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Inaugurated in December 2001, it opens a rich and fascinating cultural and multimedia space inside Palazzo d'Accursio, the 'quasi-castle', the historical seat of the Municipality overlooking Piazza Maggiore, which has always been the centre and heart of Bolognese life.

Under the glass of the Piazza Coperta, one can admire the ancient excavations and the sedimentation of various civilisations in a setting of harmony and light. Centuries of history thus relive, from the first hut settlements of the Villanovan civilisation in the 7th century BC, to Etruscan Felsina, to Roman Bononia founded in 189 BC.

What the northern part of the city palace overlooking Piazza Nettuno has been through the ages is told to us by the archaeological excavations undertaken during the work on the current layout of Salaborsa.

The traces of public and religious buildings and the urban layout testify to the fact that the site has been the centre of gravity of the city's public life since its beginnings. Today's crystal pavement of the Piazza Coperta of about 400 square metres reveals the foundations of a vast building (20-22 metres wide and 70 metres long), which was used for public functions in Roman times. More substantial are the remains dating back to the middle of the 2nd century B.C., evidence of the first decades of the Latin colony's life. The public use of the area was consolidated between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st century B.C., a period to which the construction of the civil basilica of Bononia is dated, a place where citizens met and where justice was administered, the vital fulcrum of the city. Between the first and second wall foundations of the basilica, there are very evident remains of an ancient paving stone or road pavement from the Augustan age. Also interesting is the discovery of three aligned groundwater wells, crude, unlined and still visible, surely intended to serve a large population.

The stratigraphy of the excavations uncovers the transformations that occurred during the Roman period until, between the end of the 5th century and the 7th century A.D., the area underwent increasingly marked phenomena of degradation, from the collapse of structures to the stripping of valuable material. The impoverishment of the area caused a considerable reduction in the number of buildings, until their almost complete disappearance at the beginning of the early Middle Ages.

After faint signs of revival, the area underwent a real revival during the 13th century, marked by the presence of civil buildings of considerable architectural commitment, with the use of valuable materials, built one and a half metres above the Roman ruins. The dwellings belonged mainly to Ghibelline families, including that of Francesco Accursio, son of the

famous jurist. Around 1245, the palace underwent a profound transformation after the demolition of the previous remains and became a large palace of 'robust late-Romanesque architecture' with a portico towards the square, crowned with battlements.

Under the rule of the Visconti family, the palace became a veritable fortified citadel, the headquarters of the troops guarding the fortress. The Visconti were succeeded in 1360 by the papal vicars, including the great diplomat Egidio de Albornoz and Androino de la Roche, who in 1360 bought a complex of 35 houses on the north side of the building to design a large garden surrounded by crenellated and fortified walls, on the model of the papal palace in Avignon. Androino invested large sums in the construction of the *viridarium*, or palace garden, right in the most densely built-up part of the city. Near the garden were stables for the horses and accommodation for the papal palace guard.

The fortress aspect was preserved until 1376, when the city rebelled against the Cardinal Legate and obtained recognition of its autonomy from the Pope, which would be short-lived because in 1401 Giovanni Bentivoglio occupied the piazza and proclaimed himself master of the city.

In the autumn of 1506 Julius II entered Bologna and drove the Bentivoglio family out. Two years later the palace was consolidated as a fortress with the construction of the Torrione towards the Canton de' Fiori. Other significant interventions to the structure took place between 1554 and 1555 by architects Stefano Grandi and Antonio Morandi, who directed the renovation of the interior of the stables and replaced the old pillars with two series of Tuscan columns, giving the place the appearance of a 'basilica'.

In 1568, Ulisse Aldrovandi transformed the Cardinal Legate's *viridarium* into a botanical garden with geometrically shaped flowerbeds modelled on the Giardino dei Semplici in Padua (1545) and the Giardino Pisano (1547). Ulisse Aldrovandi took care of the cultivation of medicinal herbs of medieval classification, considered essential to any good pharmacopoeia.

As custodian of the Botanical Garden for 50 years, he enriched it with exotic species from India, Africa and the Americas: a veritable laboratory of naturalistic experimentation to which the birth of modern botany can be traced.

The layout of the kitchen garden consists of four rectangular parterres with different designs, which contain as many tanks for irrigation. The remains of the cruciform basin, dedicated to the cultivation of aquatic plants, can be seen in the north-west corner of the archaeological excavation. The irrigation system is regulated by the cistern located in the centre of the garden.

In 1587, Francesco Morandi, known as 'il Terribilia', built a delightful Corinthian aedicule above the cistern, which was later moved to the Pinacoteca courtyard in 1886 on the occasion of the construction of the future Sala Borsa.

A replica of the work can be seen today in the courtyard of the well in Palazzo d'Accursio.

In 1765, the Botanical Garden was moved to Via San Giuliano and later, during the Napoleonic period, to its final location on the grounds surrounding the Palazzina della Viola, near Porta San Donato, where the Botanical Garden included in the University Museum System still stands today. The end of the 19th century saw the final transformation of the palace garden and the last acts of the removal of the ancient public garden made way for a grassy courtyard, used for over a century as a training ground for the city's militia and for fire brigade drills.

In 1870, the Municipal Council decided to allocate the part of the garden bordering the side of the present-day Piazza Nettuno to the building of a semicircular structure, the present-day entrance called the Esedra, including some rooms on the ground floor of the Cardinal Legate's summer flats, which would become first a telegraph office and later the Residence of the Royal Post Office.

The use of this part of the city palace as the centre of the city's economic and social life was consolidated under the impetus of the committee promoting the new Sala Borsa project. The Bolognese entrepreneurs in it intend to build a new building in place of the garden, courtyard and cistern for stock exchange trading, market operations and trade.

The initiative also aims to regulate the consolidated use of public spaces and to discourage the Bolognese traders' habit of bargaining outdoors in the Mercato di Mezzo and throughout Piazza Maggiore.

Thus the five-century-old viridarium of the Apostolic Palace was demolished to make way for the then much admired and innovative iron structure of Sala Borsa. Between 1883-1886 the cast iron and glass pavilion was built, which still retains its original basilica-like structure with a vast central body lit by a skylight.

The portico is supported by a series of arches resting on slender cast-iron columns, which support a four-sloping canopy of metal reinforcement. The project, which partly follows the Paris Stock Exchange, is characterised by the extensive use of iron, already used in the skylight roof of the Royal Post Office, and is the work of the firm of Alfredo Cottrau, a French-born Neapolitan, and Paolo Boubée, head of the Italian metal construction company in Naples.

The style of the pavilion is fully in line with the modernist renewal current that affected infrastructure and civil architecture of the time, well represented by the Galleria Umberto I in Naples and the Galleria di Corso Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan.

The use of iron also in the construction of the decorative parts is a slight and ingenious premonition of Art Nouveau taste, clearly identifiable in the small rose window decorations. Some architectural and stylistic anticipations can be traced back to the Viennese secession movement, based on the model of the Post Office Savings Bank in Vienna, designed by Otto Wagner.

The gradual decline in trading and exchanges led to a steady and inexorable fall in the number of visitors to Sala Borsa and led to the definitive closure of the operating offices in 1903.

Later, between 1917 and 1920, during the years of the socialist administration of Mayor Francesco Zanardi, Sala Borsa housed an economic restaurant, some bank branches of the Cassa di Risparmio and an office of the National Tourist Board agency.

In the early 1920s, the Cassa di Risparmio obtained the use of the entire hall with adjoining premises from the municipality for a period of 50 years. The intention was to expand and revalue the building to make it once again a privileged place for transactions and exchanges. In 1924, work began on the construction of the second and third galleries by engineer Francesco Tassoni, which run around the covered square in perfect harmony with the existing order of offices.

The new structure also features two splendid underground rooms with stucco decorations and Art Nouveau paintings, enhanced by transparent glass illuminating the paintings in the coffered ceiling. It is one of the first examples of a reinforced concrete structure built in Bologna, very innovative in the field of construction. Its authorship is still uncertain, but is traditionally attributed to the Bolognese architect Edoardo Collamarini, although the hypothesis of a collaboration between the most qualified professionals of the time is more credible. The inauguration of the Sala Borsa aroused considerable interest and a large number of Bolognese attended the ceremony, which took place solemnly on 17 July 1926 in the presence of the Minister of Finance, Count Volpi di Misurata. Work continued until 1930, when the underground reservoir of the cistern, designed in 1587 by Pietro Fiorini on the northern side of the viridarium, was transformed into a vaulted room for use by the bank.

After World War II and until the 1960s, the indoor square was transformed into a modern sports hall, hosting basketball games and even boxing matches. While normal business operations take place during the day, in the evenings the custodians clean the floor and set up the baskets for the teams' training sessions. On match days, the side parterre and galleries fill up with fans and the covered square becomes a veritable lion's den. Inside the Torrione del Canton dei Fiori, the old north side of the palace fortress, the first and perhaps only Teatro Stabile dei Burattini, the famous 'Teatrén di buratén', directed by Demetrio Presini, was inaugurated in 1976.

Later, the building became the seat of the administrative offices of the Municipality of Bologna. The first redevelopments of the Sala Borsa area were part of the larger redevelopment project known as the Piazza Maggiore Urban Park, which in 1999 marked a significant turning point in the use of the covered square as a place dedicated to culture.

The latest renovation of Sala Borsa respects the layout of the pre-existing architecture and the stratification of buildings that has formed over seven centuries of urban history. Today, in the excavations visible beneath the glass, the path back in time winds its way along the walkway hanging from the structure and guides us along a highly evocative and fascinating historical route. From the mighty wall parameter of the renaissance cistern of Terribilia, stepping over the paving stones and foundations of the Roman basilica, skirting the wall of the medieval tower house, one glimpses the star-shaped basin that stood in the centre of the garden,

testifying once again to the centrality of the place in its new destination as a library, a piazza of knowledge and contemporary multi-media culture.

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