



Introduction: Castles



Between the 9th and 10th centuries, the new invasions that were threatening Europe, led the powerful feudal lords to build castles and fortresses on inaccessible heights, at the borders of their territories, along the main roads and rivers' fords, or above narrow valleys or near bridges. The defense of property and of the rural populations from marauding invaders, however, was not the only need during those times: the widespread banditry, the local guerrillas between towns and villages that were disputing territories and powers, and the general political crisis, that invested the unguided Italian kingdom, have forced people to seek safety and security near the forts. Fortified villages, that could accommodate many families, were therefore built around castles. Those people were offered shelter in exchange of labor in the owner's lands. Castles eventually

were turned into fortified villages, with the lord's residence, the peasants homes and all the necessary to the community life. When the many threats gradually ceased, castles were built in less endangered places to bear witness to the authority of the local lords who wanted to brand the territory with their power, which was represented by the security offered by the fortress and garrisons.

Over the centuries, the castles have combined several functions: territory's fortress and garrison against invaders and internal uprisings ; warehouse to gather and protect the crops; the place where the feudal lord administered justice and where horsemen and troops lived. They were utilised, finally, as the lord's and his family residence, apartments, which were gradually enriched, both to live with more ease, and to make a good impression with friends and distinguished guests who often stayed there. Their size varied according to the importance of the castle, the lord's wealth and the number of servants and soldiers who were housed. The first castles consisted mainly of a vaguely circular ditch, that enclosed a small hillock on which the excavation soil was accumulated. This terrain was reinforced with stones and timber and formed a hillock, from 5 to 20 m high, on which a wooden tower (the keep) was built. The moat whose walls were often covered with timber, to prevent landslides, could be made more dangerous by planting sharp-pointed poles on the bottom. A wooden bridge which could be removed or lifted, secured the passage between the inside and the outside.



Close to the inner ditch's bank, it was eventually began to raise a logs palisade, often reinforced by higher corner towers, from which the archers could target the attackers. If the latter were able to cross the ditch and break down or climb over the fence, the besieged could still seek refuge in the tall and



strong tower as extreme defense. The keep was equipped with slits to throw darts and well supplied with food and water to resist for long periods of time. Over time, castles' structure evolved; the wooden constructions were replaced by massive stone walls and the moat, if it existed, was widened and the drawbridge appeared. High and mighty towers defended the access, which was already protected by sturdy doors and iron gates. Around castles, just beyond their walls, developed villages. They were inhabited by servants' families and the many artisans who worked at the manor: carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, locksmiths,

armors and weapons manufacturers, tailors, potters, wagon wheels makers, barrels, crockery, but also clerics for the liturgical services, pages, wool spinners, staplers, allotment farmers and help cooks, dishwashers, maids etc.

The village also hosted a small local market, and, a little further, just beyond the fields, there could be other buildings such as folds, mills, sheds and farm implements and wagons. Over the two hundred years since their first appearance, castles changed profoundly. They became bigger and stronger and often had a tower complex, with round corner towers (which ensured a better view of the defenders), up to 30-35 meters high and three or four floors. The keep was often surrounded by a second internal moat, while a second drawbridge could isolate it from the rest of the castle.

To make it simple, if attackers were able to penetrate into the castle, they would have found inside a second keep: higher, stronger and practically impregnable. The outer circle's walls could be 4 meters thick (six feet for the keep's wall) and be formed by two walls of large hewn stone, with a space between the walls filled with rubble and concrete, and reinforced by piece iron chains. It should be noted that the term "castle", in Friuli, do not indicate a village defended by walls in which only a small portion is paid to the mansion with an exclusively military structures (formwork), but it refers to a fortified complex inhabited by a noble family whose features are distinctly military and defensive.

The mighty and complex Friulian defensive system, was aimed to defend the outlets of the Tagliamento, the Natisone, the Soca, against the dangers from the east and the north-south. They also controlled communications, as well as defending Friuli from the dangers coming from the sea.

They were spread all over the plain as to defend the inner streets and fords, which were of major strategic and commercial importance. Each complex is an original unique and unrepeatable building. The castles were not the result of a predetermined project, carried out within a few years, but the result of a secular growth.



Each fort was built, modified and, if damaged or destroyed, rebuilt in a different period and, sometimes, transformed, especially in the plains and on the hills, into villas, mansions or offices or farms.

The castles that were built on the mountains instead, with the advent of the Venetian's supremacy and the increased use of artillery, lost many defensive functions, and were often abandoned, especially if located in inaccessible positions.

Many of those castles are still privately owned, and others, especially the most important are property of the State, the Region or of Commons. Some retain certain residential functions or are uninhabited, others are reduced to fascinating ruins, still capable of evoking the echoes of a glorious past, despite the sense of deep melancholy that remains. Others have been converted into restaurants, hotels, wineries, museums. Each one is worth visiting, even only from the outside, to appreciate the architectural features and ideally relive the complex historical events.

The route: the province of Gorizia

Fortress of Monfalcone

Coordinates: 45.811213, 13.537345

Zone: Plain

The site is reachable by: road



The fortress stands on the summit of Mount Falcon (the name was given because of its strategic location and because the Mountain is frequented by these birds of prey) from which the town below, famous for its shipyards, takes its name. The site was certainly a castelliere and was later converted by the Romans into a lookout post to guard Via Gemina, that from Aquileia led to Tergeste. During the empire's last phase, it was constantly under the threat of barbarian invasions. The real fortress was probably built by Teodorico, king of the Ostrogoths, who defeated

the emperor Odoacre in 409 on the Isonzo. It was later occupied by the Lombards and Franks feudal lords, who moved many families of Slavic settlers, through the banks of the Sava and Drava, to make them work and crop the barren and abandoned lands.

The fortress then passed under the dominion of the Patriarchate of Aquileia, and was the object of contention between the Patriarch and the Count of Gorizia until 1420, when Monfalcone was conquered by the Venetian Republic. From 1471 to 1477, the defensive line on the Isonzo has once again been subjected to test by the pressure of the Turks, but the fortress of Monfalcone always constituted a bulwark and a providential refuge for the survivors.

Because of the fortress's strategic location, which earned it the nickname of "eye of Friuli".

The Serenissima, during his long reign, constantly provided the fort with new defensive structures: the walls have been repaired and equipped with a guard rail, moats have been restored, the ancient central artifact has been landed and replaced by a massive square tower; the garrison has been increased.

At the end of the 16th century the fortress lost its defensive function, due to the construction of the fortress of Palmanova, and thus became a lookout post on the eastern borders of the Republic. With the Treaty of Campoformido, on October 17, 1797,

the fortress passed to Austria, under which it remained until the First World War, when, on June 9, 1915, it was occupied by Italian troops. Due to the harsh battles that were fought in this important front, part of it was severely damaged but was restored between 1950 and 1955. From March 30 1970, it is the seat of the Paleontology Museum, in which are exposed over ten thousand historical-scientific exhibits.

Of that ancient defensive system very little remains. The defensive circular wall (bounded by the remains of a pre-Roman castelliere), within which stands the square tower. The tower is divided into three floors, which house cramped premises in order to ensure that the total defense; between the tower and the walls there was a covered gallery and a premises for the garrison, while in the courtyard are still visible two wells built in different periods, one of which draws from an internal reservoir where rainwater is collected. At the top, on one side of the fortress, stands the Lion of St. Mark with the Gospel open, as evidence of the Venetian rule.



The fortress is always open on the outside.

The Paleontological Museum is open in the following hours.

From September to April: all holidays (except Christmas Day and Easter) from 10.00 to 12.00 and from 14.00 to 17.00

From May to July: all public holidays from 10.00 to 12.00 and from 16.00 to 19.00

The Castle of Gorizia

Coordinates: 45.944055, 13.627907

Zone: City

The site is reachable by: road



The Castle of Gorizia (from the Slovenian word “Gorica”, which means “mound”), dates back to the 11th century and overlooks the city as well as the surrounding area. On the hill, in Roman times, it was probably established a military lookout post, but the first castle structures are from the 11th century and almost certainly date back to the period of Emperor Ottone III of Saxony. Subsequently, in 1117, it passed to the House of Eppensteins, who appeared in 1060 with the title of Counts. It is likely that a series of defensive structures like a rampart, a ditch, a stockade, have

preceded the construction of the stone keep, which was further expanded during the 13th century with the addition of a two floors building. In this period, a borough (medieval sources cite it as the “above ground”, in which administrative and judicial functions took place) was certainly present outside the fence that provided a defensive barrier. Residents had the obligation to build masonry houses exclusively and defend the First World War, during which it was castle in case of attack. As time passed, the castle was made more and more suitable for the defense, while the Counts increased their political and military prestige widening their domains in South Tyrol and Istria.

At the end of 1340, Patriarch Bertrando St. Genesio tried to occupy Gorizia and stormed the castle, but, because of the weather inclemency on Christmas Day, he was forced to remove the camp and lead his soldiers towards Belgrade and Latisana. The familiar and military turnovers and the various alliances, brought the county near the imperial power. In 1500, after Leonardo’s death, who was the last Count of Gorizia, the feud was hired by Maximilian I of Habsburg Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, who reinforced its defenses but lost the fort that, in 1508, for a short period, fell into Venetian hands.

During the war between France and the Empire, the castle was occupied alternately by the two armies. In 1813 it was occupied again the Austrians, who remained there until the end. During its turbulent historical events and the many changes it went through, the manor has gradually lost its Medieval appearance. In the 30s of the last century it was the subject of a philological restoration that restored its pentagonal shape and the overall appearance that characterized it in the 16th century.



The castle’s core is the “Court dei Lanzi”(ie the armed guards who served the lord), the central courtyard, where you can still see the remains of the old tower that was demolished in the 16th century, because it was considered too vulnerable to artillery. There’s also the large well for water supply. Inside the massive walls, guarded by six semi-cylindrical towers, the various environments of the castle retain the original furniture: a small dining room and a kitchen furnished with tables, sideboards and late medieval dishes; the Knights’ Hall houses the Museum of the Middle Ages of Gorizia, where you will find interesting handcrafted reproductions of the weapons used in that period; the Count’s Hall,

and the Hall of the Provincial States; the music Room, which accommodates perfect reproductions of ancient instruments whose melodies can be listened to with modern technology; the small and precious palace chapel dedicated to St. Bartolomeo.

Opening hours:

All year from 10.00 to 19.00 (Closed on Mondays)

Castle of San Floriano

Coordinates: 45.982403, 13.587213

Zone: hill

The site is reachable by: road



The hill, on which the castle of San Floriano stands (from the name of a Roman legionary, who was martyred on the banks of the Danube and whose cult in Friuli, where he's considered the protector against fire, dates back to the 7th century), was certainly inhabited since the early centuries of the Christian era, as evidenced by the findings of ancient walls and numerous coins and Roman artifacts. The castle had been a patriarchal possession since the 11th century, but it was first mentioned in a document dated 1170-1190, concerning the abbess of the Benedictine monastery of Santa Maria d'Aquileia, to which the manor was then subject. The first owners were

probably the Ungrispach, whose origins go back at least to 1180. In 1520 it was sold to the Vinciguerra Formentini of Cividale, who made many restoration work to make it suitable for residence.

The castle was part of a broader defensive imperial system, which had as its cornerstones in Gorizia, Gradisca and then continued on the Collio with the castles of Quisca, San Martino, Castel Dobra and many others. It was involved in 17th-century war of Gradisca fought between Venice and the empire. In 1616, due to its strategic position, it was attacked and occupied by the Albanians soldiers led by the Venetians, who then could easily control the pitch between the hills of San Martino and Gorizia. On that occasion, the venetian troops found in the castle's cellars "three hundred barrels of exquisite wine". Thanks to a drawing made in 1609, we know that the manor was composed of a main building, home of the feudal lord, some smaller houses and a church surrounded by crenellated walls and interspersed with strong towers.

Once deprived of its military importance, during the eighteenth century, in 1860 it was transformed into a residence by Baron Giuseppe Formentini, whose descendants still own the property. The building suffered serious damages during the two world wars and of the original edifice only a some walls sections remain: the northern entrance and two cylindrical towers.



Inside the watchtower there's a large well preserved fireplace dating from the seventeenth century. The castle hosts "The Museum of Wine and peasant life ", which displays artifacts and materials related to viticulture (farming implements for vine cultivation, wine production and its by-products, bottles, flasks, documents and photos) and has a specialized library.

The Castle of Spessa (Capriva del Friuli)

Coordinates: 45.947853, 13.504558

Zone: hill

The site is reachable by: road



The castle of Spessa (whose name derives from the Latin “silva spissa” as to indicate the rich vegetation surrounding the place) was built around a watchtower erected by the Romans and later used by the Lombards, due to the strategic location of the site. The Roman Empire collapse, sanctioned the downfall of these territories, so that, at the end of the ninth century, the Patriarchs of Aquileia brought many Slavic settlers to repopulate the desolate and uncultivated countryside. Spessa has experienced several important historical moments: in 1420, it was ruled by the Venetian Republic until it was finally attributed

to the Habsburgs in 1528. Historical sources confirm that in the fifteenth century, the castle was the home of the Ratscha de Rausser, a Germanic family who settled in Gorizia in the 15th century. In 1575 it became part of the goods brought as dowry by the daughter of Giuseppe Rassauer, Giovanna, who married Count Sigismondo Della Torre-Valvassina.

Over the following centuries, the property has been broken up and sold to various noble families of the area until it was purchased by Rodolfo Voekl from Trieste who restored the castle with the architect Roger Berlam, which operated according to Neo-Gothic canons, as testifies the embattled tower and mullioned window made of polychrome stone, attached to the body of the building and crowned by rich moldings. Another architectural recovery was made by Senator Salvatore Segre, who had purchased the property in 1925 and hosted famous Italian politicians and aristocrats. During the Great War, the castle of Spessa became the headquarters of the Italian military (Marshal Cadorna and Marshal Diaz have stayed in the castle during their visits to the front on the Carso), while in the course of World War II it was occupied by German troops, who used the bunker, built in the 1930s, as a refuge and storage. At the end of the conflict, the son of Senator Segre, George, transformed the property into a vineyard. The current owner is the Friulan entrepreneur Loretto Pali. Despite its long history, and precisely because of the turbulent historical phases and subsequent rearrangements, there are few remaining elements of the original structure besides the walls located on the western side of the building and the wine-cellars dug into rock in the Middle Ages.



The Castle of Cormons

Coordinates: 45.967319, 13.476448

Zone: hill

The site is reachable by: staircase or mule

The town of Cormons certainly has pre-Roman origins, as evidenced by the many findings in the area. It is assumed that the name derives from the Celtic word “carmo” which means weasel, or from “kar”, which means rock (hence Carnia). During the Roman Empire, on Mount Quarin, existed a castrum which was part of the long chain of signaling posts (it was built in the 2nd century AD after the invasions of the Quadi and Marcomanni) that stretched until Rome, and maintained the continuity of reports based on fires. During the fifth century, the hill probably offered refuge to the local population fleeing from the raids of the barbarians. The fortress was conquered by the Lombards in the late sixth century, and was referred to as “Castrum Cormones” by Paul Diacono. Along with the forts of Nimis, Osoppo, Arte-

gna, Gemona, Ragogna and Ibligine made up a Lombards defensive system against the Avars' invasion. In 628, as a consequence of the complex theological and political controversy known as "the Three Chapters Schism", the patriarch of Aquileia, Fortunato, moved to Cormòns, which was safer, not too far from Aquileia and still tied to the ownership of the province. His hosted with him many sacred treasures; Cormòns was patriarchal seat for more than a century, from 628 to 737, the year in which the patriarch Calisto moved the seat in Cividale, home of the Lombard dukes and a flourishing center of city life. Since then, and for many years, the castle was abandoned and became a criminals' den, but it probably offered people shelter during the Hungarians incursions, between 9th and 10th centuries. As a result of these new invasions, even in Cormons, as in



the whole Friuli, new defensive structures were constructed. They were called "cente", and their remains are still visible in the urban structure of the city center. Following the donation made by Ottone II to Patriarch Rodoaldo, the castle on Mount Quarin became a Church fief and, because of its military importance as well as the closeness to important roads crucial to trade and pilgrims, this fortress was often reason of disputes between the Counts of Gorizia and the Patriarchs. Only on January 27, 1202 it finally resulted a peace agreement which was signed in the church of St. Quirinus. The fighting continued until 1286 when the castle became undisputed domain of Gorizia where it remained until 1497, when it was sold with a trade-in, to Maximilian of Austria who then gave it to Simone Ungrispach, a descendant of a family that had already taken place in the goods.

With the passage of the entire County to the Habsburgs in 1500, Cormons increased its strategic importance so much so that in 1508 the fort underwent yet another assault by the Serenissima: Bartolomeo d' Alviano, with 10,000 men of the Venetian army, stormed and raided the entire village. The fortress defensive walls, which represents a threat to the nearby border of the Venetian Republic, were demolished. The destruction was then continued by the locals and provided building material. With many ups and downs, Cormòns remained under the Venetian rule until 1616 when on September 6, following the results of the War of Gradisca, it returned into imperial hands and was abandoned altogether, ending up in ruins. The current state of the ancient defenses still offers a testimony of what was a past rich in strives and contentions: the ditches are still visible as well as the defensive walls, part of the keep and the fortress itself.

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The Castle of Trussio (Dolegna del Collio)

Coordinates: 45.992191, 13.469249

Zone: hill

The site is reachable by: road

The castle of Trussio (whose name is to reconnect at the Indo-European word "trusin", which means reed) is located halfway up Mount Ruttars, in the municipality of Dolegna del Collio. Its origin is unknown, but it is assumed that not too far from the castle there was a tower, built near the place where once stood a Roman watchtower. The first historical source, dates back to 1257, when his master, Ghislardo of Fratta, had to leave the castle conquered by Mainardo, Count of Gorizia, who was fighting against the patriarch Gregorio da Montelongo. During this feat of arms, the castle was set on fire, but soon after, in the same year, it was reconquered and rebuilt from the previous owners. In 1279 it belonged to the lords of Spilimbergo, that sided with the patriarch against the Count of Gorizia, and suffered the siege by the Udinesi, in 1364, during the invasion of Friuli by



Rudolf IV of Austria. Some years later in 1385, in the castle's dungeons some villagers were locked up, because of their attempt to make an armed resistance against the commendatory patriarch Filippo of Alengon. The prisoners were eventually released thanks to the intervention of their generous opponent, Guarniero of Manzano. In 1431 the castle was occupied and destroyed by the Hungarian troops that supported the deposed Patriarch Ludovico of Tech, against Venice. It was rebuilt and again damaged during the war between the Austrian Empire and the Republic of Venice in 1511. On its ruins, arose the oldest buildings in the current structure: the thick massive wall and the two western towers. The Spilimbergo family, through ups and downs, were lords of Trussio until 1869.

Texts by Enza Chiara Lai (bibliographical references on www.ciaoin.com)

