

TEATRUM BALBI GADITANUS

A precise intervention in the history of Tomás Carranza and Javier Montero

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Cadiz is the oldest city in the West. And the most beautiful and the most universal. Not in vain, from Caesar Augustus, before becoming emperor, to Goya to capture some paintings in the Santa Cueva for which Haydn composed a wonderful oratorio. From Mutis to leave the city a splendid Botanical Garden. From Zurbarán to fill with interior light the clothes of his monks to Vicente Acero to raise an incredible marine Cathedral. And Falla to soak the air of Cadiz with modern music. A city founded by the Phoenicians in 1,100 BC.

Did you know that the people of Cadiz are Roman citizens by birth? When Caesar was foretold by the oracle of the Temple of Hercules that he was going to be emperor, Caesar promised and did so, that when he became emperor he would grant the citizens of Cadiz Roman citizenship. If I had been born in Cadiz I would have claimed it, since no one has repealed that decree.

Did you know that the Gaditans wrote their laws in verse? Strabo tells how the inhabitants of Tartessos, who were the most cultured of the Iberians, "used to put their laws in verse since ancient times". And these were the Andalusians of Cadiz.

Did you know that Cadiz had given a mayor, Enio, to Rome?

For this city, so cultured, had and has hidden in its entrails a Teatrum Balbi Gaditanus. A theater in the image and likeness of the theater that Balbo ordered to be built in Rome. A theater whose spectators were cradled by the murmur of the waves of the Atlantic Ocean that surrounded it. And where the actors recited the verses of Plautus and Terence, looking out to sea. And this theater, with the passing of the centuries, has been buried by the constructions that have been erected there between ignorance and oblivion.

Well, here, in this magical place, two wonderful architects from Cádiz, Tomás Carranza and Javier Montero, have carried out a first class architectural operation to create an Interpretation Center of the Roman Theater of Cádiz.

They had already acted in the immaculate cavea with great delicacy. They had enhanced the toral gallery, made entirely of stone, by means of the light that they took through the vomitoriums converted into skylights. And a simple concrete floor. All pure essence. All pure beauty. And outside, a simple wooden structure.

Here, in this new performance, it would seem that our architects have gone through the twists and turns of history to, after assimilating it, with a very modern language, bring to light some spaces of great beauty. They have known as expert surgeons, cutting here, cutting there, extracting there, making visible this Teatrum Balbi Gaditanus, as they like to call it.

On the existing buildings, some of them recently restored like the Posada del Mesón, they have managed to make visible what was almost invisible. As if it were a miracle. They have created a kind of street, paved with stone cobblestones, and with white walls and ceilings that give the place a special luminosity. The drawing of the street, far from spatial temptations of transparencies and continuities, follows a sinuous layout much more suggestive and appropriate for that situation. On the walls, sometimes translucent glass elements where to place both artificial light and some explanatory systems. When the floor is no longer a street, the pavement is made of wood. All with great naturalness and precision.

In the streets, periodically appear on the ground some glass circles that let us see through some Indian wells, in the depths, what was previously invisible in the theater: the scenae frons and the orchestra. With such dimensions that we can see them very well and almost touch them. But above all we must emphasize the ability to achieve a global vision of the entire theater with a mechanism as simple and ingenious as this one. Below appears a continuum that makes us believe the story.

And at the highest point, after climbing a flight of stairs or a stone ramp, a large eye from which to contemplate the cavea, which retains the shape of the original arch existing at that point. There we feel fully in the heart of this Teatrum Balbi Gaditanus that Tomás Carranza and Javier Montero have returned full of beauty to Cadiz.