

# MACHADO DE CASTRO NATIONAL MUSEUM 1999-2013, Coimbra – Portugal

**Client** IMC – Instituto dos Museus e da Conservação

**Engineering** BETAR, Estudos e Projectos de Estabilidade (structure), Galvão Teles (HVAC), Joule (electricity), Grade Ribeiro (services), COMPUTGÁS (gas), QUARTA, Lda (health and safety), Fernando Pinho (historic preservation)

**Contractor** Edifer

**Photography** Duccio Malagamba

The *Machado de Castro* National Museum is located at the *Alta de Coimbra*, in one of the highest points of the hill, and its history goes back to more than 2000 years ago.

The museum stands, in fact, on an artificial platform composed by the cryptoporticus built halfway through I Century as the podium of the Forum of Aeminium (Coimbra's Roman name). After a long period of abandon, in the XI Century the site hosted the Bishops' Palace. Documentation can be found starting in 1083 related to the existence of the church of *São João de Almedina*, and half a century later of the cloister, a portion of which is still conserved inside the museum. During the XII Century, a new church was built, to replace the primitive, but around 1416 the Bishops' Palace is supposed to have been abandoned, probably due to the gradual decay of the construction and seismic episodes. At the end of the XVI Century, new interventions were made including the loggia attributed to Filippo Terzi, connecting the two wings of the palace and designing a balcony towards the city.

Within two millennia history that the site accumulates, there are many stories intersected. The archaeological site shows us, not one, but several buildings that remained overlapped or crossed, generating misunderstandings, hesitations or sometimes fantastic and beautiful revelations. The lucid acceptance of contemporary criticism of these sequences, whence the constant mingling of "container" and "content," is the primary feature of the project in order to correct the rupture of scale and historical context caused by sometimes random juxtapositions. The new museum tries to recover the dimension of the public space of the Roman Forum, reinforcing the valences of daily permanence and use, without neglecting the limitations and constraints necessary to museum areas.

Two elemental volumes define a flooded neutral space, illuminated by diffuse light to show the temporal sequence of the fragments of the 18th century apse of the *Tesoureiro* Chapel. The gallery occupies the entire volume of the trapezoidal shape, rising to four levels and creating a platform (the terrace of the restaurant) where it lays the rectangular volume of transparent and translucent glass that at night becomes a sort of lantern light. The lower volume adapts to the existing layout of the streets, the stone cladding is not mimetic, but consistent with the solid matter of the surrounding buildings; implantation repeats the settlement solution, morphological and hierarchical originally tied to the cryptoporticus of the Roman Forum. The experience of space is revealed as a condenser of the surrounding city, explained around the visit by similarities, analogies or contrasting perspectives of the city itself and its centuries-old history in a unified perception of beauty.

