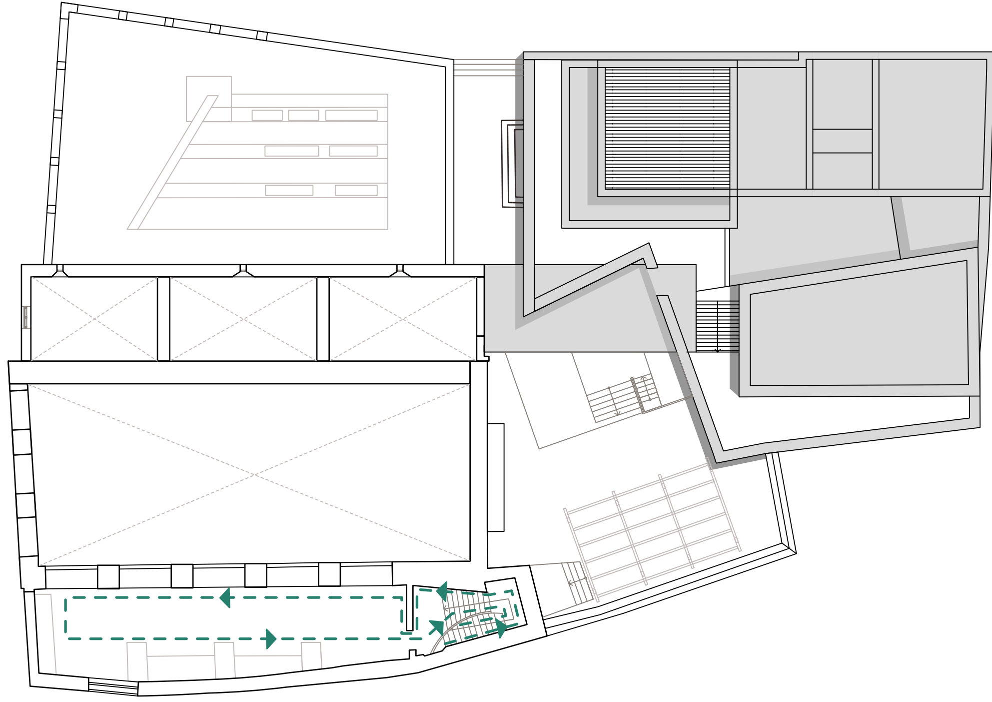


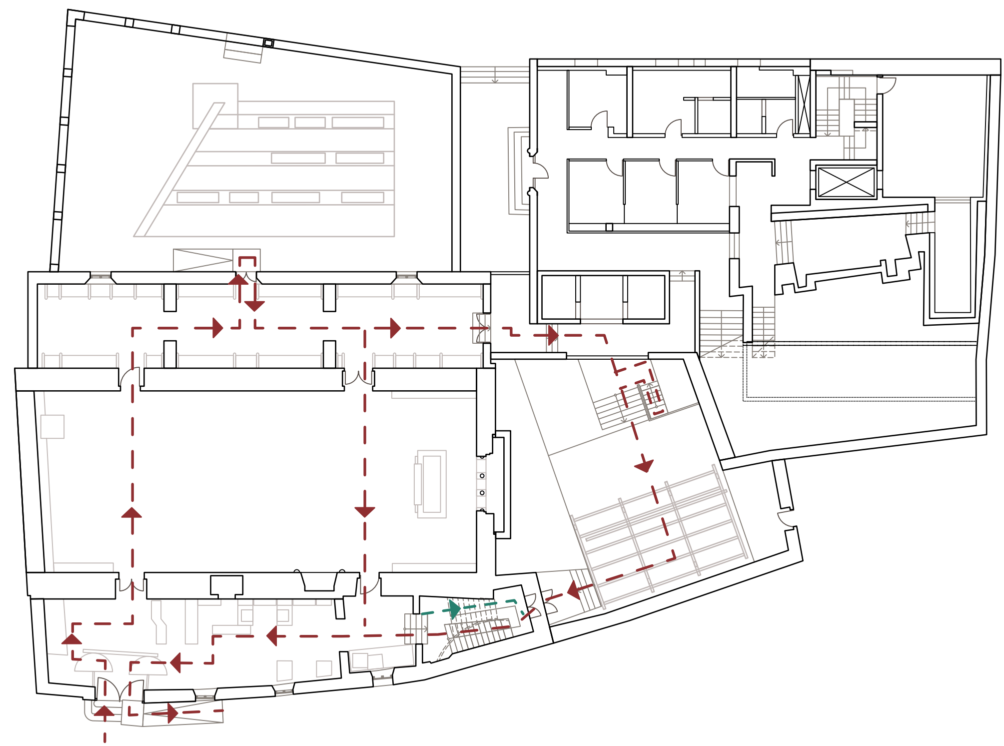
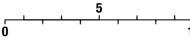


Fig. 107 Existing visitors' route



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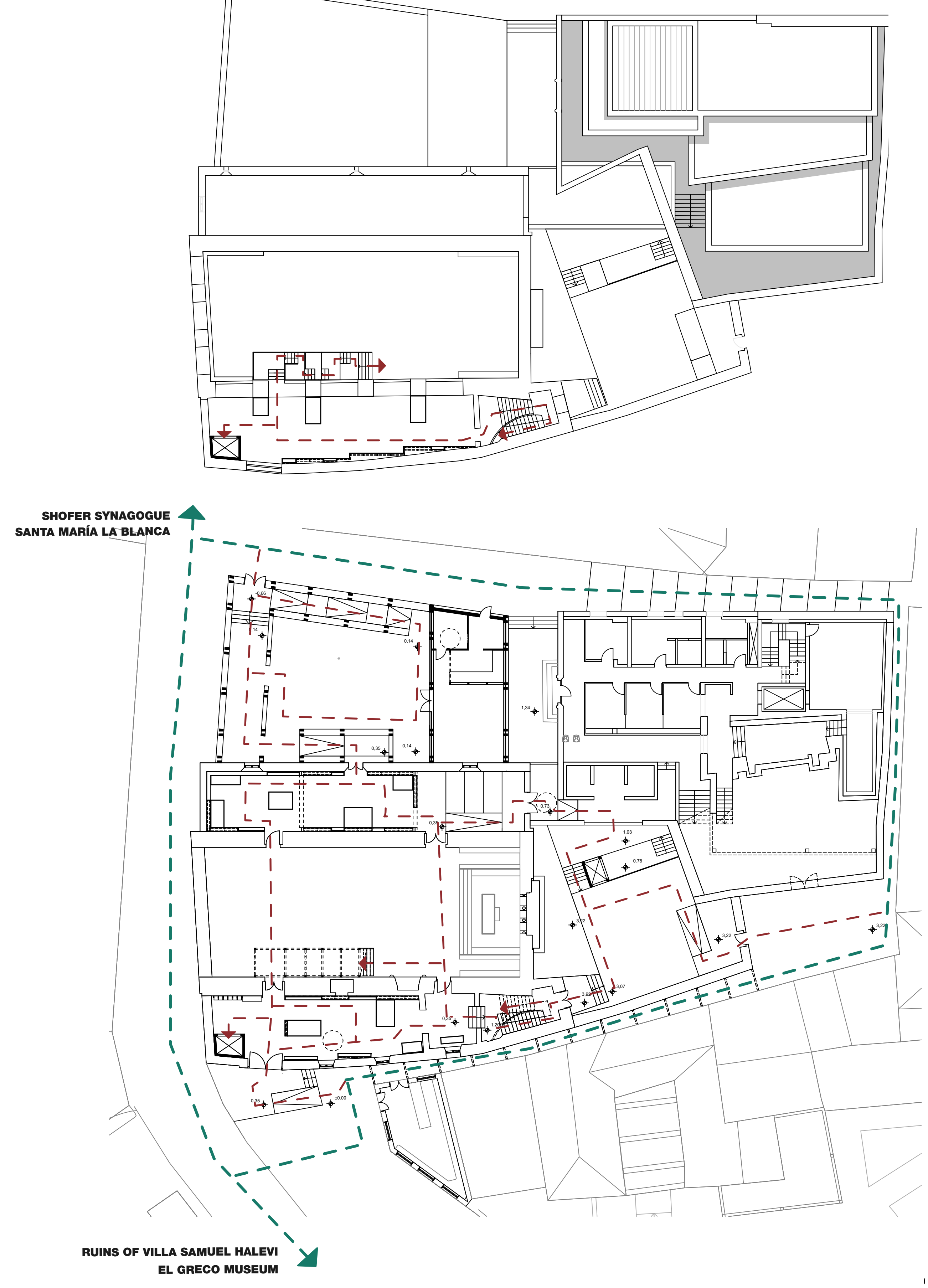

Fig. 108 Proposed visitors' route: the new proposed route consists of two circles:the outer circle connecting the museum with other sites in the Jewish neighbourhood and the inner circle with several access points allow a multitude of possibilities to visit the exhibition.

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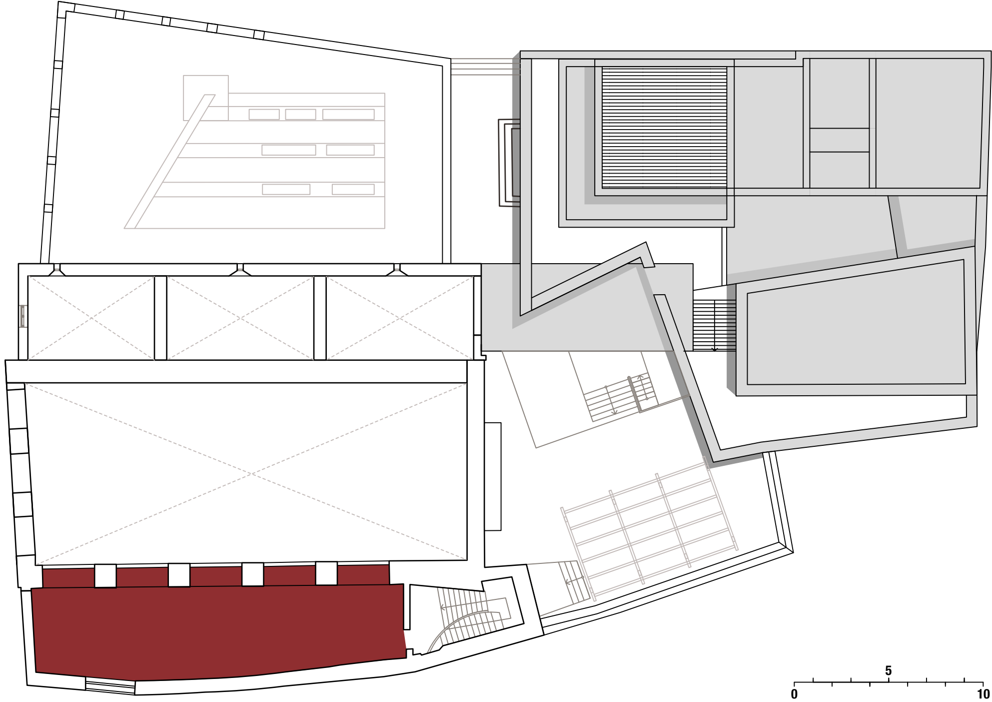

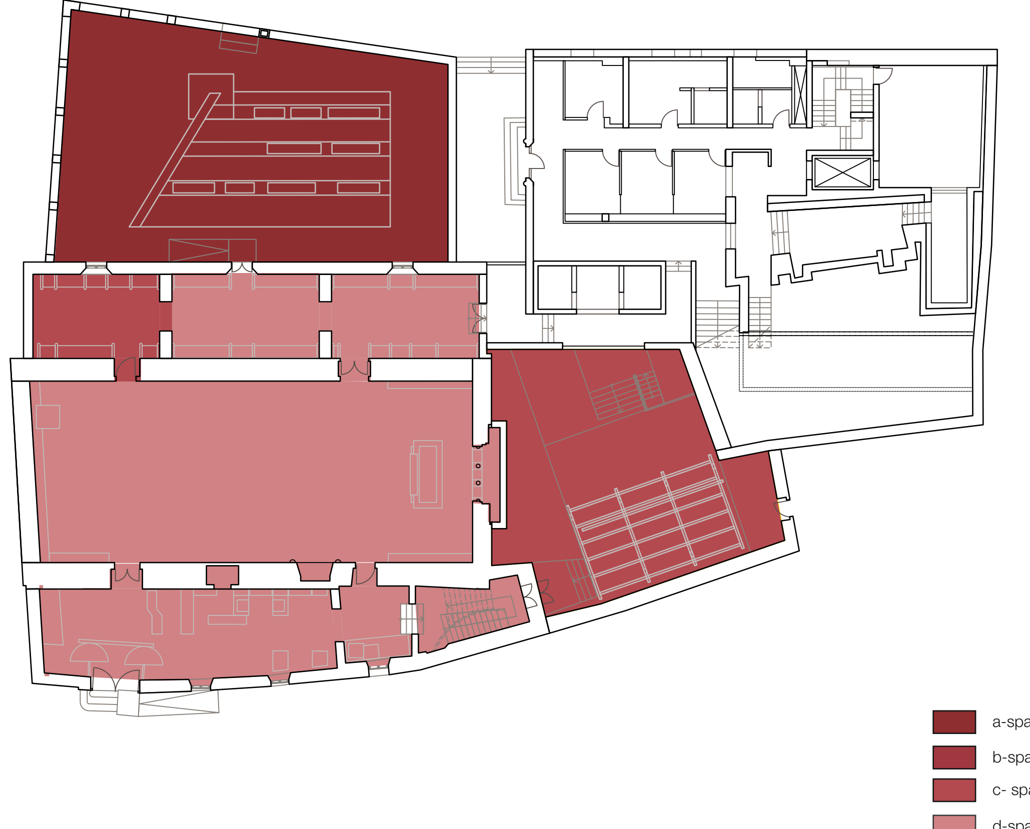

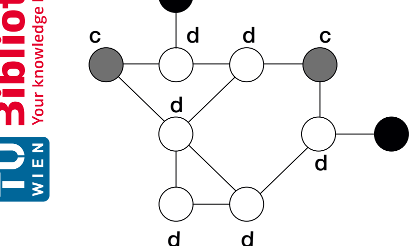

Fig. 109 Existing depth of Spaces: as seen through the existing space syntax analysis of the museum, the exhibition spaces offer a circular movement pattern in alliance with the didactic structure of the content, allowing few alternatives of moving within the spaces.

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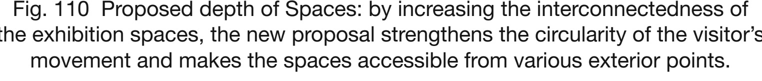
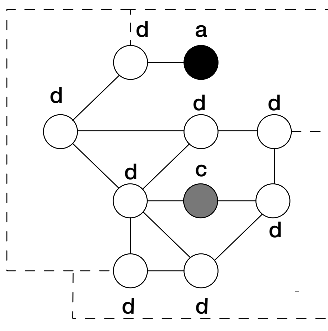


Fig. 110 Proposed depth of Spaces: by increasing the interconnectedness of the exhibition spaces, the new proposal strengthens the circularity of the visitor's movement and makes the spaces accessible from various exterior points.



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In addition to increase accessibility of the exhibition spaces, the visitors' route in the museum is also modified to accompany the openness and flexibility of the exhibition format.

The current visitor's route, as mentioned in the previous chapter, follows a circular route that does not give the visitors many options to see the museum. Furthermore, the low interconnectedness of exhibition spaces, and restricted communication with the urban space determines how the visitors can move within the museum spaces. The restricted possibilities of movement is accompanied by a strong didactical approach and a rigid sequencing of the narrative, leaving a miniscule space for the visitor to create one's own visit and come to one's own conclusions.

Thus, the new proposal for the Sephardic Museum exploits the existing connections to the city scape and expands the route to the old Jewish neighbourhood of Toledo, in which various Jewish monuments in the proximity become directly connected to the content of the exhibition. Through replacing the ticket office and the gift shop outside of the building, the limits of the museum are expanded within the cityscape and offers various possibilities to discover the local Jewish heritage. The intersecting circular routes, deviations and intersections provoke explorative movement patterns and encourages the visitor to build up one's own experience and perspective on the topic.

The display strategy

The display system of the exhibition is designed to meet the ambitions of the curatorial program to build up an open ended, discursive exhibition format. Inspired by Frederick Kiesler's "18 Functions of the One Chair", where he creates a flexible system through different combinations of single and multiple units of the chair that serve as different objects depending on their context and syntax, the MDF panels of the exhibition walls also undertake different functions depending on the context and characteristics of the objects they will display.

In contrast to Kiesler's idea of mixing the seating and display elements, the MDF panels only form display elements to maintain a clear differentiation in a dense space. Furthermore, the visual unity of the exhibition areas are maintained through floated cement-coating floors with a similar colour. The bases that serve for exhibiting three dimensional objects are thought of as mobile elements,

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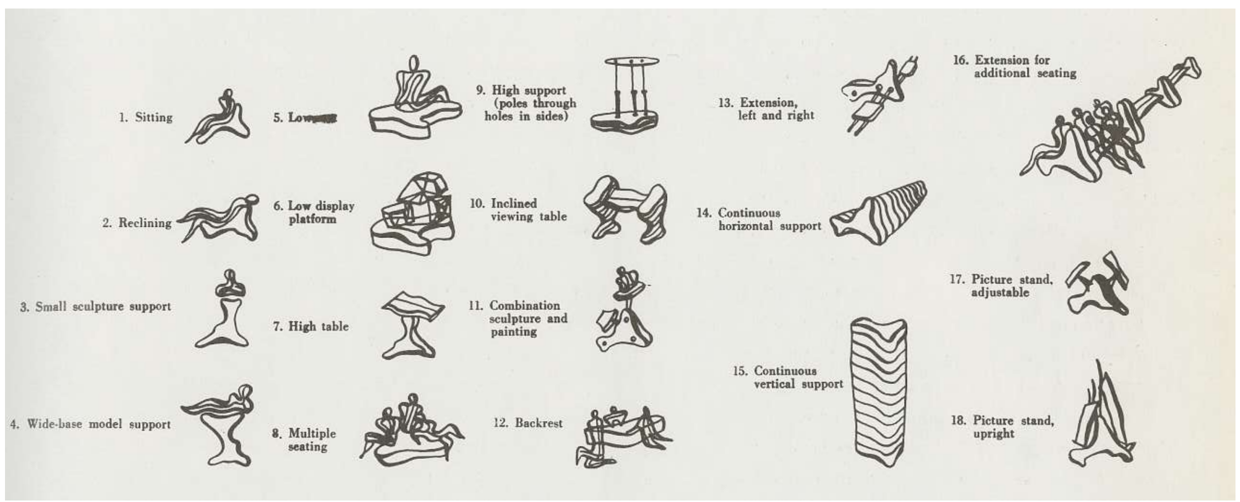

Fig. 111 Frederick Kiesler, Eighteen Functions of the One Chair, 1942

whose positions can be modified depending on the desired contextualization of the exhibits. On the other hand, the flexible distribution of the bases allows the visitors to approach the objects from different points of view and enables the construction of t relationships between the objects or between the objects and the spectator, in a similar fashion to the gazes of the sculptures in Castelvecchio. However, unlike the metaphysical layers constructed by Scarpa in Castelvecchio, this strategy intends to instrumentalize the gaze of the visitor to put forward different contexts between the space and its history, which would not be visualized otherwise. Lastly, the bases with drawers intend to display on the top original printed elements, whose copies can be found below on the drawers. Such a strategy intends to awake the curiosity of the visitor and give them the possibility to go through the objects on display that would be not possible to touch. Thus, by using the copies of delicate elements, the distance created by the display vanishes and the visitor engages physically with historical documents.

The MDF panels are mounted on a wooden substructure through a railing system to ease the installation and dismantling as the pieces are subject to relocation and displacement. The inclined panels are mainly reserved for the exhibition texts and objects that contain textual elements, to facilitate reading through distancing from the panels. The aluminium railing at the bottom of the panels serve for the protection of the edges as the material is exposed to bumps and drops by the visitors.

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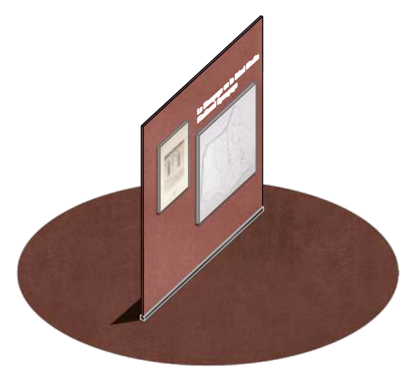

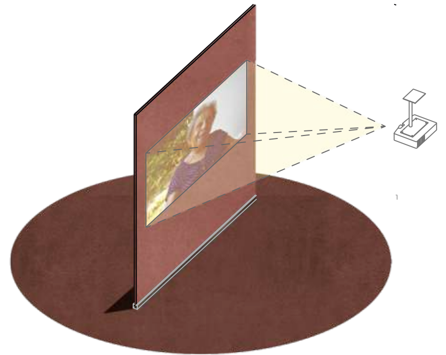

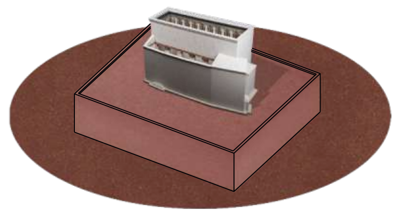

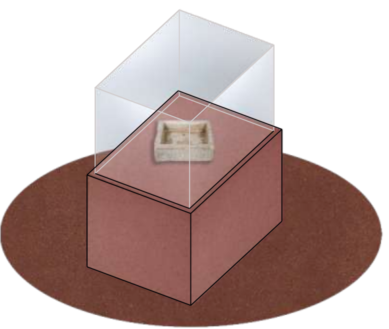

Fig. 112 The different functions of MDF displays

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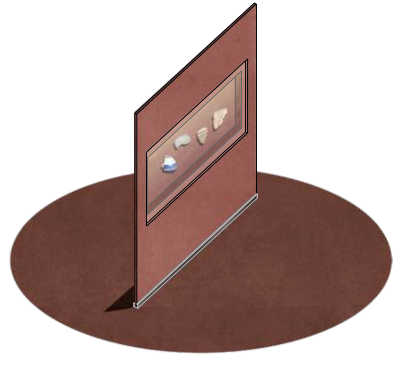

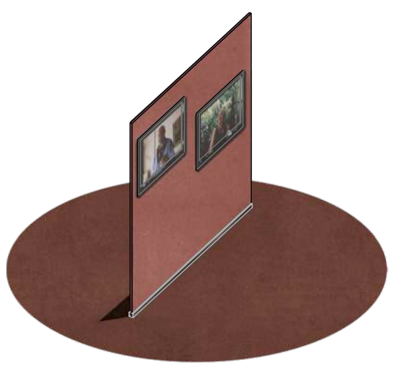

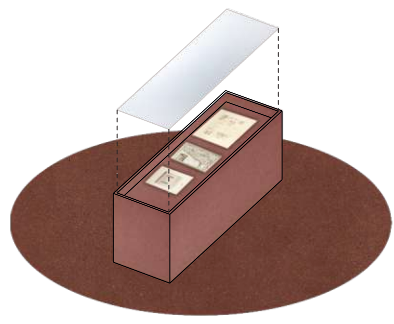

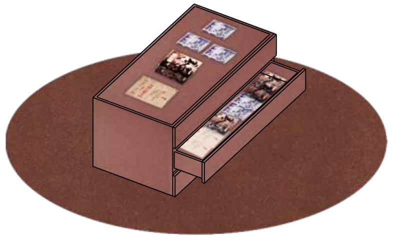

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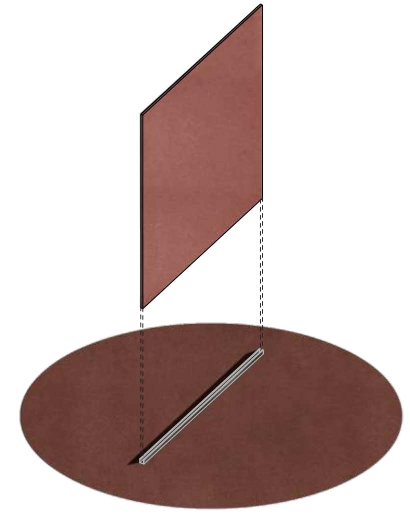

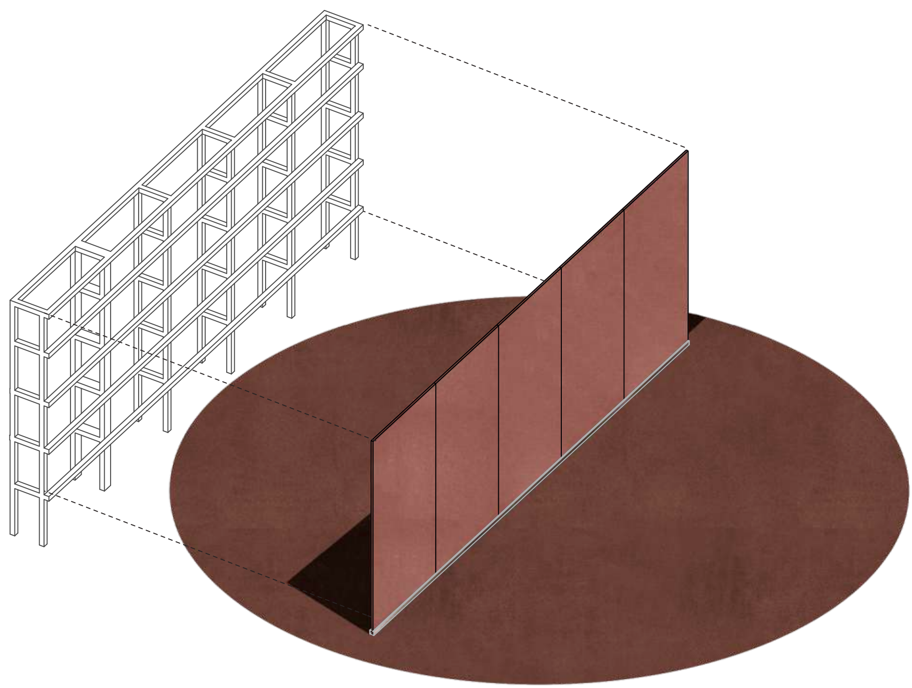

Fig. 113 The substructure and inclined panels of the display

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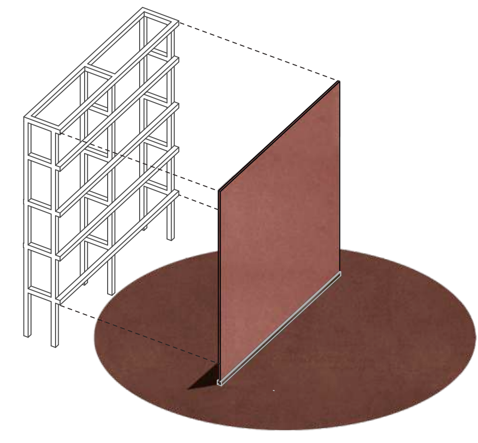

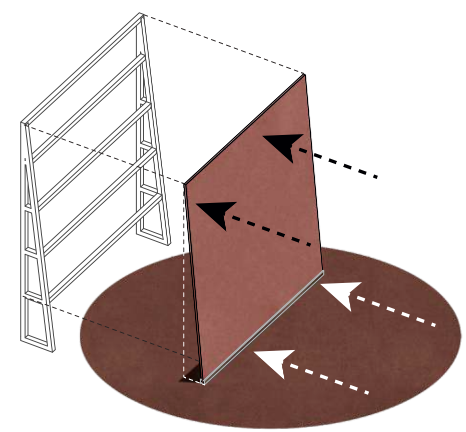

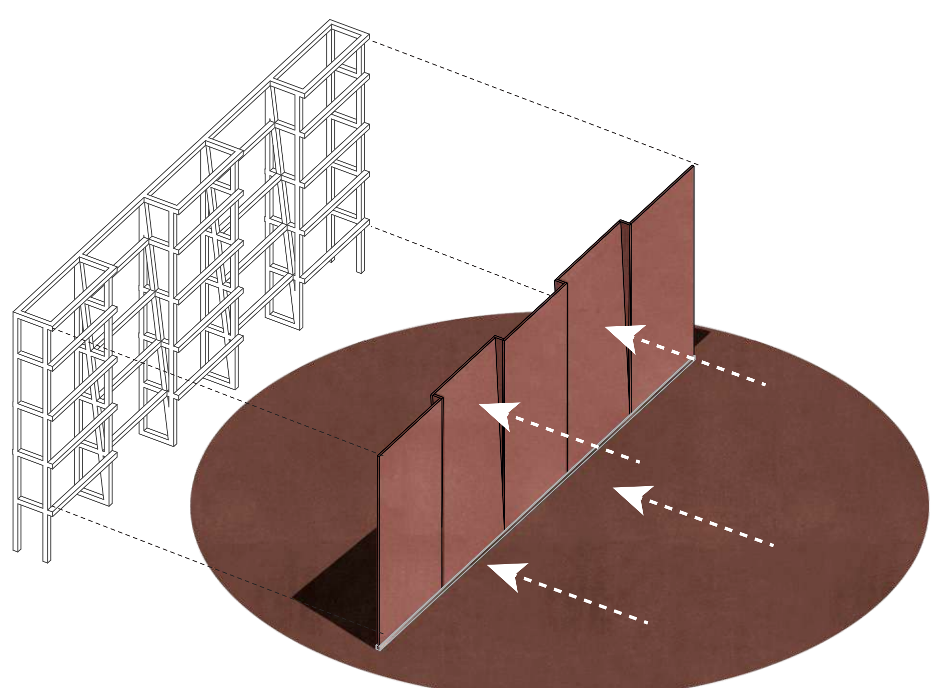

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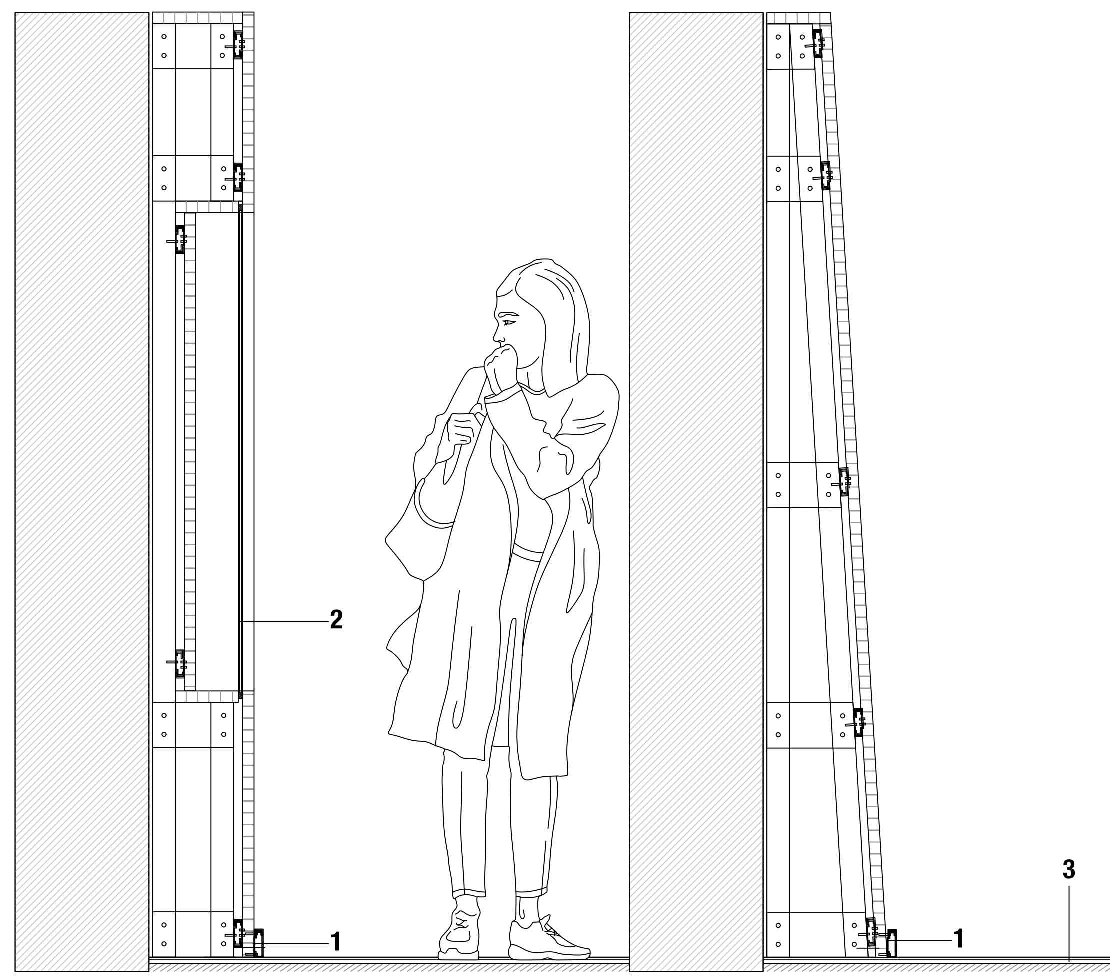

Fig. 114 1:10 Detail Drawings of the display walls and bases

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1	7 mm	*aluminium C-profile as base shoe*
	30 mm	*MDF wall lining painted red; glued joints with flat dowels*
		agraffe fastenings
	60 x 60 mm	*wood supporting structure*
2	3 mm	*laminated museum glass*
3	7 mm	*red floated-cement coating reinforced with glass-fibre mats*
	10 mm	*oiled surface chipboard with dry coating*

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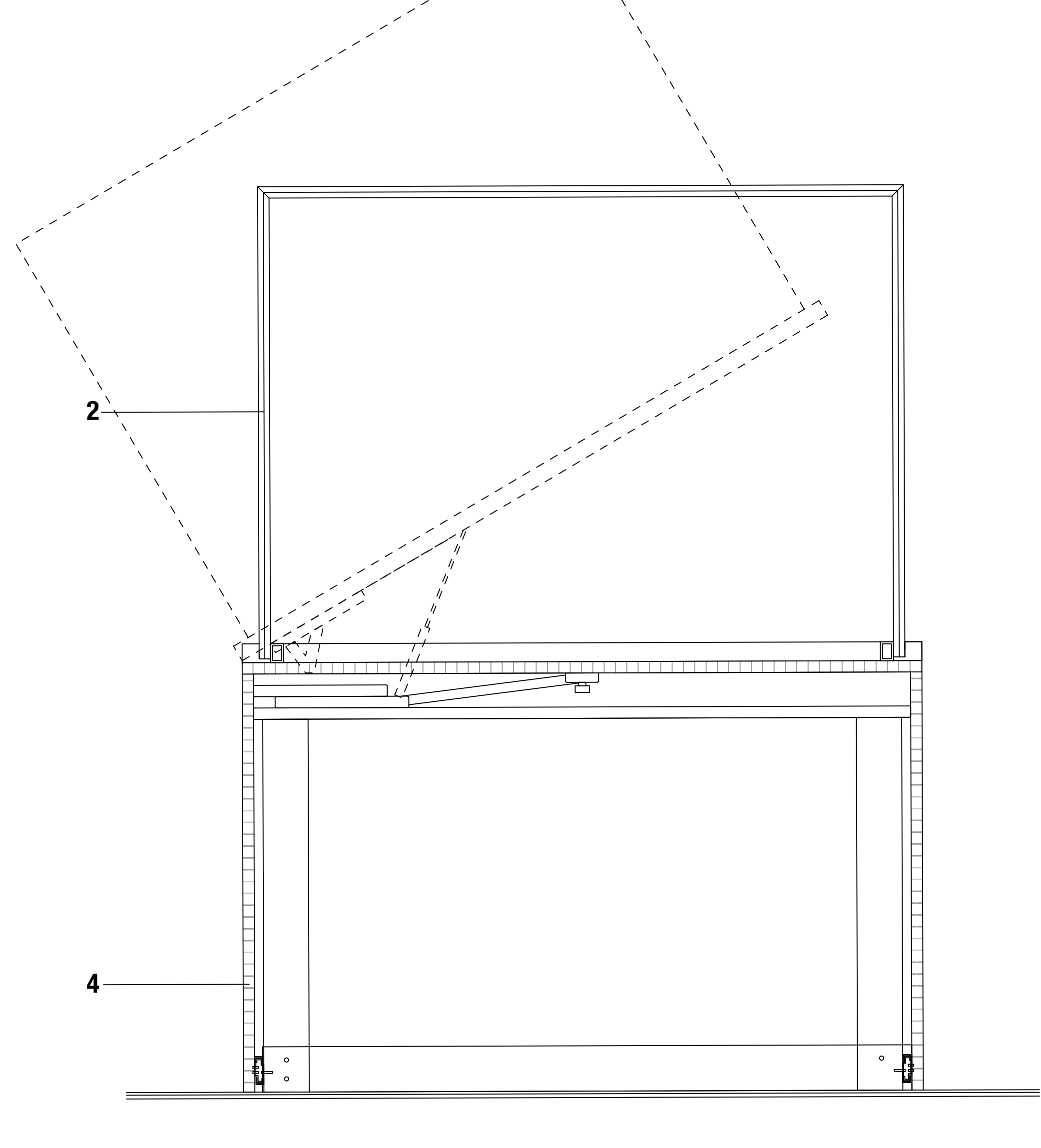

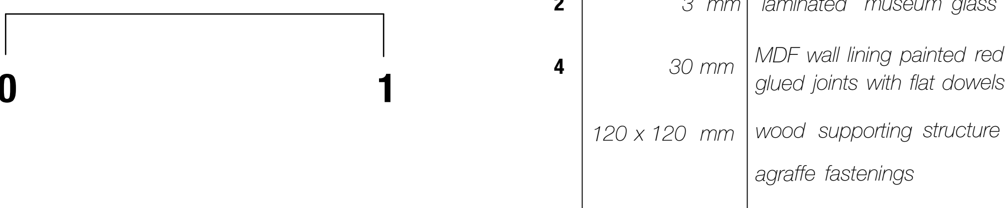

2	3 mm	laminated museum glass
4	30 mm	MDF wall lining painted red; glued joints with flat dowels
	120 x 120 mm	wood supporting structure
		agraffe fastenings

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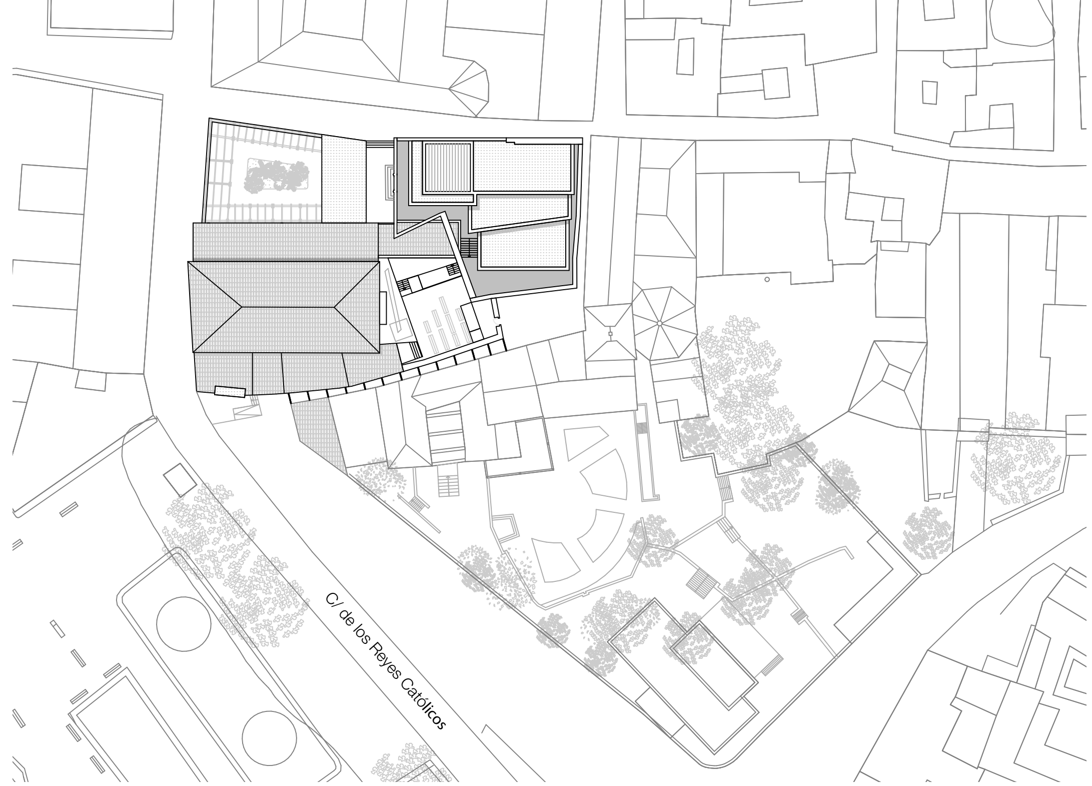

Fig. 115 1:500 Situation Plan of the museum

Fig. 116 1:100 Ground Floor

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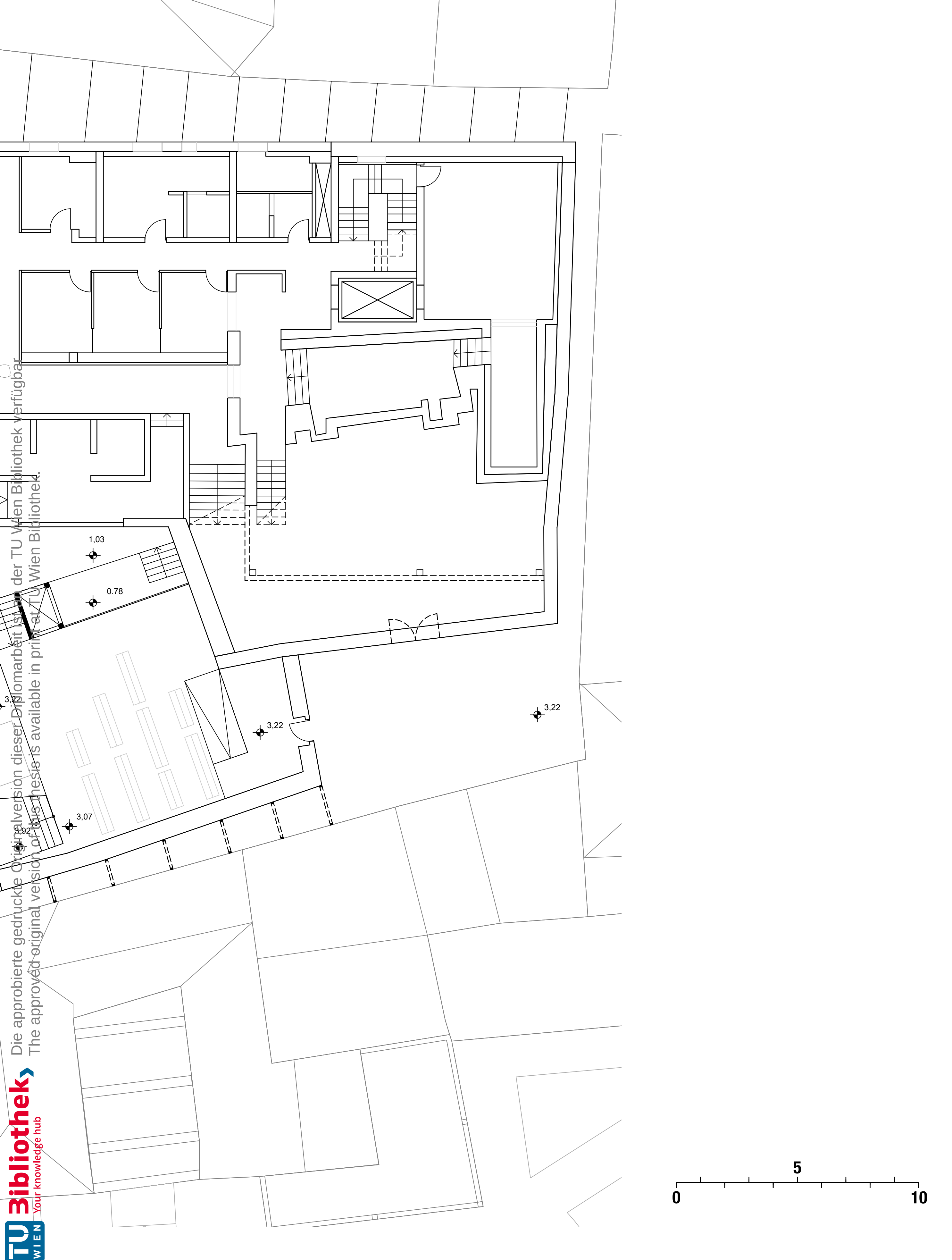

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Fig. 117 1:100 Women's Gallery

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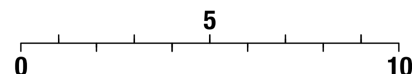

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Fig. 118 1:100 Cross Section

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The South Gallery

The south gallery remains as the main entrance of the museum, since it looks upon the crossing point of Calle de los Reyes Católicos and Calle de Samuel Halevi. The area delimited by the walls of the El Greco Museum and the southern façade of the Synagogue of Transit builds up a small square that serves as a meeting point upon entering the museum.

After passing through the entrance door, the visitor lands in a vestibule where the elevator that serves between the ground floor and the upper floor is located. This space connects the prayer hall with the southern gallery as well as Calle de los Reyes Católicos, looking directly upon the statue dedicated to Samuel Halevi beside the entrance of the El Greco Museum.

After entering the vestibule, the visitor either continues to the main prayer hall or enters the exhibition hall, which is separated from the vestibule through a partition wall which is 2,5 meters high. The lower exhibition walls intend to maintain the unity of the small space but separate the functions clearly for the most efficient functioning and circulation.

The existing wooden beams added after the restoration work are extended vertically to enclose the exhibition gallery visually and creates a unifying background behind the variety of collection pieces. The renaissance sacristy prior to the staircase house also forms part of the exhibition in which a base with drawers is placed below the window. This space creates a perfect setting to display the history of *conversos*, considering the fact that it is a Christian sacristy directly connected to the prayer hall of the synagogue.

In the women's gallery the materials of the exhibition spaces repeat themselves to maintain the same visual language. However the distribution of the walls and bases is slightly different in this gallery than the one on the ground floor, as it has five openings with remaining stucco works on its northern walls that connect the gallery to the prayer hall. As a result the exhibition elements are directed towards the south with benches which are distributed parallel to the walls to be able to look at both directions: the exhibited pieces and the prayer hall.

As such spaces in synagogues are spaces dedicated exclusively to women, the walls are reserved for the testimonies of Jewish women, works of artists, poets and writers, that would echo on the prayer hall and thus manifest their presence.

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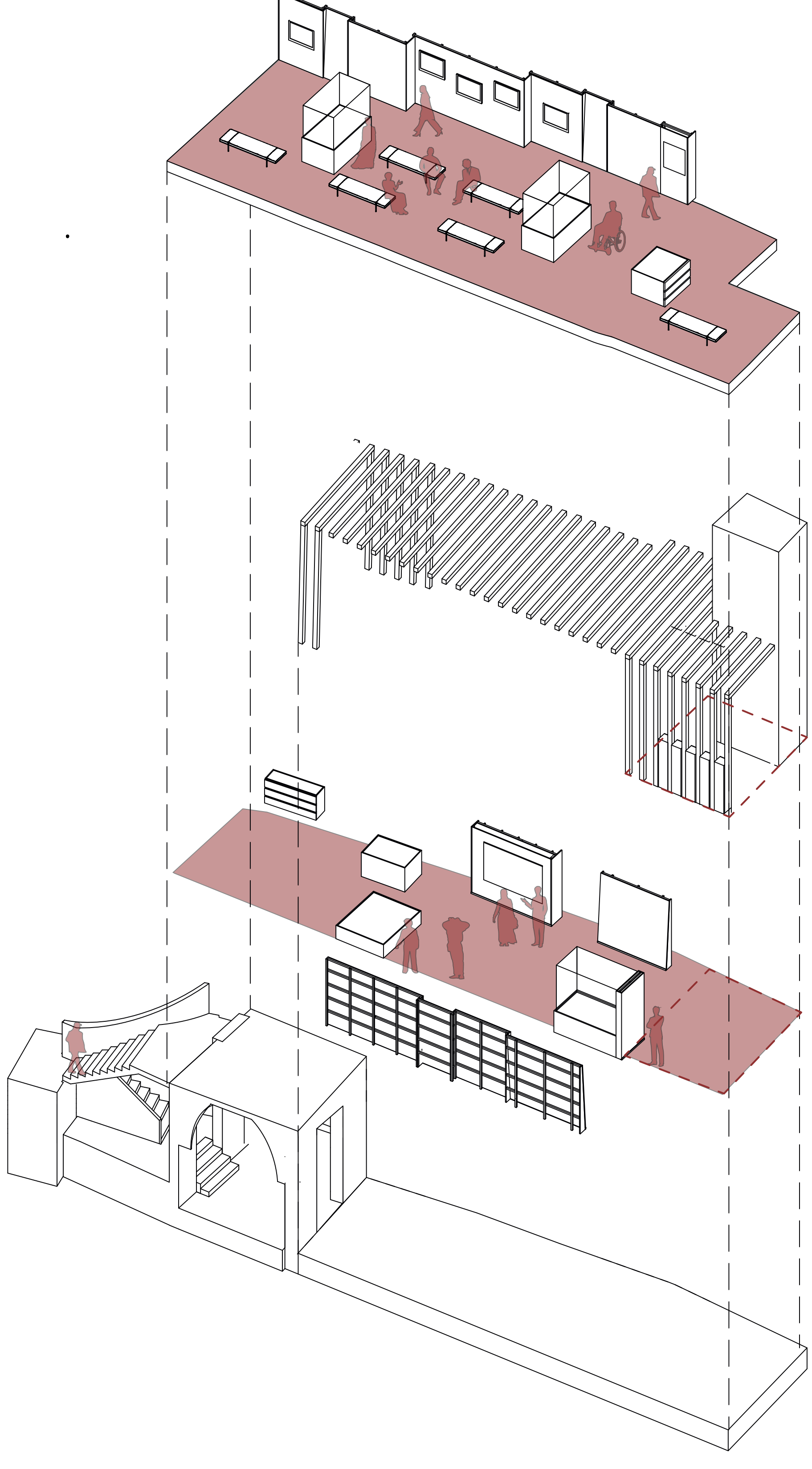

Fig. 119 Axonometric drawing of the southern gallery

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Fig. 120 View from the vestibule towards the exhibition gallery and Calle de los Reyes Católicos

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Fig. 121 A view towards the women's gallery

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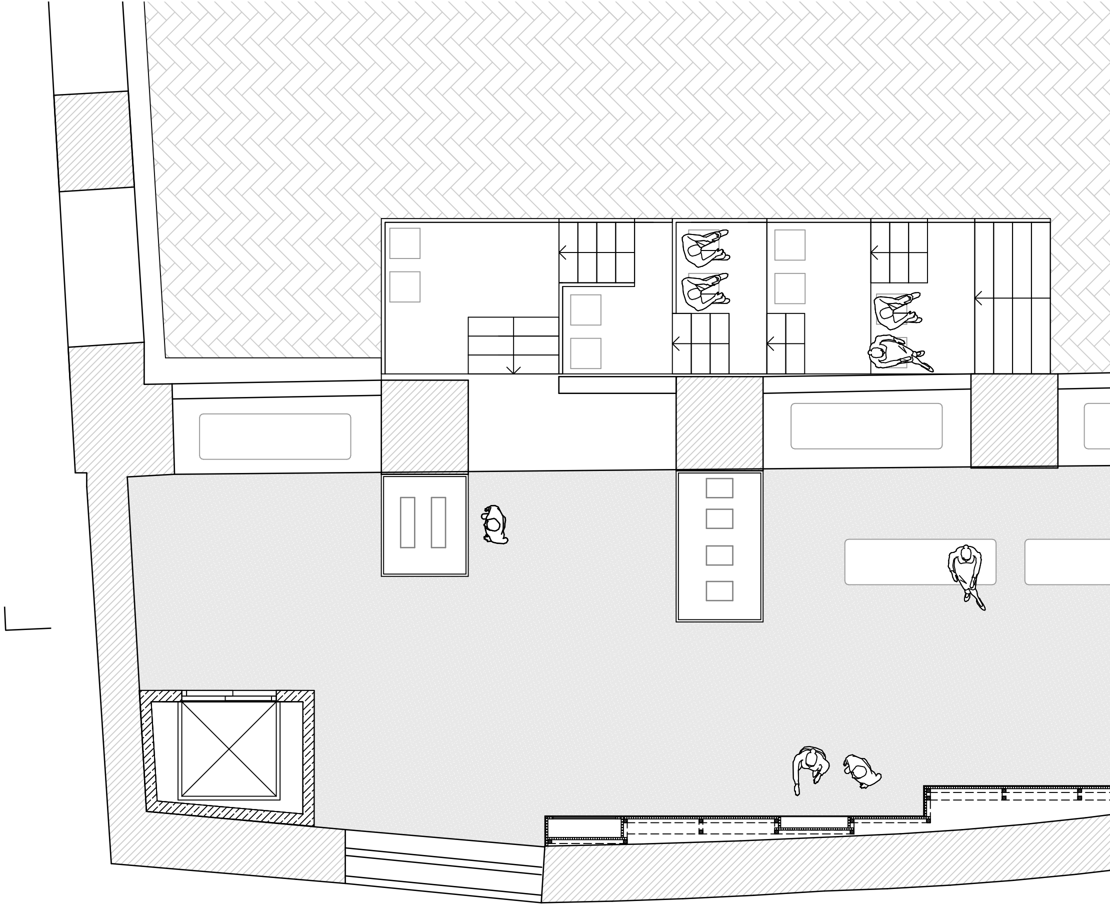

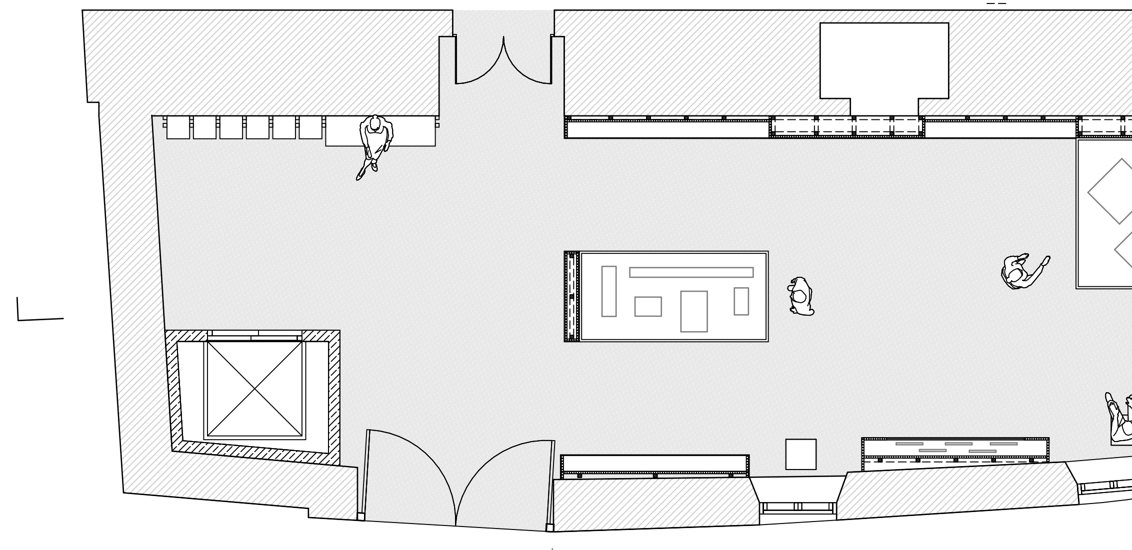

Fig. 122 1:50 Plans of the southern galleries

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Fig. 123 1:50 Perspective Section of the southern galleries

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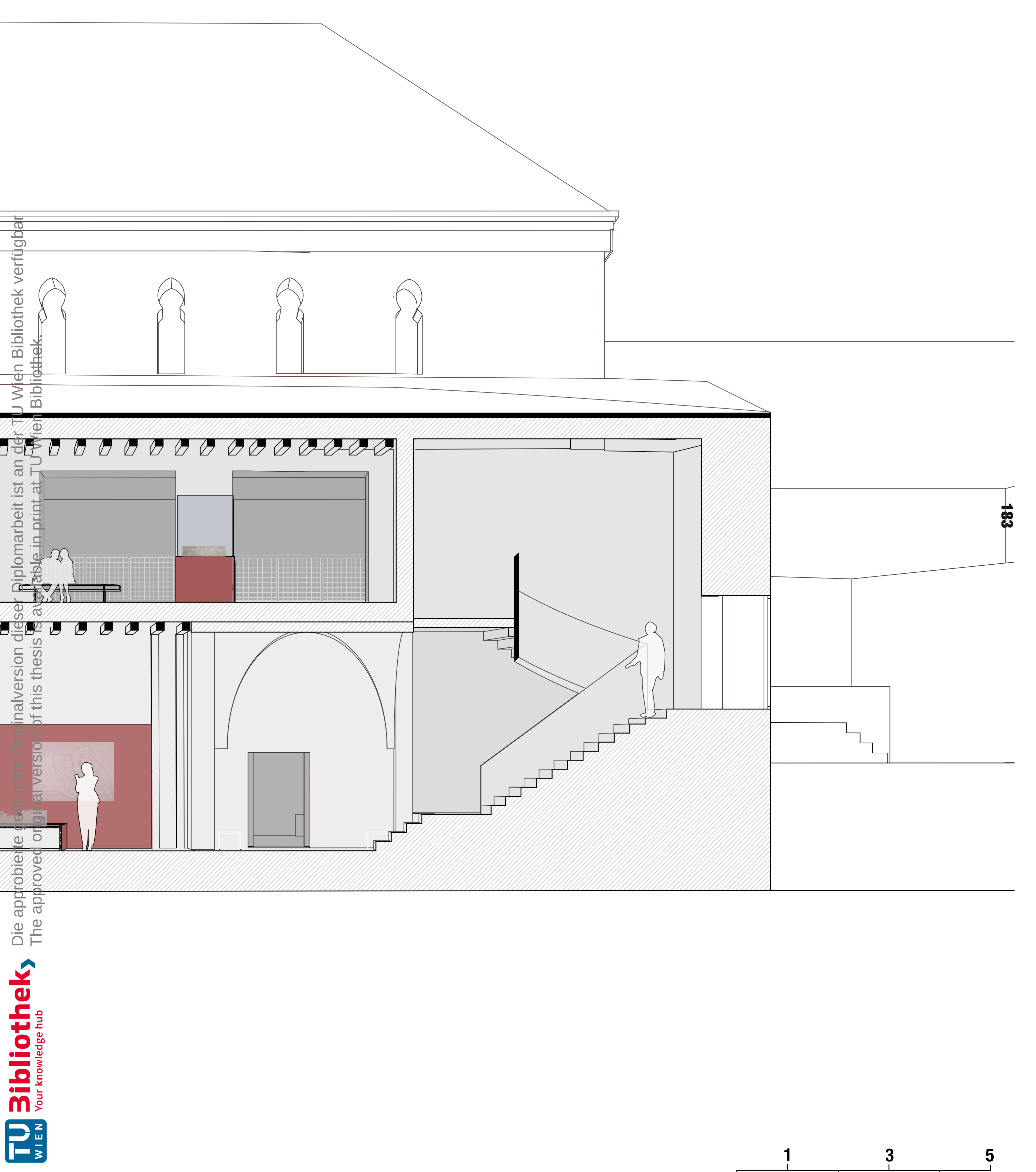

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The prayer hall

The main prayer hall constitutes, as a whole, the central volume of the building complex. This space, as mentioned before, contains many historically and artistically valuable elements, from mudejar stucco works and inscriptions, to a baroque arcosolium and renaissance portico that opens up to the sacristy on the southern block.

Fig. 124 Photo of the baroque arcosolium and the renaissance portico

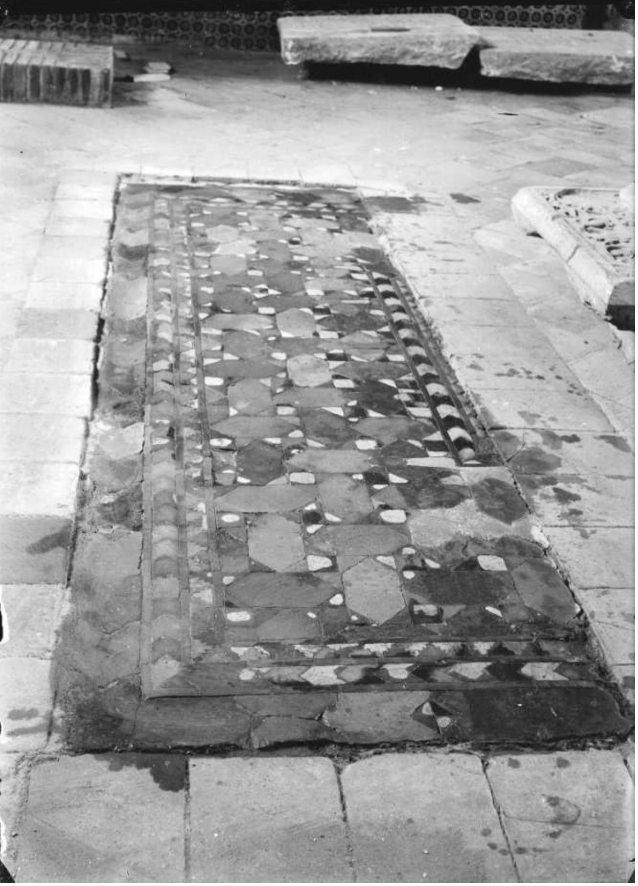

Fig. 125 Photo of the discovered tile flooring that belongs to the medieval synagogue's tevah, Moreno, n.d.

The hall is not thought primarily to host exhibitions. Similar to its current state, in the design proposal, the prayer hall is designated as a multifunctional space used for a variety of cultural activities such as concerts, lectures, panels and workshops. Alongside these functions, the prayer hall can be used as a synagogue for religious activities and operate independently while the exhibition halls remain open for visitors. Thus, the visitors can have a glimpse on religious activities that take place momentarily through the openings of the women's gallery.

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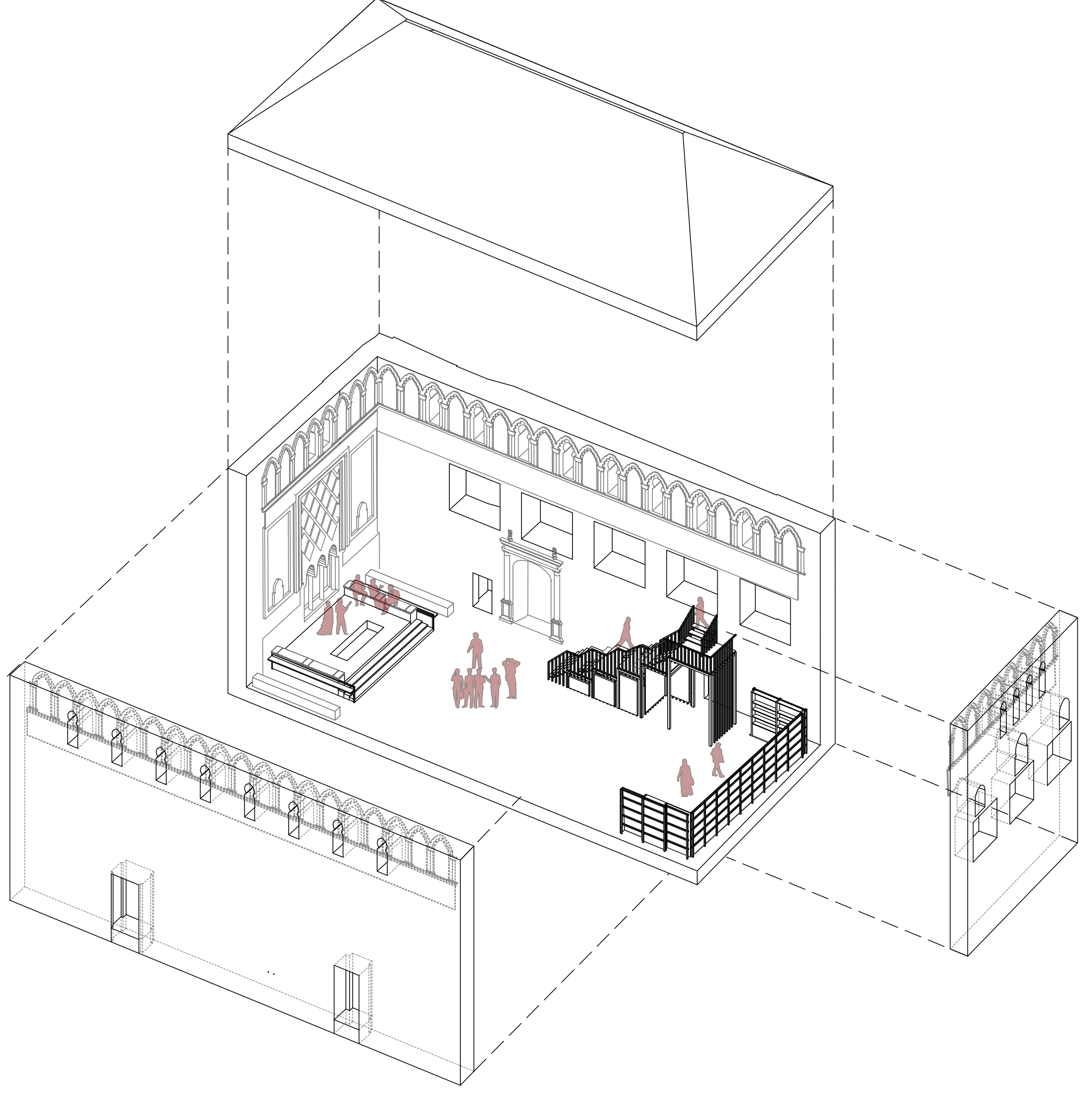

Fig. 126 Axonometric drawing of the prayer hall

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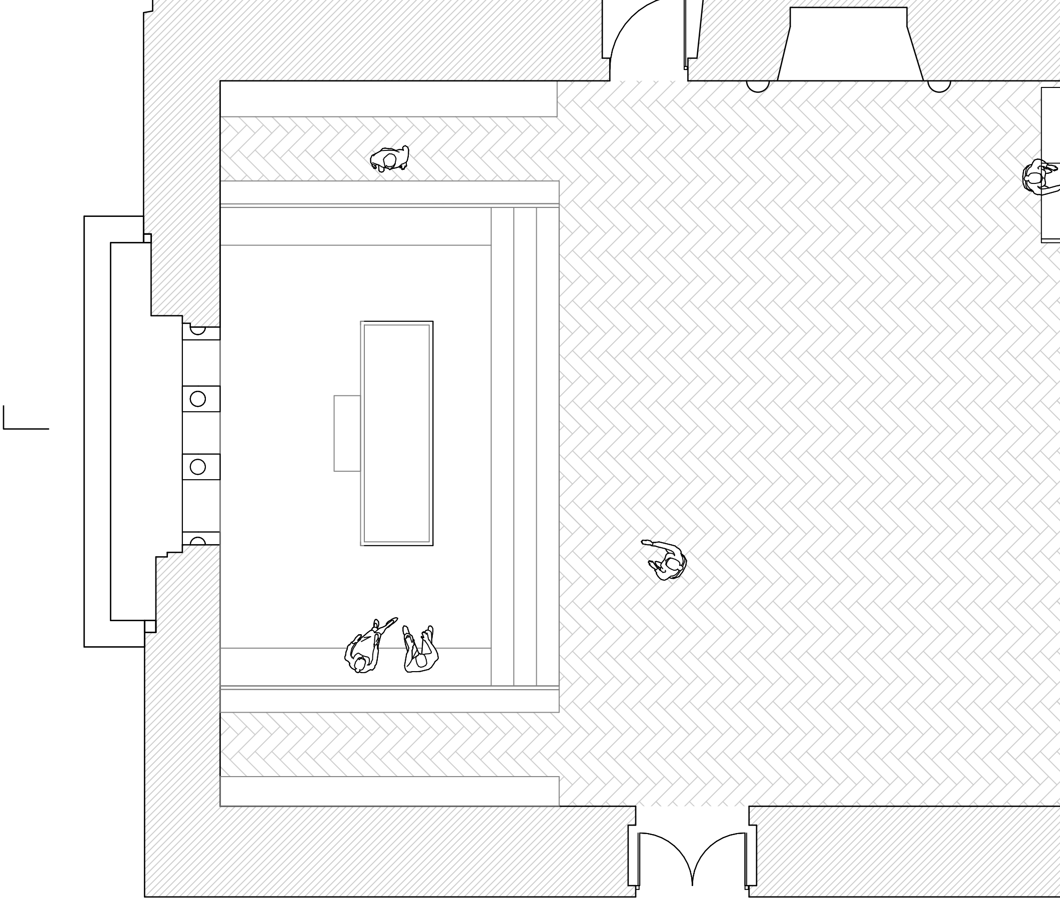

Fig. 127 1:50 Plan of the prayer hall

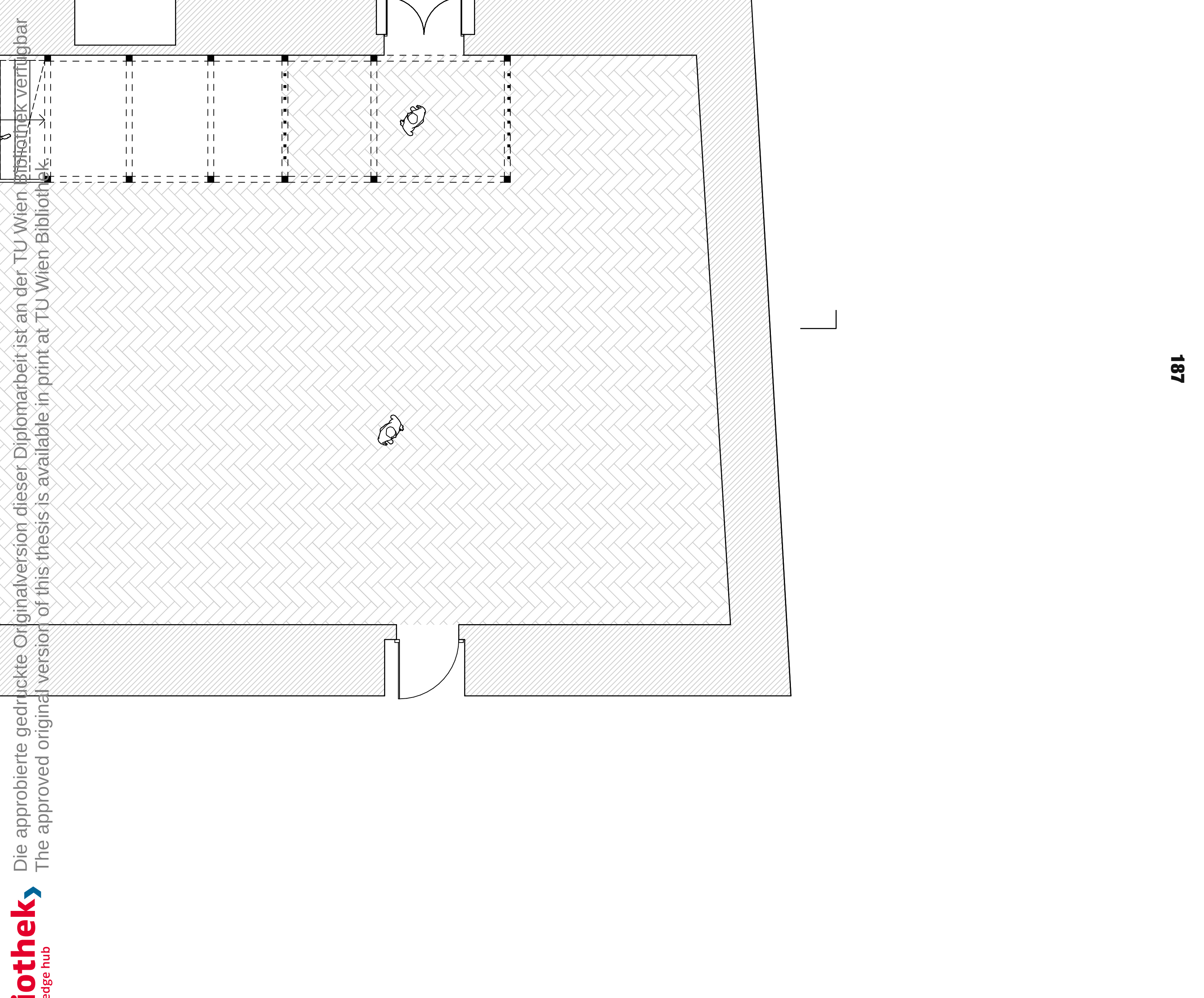

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Fig. 128 1:50 Section of the prayer Hall

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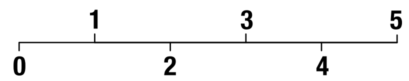

An important addition to this space is the wooden stair-platforms which connects the women's gallery directly with the prayer hall. Apart from increasing the interconnectedness of both spaces, these stairs intend to provoke questions that challenge the traditional, patriarchal ways of gathering, in which the women are separated and cannot take part actively in the ceremonies*.

A further intervention in the prayer hall is the elevated wooden platform just beside the ekhal, which would serve as a tevah in religious ceremonies and as a stage in other cultural events. The wooden platform also protects the medieval tile flooring, which could be seen through a protective glass upon going up the platform.

The multifunctionality of the space thus compliments the essence of the synagogue: it is not merely a sacred space for religious ceremonies, but it is also used for education and learning. That is why within the usage as a museum, this space also serves as a space for rest, reflection and detachment from daily life, like the pantheons of the early museums. In this central space the visitors gather, talk, reflect, and appreciate the architecture of the building.

1	*1200 x 250 mm*	*timber tred with pressure impregnation and glaze finish*
2	*50 x 50 mm*	*timber railing with pressure impregnation and glaze finish*
3	*15 mm*	*oak parquette flooring*
	200 x 200 mm	*laminated timber beam*
4	*200 x 200 mm*	*laminated timber column*
	5 mm	*ceramic floor tile*
		existing underfloor heating screed smoothened

Fig. 129 1:20 Detail section of the stairs

* In the Orthodox Jewish tradition, minyan, the group of people for the communal religious service, consists of at least ten males.

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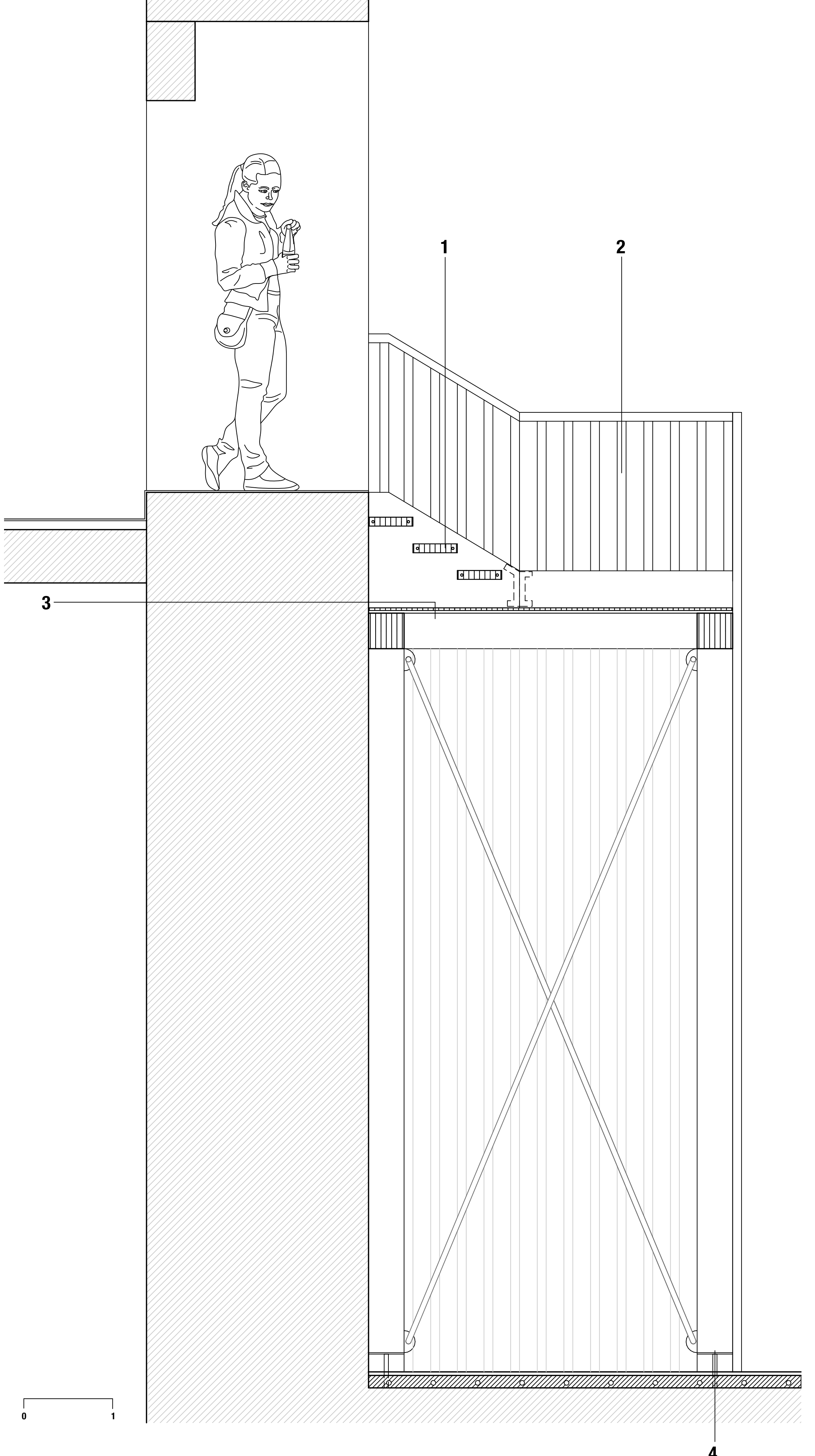

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Fig. 130 An imagined wedding ceremony in the synagogue

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Fig. 131 The prayer hall during functioning as a part of the museum with a temporary exhibition installation

Northern gallery

The northern gallery is located in the 17th century vaulted volume that has its unique spatial qualities, like the other two volumes. Here, to open up the space divided in smaller units that functioned as galleries, the reinforced perpendicular partitions are replaced with rigid steel frames.

A great part of the volume is reserved for exhibition, and similar to the separation in the southern volume, there is also a partition that divides the whole gallery into two: the main exhibition area that opens up to the northern patio, and the elevated platform with the ramp that leads to the eastern patio and bathrooms. The elevated platform with three steps is converted into a projection area, in which audio-visual material can be displayed in bigger formats.

In this part of the building complex, like the other exhibition areas, the same principles are maintained: MDF panels on lateral walls and bases for three dimensional objects which create the dynamic in-between spaces that allow the visitor to approach the objects from different angles.

The Garden

The garden in the north is converted into a fully accessible open space, which accommodates a pavilion serving as the café, but also as a place for gastronomical events and workshops, taking part in the cultural program of the institution.

A wooden structure is lifted upon the garden with concrete bases that also serve as seating places for visitors and anyone passing by the museum who wants to rest and enjoy the scenery. Like in today's Sephardic Museum, the collection of sculptures of contemporary Jewish artists are also exhibited in the central area of the garden.

The garden is redesigned to be a permeable open space and stand out in the dense medieval urban setting of the old Jewish neighbourhood. It is aligned on Calle de los Reyes Católicos with other Jewish monuments such as the archaeological remains of the Shofer Synagogue as well as the Synaogogue of Santa María La Blanca. In this way, the garden becomes an addition to the imagery of Jewish monuments, as an open, active and vivid space that becomes a part of the contemporary cultural scenery of the city.

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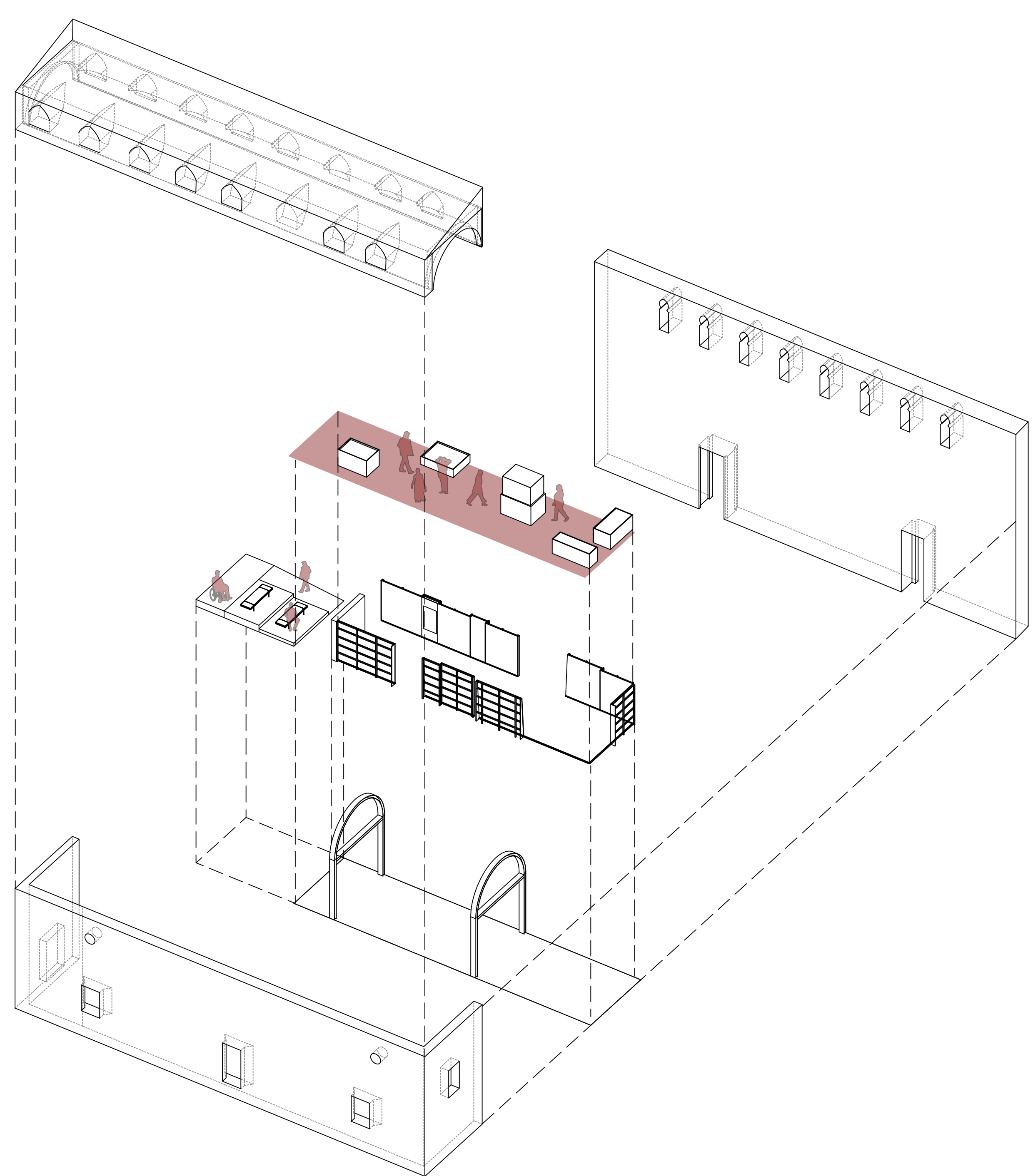

Fig. 132 Axonometric drawing of the northern gallery

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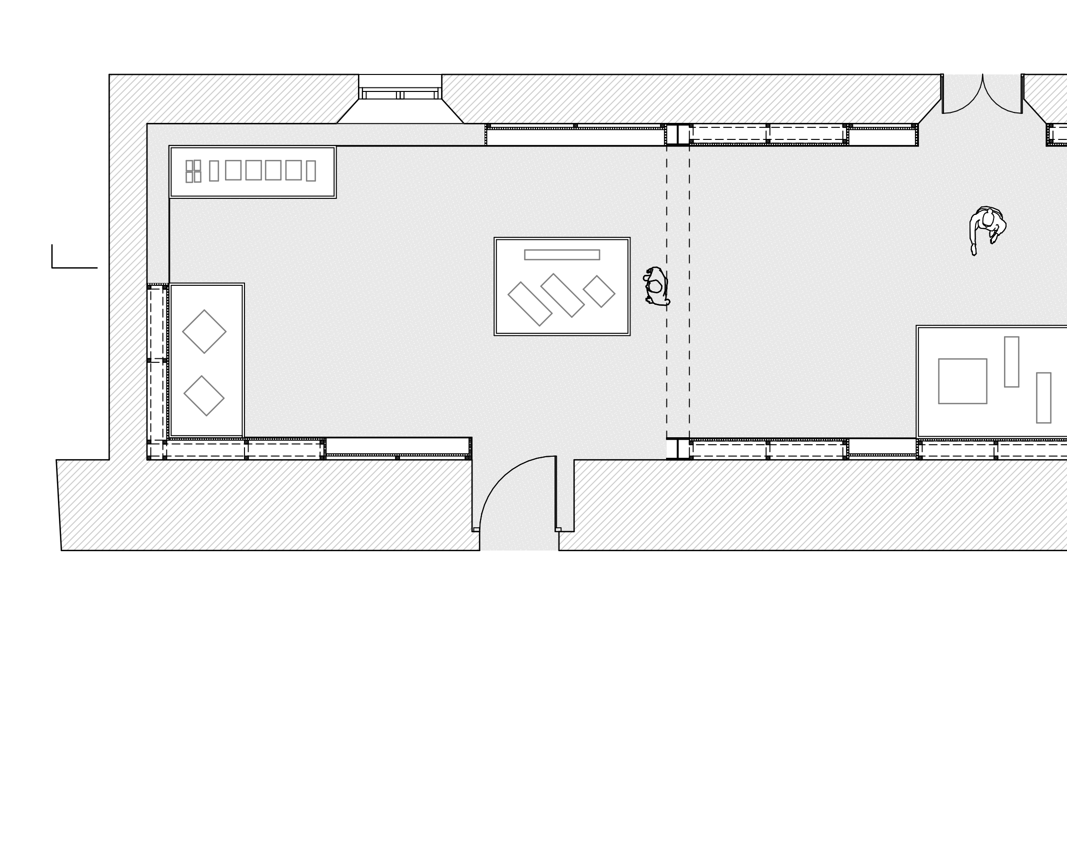

Fig. 133 1:50 Plan and Section of the northern gallery

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Fig. 134 A view from the exhibition spaces of the northern gallery

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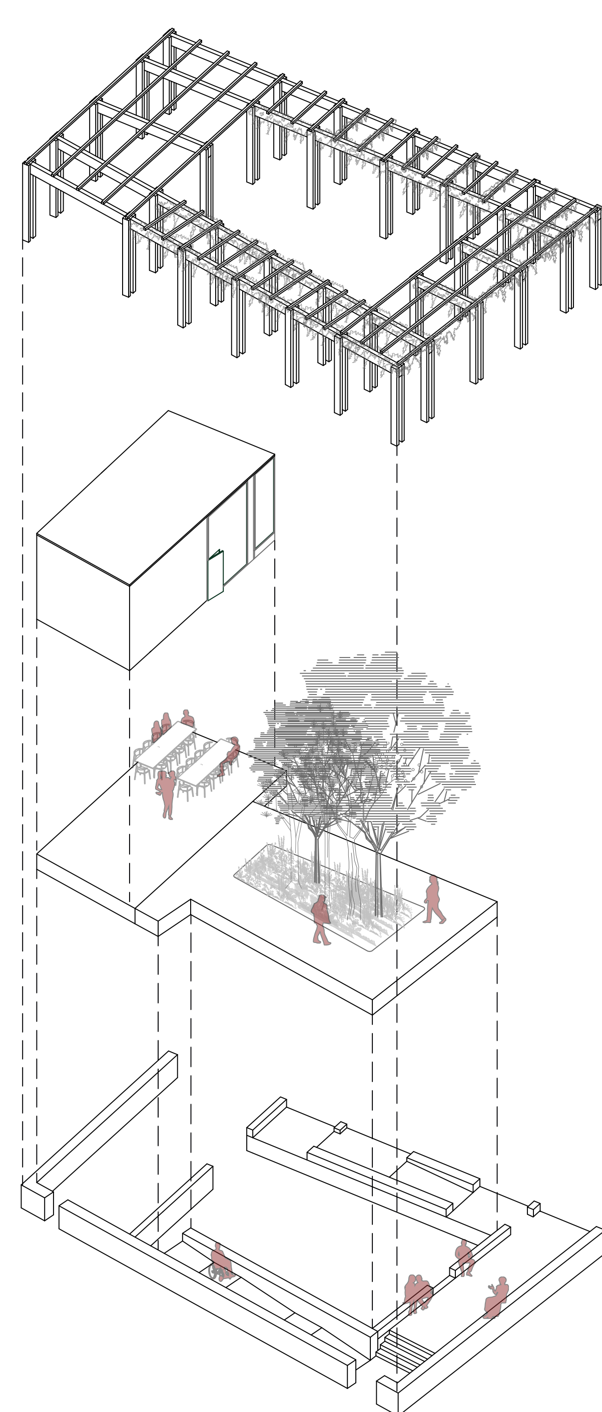

Fig. 135 Axonometric drawing of the northern garden

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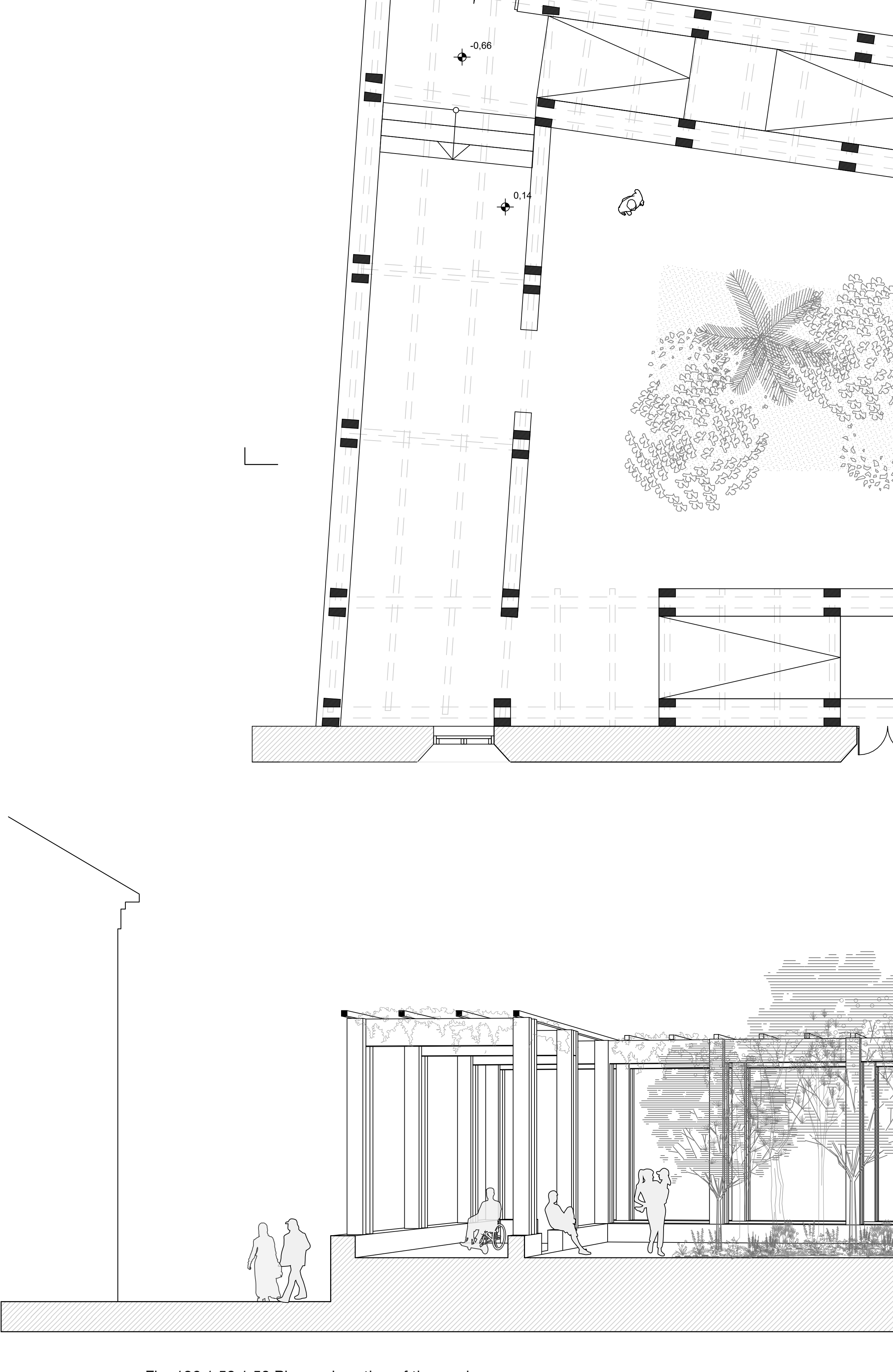

Fig. 136 1:50 1:50 Plan and section of the garden

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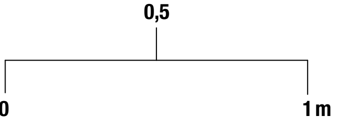
1		*seal, two layers*
	100 mm	*rigid foam thermal insulation*
		vapour barrier
	30 mm	*pine plywood*
	100 x 100 mm	*pine beam, painted dark brown*
	500 x 300 mm	*pine beam, painted dark brown*
2	*4 mm*	*double glasing laminated safety glass*
	6 mm	*aluminium frame*
3	*300 x 150 mm*	*laminated timber column*
	300 mm	*insulation concrete*
4	*70 mm*	*underfloor heating screed smoothened*
	30 mm	*thermal insulation*
	250 mm	*reinforced concrete slab*
		PE foil as seperation layer
	120 mm	*foam glass as perimeter insulation*



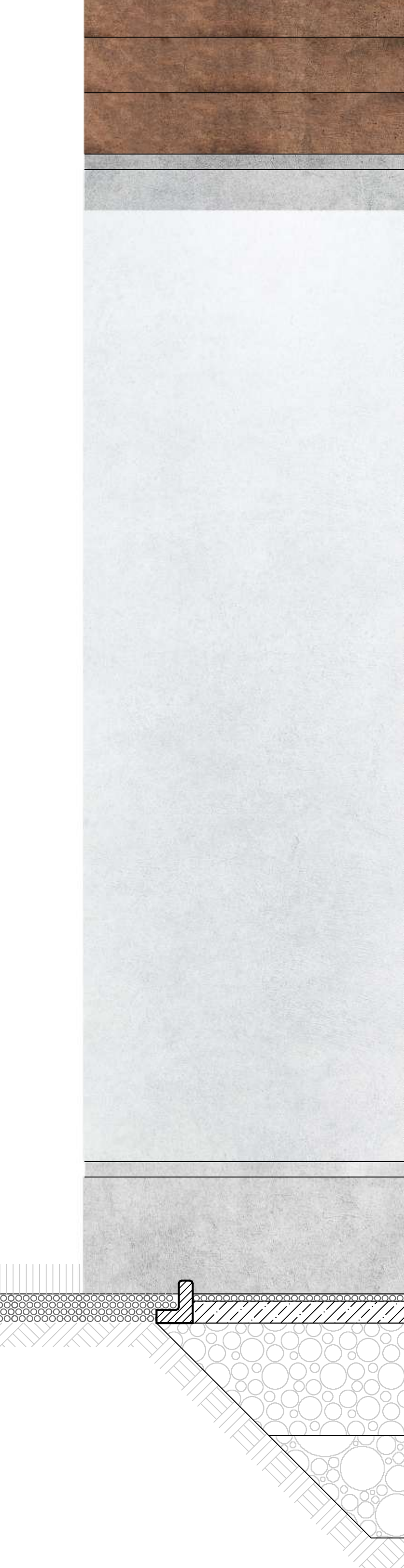


Fig. 137 1:20 Detail Section of the garden

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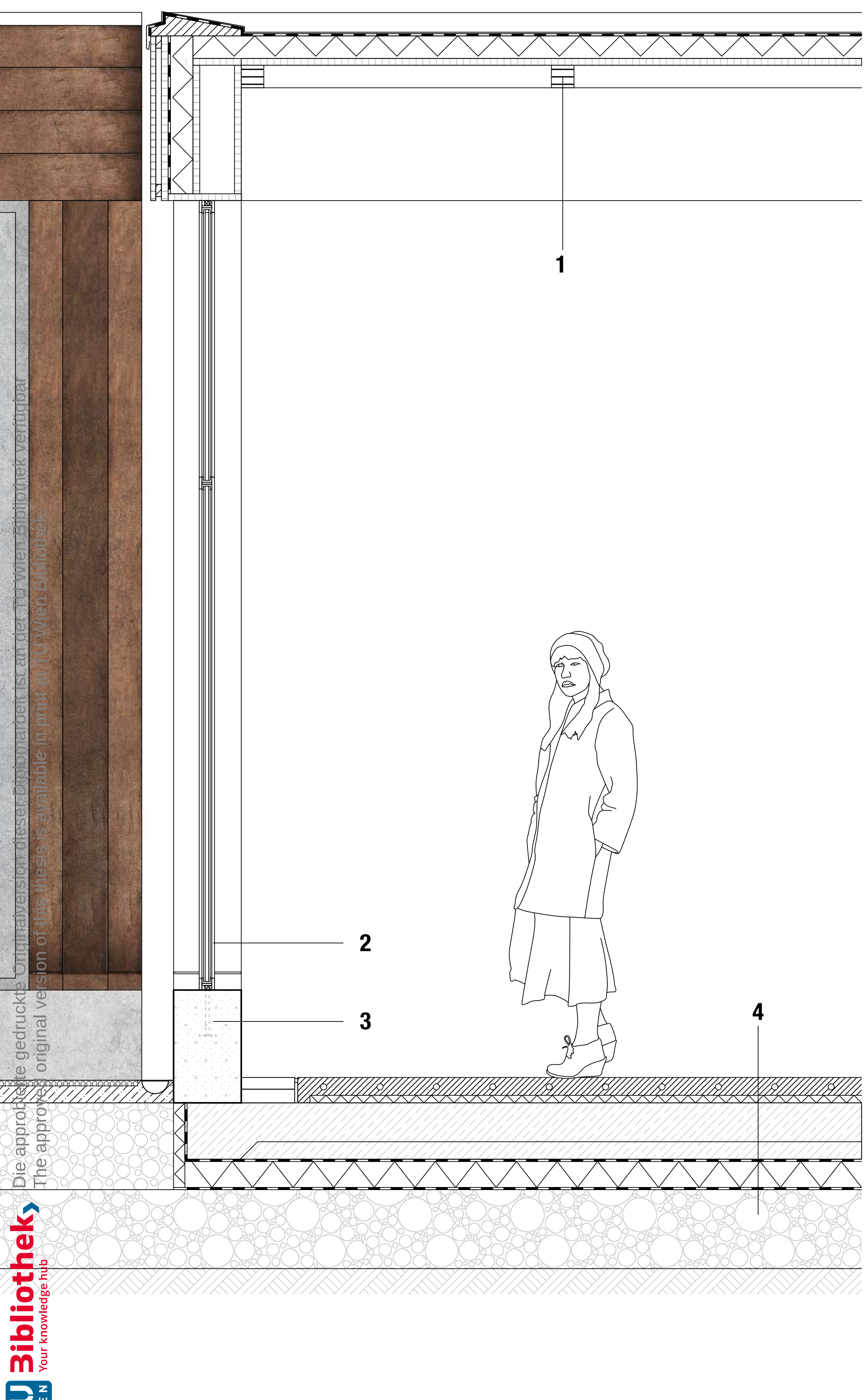

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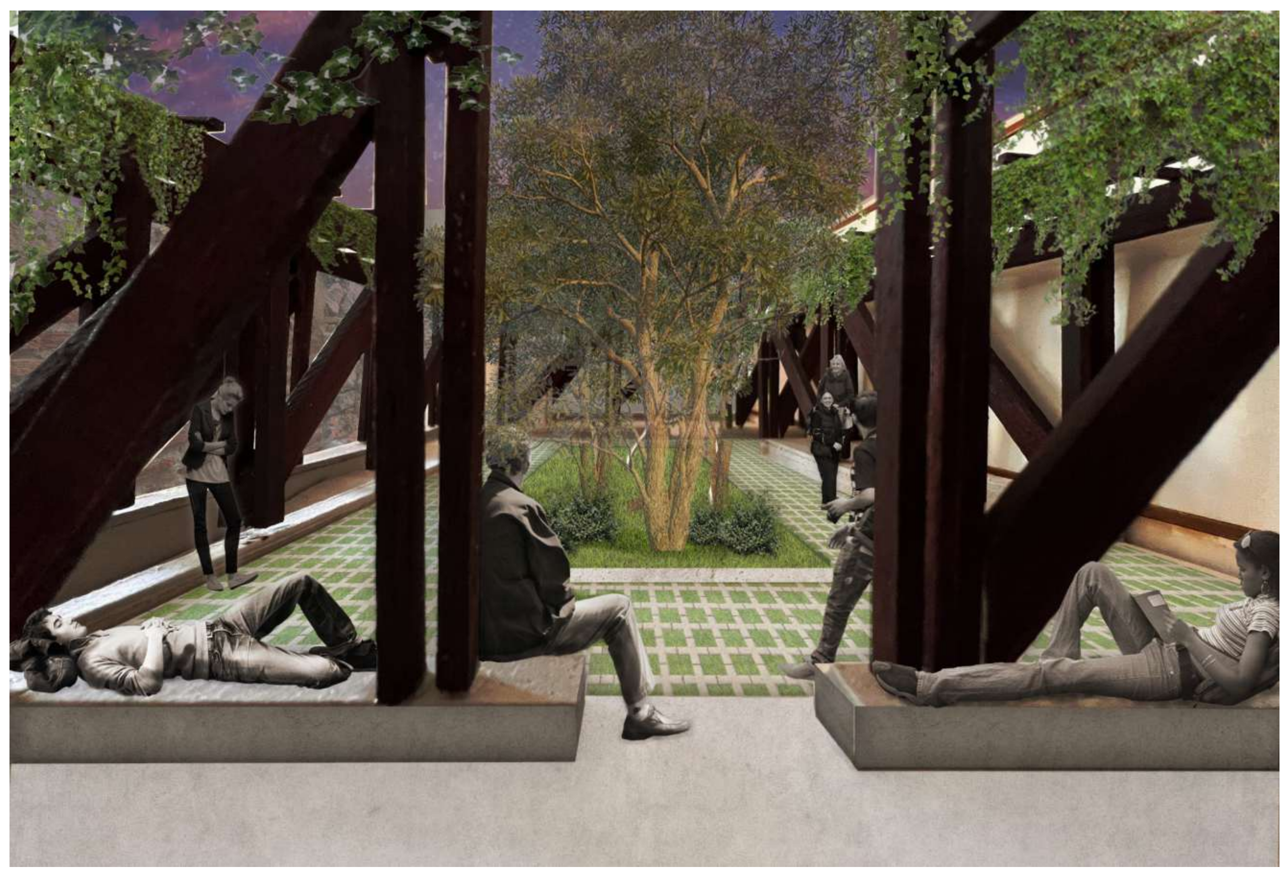

Fig. 138 A view towards the garden

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Fig. 139 Model 1:50

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Conclusion

The idea of the museum as a democratic space, or at least as a symbol of democratization, has been a part of the modern museum since the occupation of Louvre. However, these ideals did not prevent the museum from becoming an active agent of nationalistic political ambitions and desires to construct a homogenous identity. Rather, they became cultural institutions responsible for the mediation of a national image in the materialization of the national ‘pride’.

Towards the turn of the last century, with the emergence of the neoliberal economic system, the image-making potential of the museum extended itself to a generalized cultural strategy. As we have seen, new museums with monumental architectures have arisen to contribute to the leisure economy by promoting diverse heritage products. The excessive amount of new museums in the last few decades created a limitless field for spatial experimentation and mediation of stories, increasing the intensity of the visitor experience. Thus, the constraints of the market economy and identity politics [de]democratized the museum space, even though “diversity, participation and innovation” (Sternfeld 2018) succeeded to find a stable place in contemporary museum practice.

From this particular point of view, we saw that the Jewish museums appeared as spaces that both challenged and materialized the intentions of such cultural strategies. While emerging as spaces that rectified national myths and legitimized identities, the contradictions of Jewish spaces challenge the political agendas to be questioned and modified. The “otherness” (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020) of Jewish spaces incorporates new perspectives on our national histories and invites us to “unlearn” (Sternfeld 2018) the narratives that are engraved in our historical consciousness. In these terms, we can see that the exoticness of the Jewish culture does not actually derive from the mere fact that it is a minority culture, but rather the way it contradicts and disputes the hegemony of the majority culture. On the other hand, as we moved between the ‘aura’ and ‘Objekeffekt’ (Sternfeld 2018), it became clear that the exoticness of cultural artifacts displayed in (Jewish) museums are objects that are ‘out of place’, thriving for the interest of the identity-free tourist within the market economy. These different meanings of exoticness, a significant element for cultural representations in our cultural artifacts displayed in (Jewish) museums are objects that are ‘out of place’, thriving for the interest of the identity-free tourist within the market economy. These different meanings of exoticness, a significant element for cultural representations in our institutions, prove that

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exoticization is a wide-spread practice in European museums which in many cases takes away the possibility of self-representation of marginalized groups, described by Ruth Ellen Gruber in the Jewish case as 'Judaica minus the Jews' (Gruber 2002). Thus, it is laid clear that [de]exoticization is a necessity for the democratization process of the museum space.

With these arguments on my mind, through visiting different Jewish sites and museums in Spain and across Europe, I have witnessed how the theoretical discussions on identity work are being materialized, in which the opportunistic narrative and collective memory exploitation surfaces within narratives that are geographically distanced but strategically aligned. Nevertheless, throughout this journey I also came across many -as I would like to call- memory activists, who despite all the odds intend to share their knowledge to build up a widespread, multi-layered remembering practice in Spain.

Verifying the gained theoretical knowledge on the field as a social practice contributed to a multidisciplinary understanding of the site I worked in as an architect and encouraged to bring together the physical and socio-spatial consciousness closer to one another.

I reconfigured mentally and visually the Sephardic Museum of Toledo, the site of interest, as a vivid example of an institution that is born out of the political agenda of a 'democracy' and contradictory history of a "converso legacy" (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020) which is carved in the Synagogue of the Transit's architecture.

The Synagogue of the Transit questions Spanish national myths by its very existence, even though it is instrumentalized to legitimize them. The physical traces in the architecture of the synagogue materialize "expropriation, violence, conversion, accommodation, and survival" of the post 1492-era (Flesler and Pérez Melgosa 2020: 162), directing the attention of a careful eye to different "wrappings" (2020:163) of the building: the synagogue, the Church of San Benito, the Chapel of the Transit, the museum of the Francoist era or the museum of a thriving democracy.

In any case, these contradicting wrappings bear the potential of the emergence of a "para-museum", as Nora Sternfeld conceptualizes (2018: 55). It is a museum that contradicts itself by being strongly traditional and institutional, but also, revolutionary, and critical. Hence, the design experiments and proposals as a result of the research process explores this duality by configuring spatial situations in which the complexity of the museum's architecture and collection is revealed. Within this framework, the space acts as a pedagogical device that supports an open and reflexive

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narrative, cultivating experiences that attempt to change our culture of remembering.

In these terms, the design interferes with the existing architecture through a curatorial process, in which the pedagogical intentions are put into a spatial practice following the examples of architects and designers such as Carlos Scarpa, Frederick Kiesler and Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Along its pedagogical intentions, the proposal also addresses design issues such as accessibility of the premises and flexibility of the display in order to put the critical and democratic aims of the institution in practice. However, within the design process it had also became clear, that intervening in the physical space alone is not sufficient to accelerate the process of 'unlearning'. The space and our interventions as architects can become agents for transmitting pedagogical intensions that might challenge the solidified historical narratives; yet an extended curatorial concept upon the exhibition and space is indispensable for an effective mediation.

All in all, the proposed research and design project for the Sephardic Museum of Toledo raises questions on how democratized our cultural institutions are and brings forth the doubts about the sincerity of the 'reflexive turn' (Sommer 2013) that they have undertaken over the last decades as a result of the pressure of decolonial, feminist and pluralistic voices. Moreover, the research also showcases the importance of space as a cultural agent and how it is instrumentalized to transmit certain political intensions. The findings prove that [de]exoticizing the museum space is a necessity in order to democratize our culture, and it is a process that still has to be undertaken by our institutions, despite centuries-long battles in the name of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité.*

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