

The castle of Collalto Sabino. Transformations and restorations

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Abstract

The feature aims to address the historical evolution of the castle of Collalto Sabino, in the Province of Rieti, its transformations and restorations. The fortification of the site dates back to the first half of the XIII Century with the settlement of a Seigniorship that ruled over a vast territory, a frontier land between the Papal States and the Kingdom of Sicily. In the next century Collalto assumed the title of barony under the direct jurisdiction of the Emperor. The current development of the complex, formed by the early medieval fortress and palace, can be traced back in this phase of history.

Keywords: castle, historical evolution, restoration.

1. Introduction. Historical summary

Collalto Sabino is located on a hill - from which the primitive name *Collis Altus* - in the north east of Lazio, between the river Turano and the border with Abruzzo, at 980 meters above sea level. To the east, the land goes down to the river valley and to the south it reaches the edge of the ancient road Tiburtina; to the north is surrounded by Mount San Giovanni and Cervia (chain of Caersolani).

With the Saracen invasion of the year 891, the people living in the Turano valley retreated to the mountains giving birth, or expansion, to many mountain villages, including the residential settlement of Collalto (Latini, 1936).

Placed in the upper part (modern fortress), it should have included a square plan tower, corresponding to the first building phase of the keep, and a fence protecting the town along the northern and western route of the existing walls of the fortress.

In the IX Century Collalto was among the possessions of the Abbey of Farfa, annexed to the Papal States, and it was given in perpetual lease to the Counts de 'Marsi (Latini, 1927). In this period took place the first extension south-

west of the city walls, characterized by circular towers.

During the XII Century the Duchy of Spoleto, whose territory included Collalto, was part of the Norman possessions. The feudal structure centered on the figure of the Baron takes shape in this period. The Barony of Collalto included several castles with many landlords and soldiers (Latini, 1927). The demographic development of the area led to a second extension of the city walls that, in addition to expanding southwest, enclosed eastward the structures of today's baronial building.

After the battle of Benevento in 1266, Charles of Anjou handed the Duchy of Spoleto over to the Papal States. Collalto became a strategic outpost in controlling the border between the Heritage of St. Peter and the Duchy of Naples (Latini, 1936). This led to the strengthening of the military character of the fortress and the construction of a third wall aimed to contain the expansion of the village along the slopes, to the west and south.

Between the XV and XIV Century, the territory of the Duchy of Spoleto was divided in two main parts: the Patrimonio di S. Pietro, handed

over to the Kingdom of Naples, and the Barony of Collalto that remained within the Papal States. The possessions of Collalto were very extensive and included the lands of Castles of Pietra Secca, Poggio Cinolfo and Rocca di Sotto.

In the first half of the XV Century, the feudal lord of Collalto was Antonio Oddone; in 1440 he sold the barony and other possessions to the Count de Cola Mareri (Delogu, 1990).

The advent of firearms impelled the adaptation of the pre-existing fortress to the changing needs of military defence and offense.

At the beginning of '500 Collalto was owned by the Savelli family. In 1511 Antimo Savelli took part in the movements of revolt following the false death of Julius II. Fled from Rome, he enlisted in the imperial army of Charles V and he was rewarded with feuds in Abruzzo (Silvestrelli, 1940). In 1564 the barony of Collalto was sold to Roberto Strozzi who ceded it to Alfonso Soderini in 1568. The Apostolic Camera took possession of the Barony of Collalto to preserve Nicola Soderini's creditors and assigned it to Card. Francesco Barberini in 1641. The Barberini family carried out major restoration works to the fortress relating the clock tower (added on the south side) and the keep. The baronial building, used since 1712 as a family summer residence, underwent major transformations (Delogu, 1990).

In 1798, during the French occupation, the stronghold of Collalto was handed out to the invading army without bloodshed. Before the retreat, in 1803 the French troops dismantled the fort (Latini, 1927).

A second looting, much more violent than the first, took place in 1867 through the work of the Neapolitan troops entering Collalto after opening a breach in the west tower of the city wall (De Sanctis, 1884).

In 1858 the castle became property of Count Corvin Prendowski who, in 1896, undertook major restorations as witnessed by a plaque in the palace courtyard (Cenciarini, Giaccaglia, 1982). With these interventions, aimed at restoring its Medieval look, the castle gained its present appearance: the towers were elevated

and battlements were added; windows were opened in "style" and the interior spaces were modified.

Another significant restoration was carried out in 1932 by the new owner General Ottavio Giorgi Montfort who bought the castle in 1930 from the Marquis Cavalletti. At that time the covers were made anew and the drawbridge was added to the castle entrance.

Currently the entire complex belongs to a private company and, after a major restoration that preserved part of it for residential purposes, it is used for social, cultural and economic activities (Torraca, 1990).



Fig. 1- Collalto Sabino (Google Eart, 2015)

2. The defensive system of the fortress

Located in the highest part of the settlement, the fortress has a favourable sighting dominating all around.

The plant, remodelled during the various restorations, is still legible as a whole and it substantially preserves its XVIII Century feature. It has a square ground plan with two circular towers placed along the diagonal and the keep is also placed on the same axis.

This typology seems to refer to the late XV Century although the presence of only two towers, as in use in the XIV Century, suggests a later adaptation of an existing structure. On that occasion, the towers had to be lowered and their base enlarged to adapt to the new defensive system. The walls of the fortress, built directly on bedrock, appear inclined to a certain height, after which they proceed perpendicular, ending

with a crenellated apparatus with large tracts of thickened and rounded wall made to host the artillery (five guns on each) on each platform of the towers. The escarpment of these is not delineated by a horizontal band with torus as commonly happens in the XVI Century fortress, which are divided in two horizontal levels, but it appears as a simple gradual enlargement of the same masonry.

The opening of the fortress is located on the south side, located at a lower altitude than the floor of the square which can be reached by a staircase. The access is granted by a drawbridge laid on a staircase, set on arches, and by a fence placed at a lower level which flanks the fortress to the southeast. To the East, at a slightly lower elevation, develops the structure of the baronial building.

In the defensive system of the fortress, the largest tower of radius of about 10 meters (with a wall thickness of about 2.80 meters), is aimed directly at the possible attacks from the north, while the smaller tower (8 meters in diameter with a wall thickness of about 2 meters), heading south, is to guard the city by any invaders. This way, each one having a control tower of 180 degrees, we have a completely defensible plant that preludes to the technique of cross-flanking.

At the lower level, on the north-west, there are loopholes with very pronounced conches; on the other side, towards the town, the openings are more numerous, the conches are less inclined and the wall thickness is smaller.

The keep, placed on the north-south diagonal axis of the fortress, is a squat building with quadrangular feet of about 8 x 7 meters, and overall height of about 8.50 meters, divided in two levels by a molding round (bull) limestone. At the bottom, this masonry, made of clay curtain with fragments of calcareous material, has a course in the shoe, the corners are reinforced by blocks of stone and they are bind tightly directly to the masonry. On the southern side there are two doors, the right one leads to a cramped room with no openings (perhaps adapted to prison in the past); at this level the masonry has a thickness of more than 3 meters and this might depend on the amalgamation of

the primitive watchtower to that structure. The other opening of the ground floor of the keep give access to a stone staircase that leads to the environment in which, south and west, are two openings and the upper terrace. The wall of the second level consists in a quite regular curtain wall. The openings, one on each side, have a flat brick segmental arch (those south and east) or a semicircular ring (as east and north and west) and the corners, as in the lower section, are reinforced by limestone blocks. The front ends with corbels marble on which is set a masonry parapet.

Important interventions were made by card. Francesco Barberini (grandson of the previous card. Francesco Barberini) between 1709 and 1714 for the adaptation of the structure to the changing defence needs; among these are documented placement of the spiral staircase in the tower and works to the clock tower (Delogu, 1990), a rectangular building set against the south side of the fortress.

During the restoration that affected the entire complex in the years 1989-90, it was conducted a test excavation in the northwest of the fortress (Coccia, Patterson, Guirado, 1990); it emerged previous structures, prior to the restructuring of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, without brick elements were probably part of the medieval fortification.

The fortress was the subject of a conservative, only for museum purposes; have therefore been performed almost exclusively the work of consolidation of the walls (Torraca, 1990).

3. The baronial mansion

The current structure is developed along two buildings that surround a courtyard and follows the orographic flow of the terrain that rises gradually to the west towards the fortress.

The courtyard leads directly to the various rooms situated on the ground floor (originally intended as barns, cellars, oven, deposits, etc.); the top two levels, intended for baronial residence, have access through two symmetrical ramps placed on parts of the walls at the hallway.

On the plastered courtyard walls there are two rows of windows. While lacking an architectural score, their openings are aligned both horizontally and vertically. The moldings of the windows on the first level, belonging to the main floor, in their simplicity are more elaborate than those of the upper level.

The external appearance of the building is the result of more restorations that occurred between the late nineteenth century and the middle of the last century.

The main ones took place with Corvin Prendowski Conte who owned the castle from 1858. In 1895 he commissioned its restoration to the Polish architect Lasciac. The intervention was made necessary due to the state of the structures, after the French occupation of 1799 and the fire of 1860. On this occasion the baronial building took on its current appearance. They worked in neo-medieval style in the completion of the top of the towers including the Gothic style windows, balconies and various openings (lintels in which are the initials of the count) along the external face. Other significant

measures to baronial building were made at the beginning of the thirties and mainly concerned the covers.

In more recent restoration (Torraca, 1990) that has affected the palace were made structural consolidation and adaptation of the systems and conducted excavations on the north side, which revealed traces of dwellings that can be dated back to medieval times (Coccia, 2000).

The floor plan of the building develops longitudinally and the environments follow each other, tracing in fact the arrangement of the houses that were leaning against the wall of the ancient urban settlement, and which now forms the north wall of the building, taking in the system the unification of individual units. The exterior masonry, therefore, were part of the old city walls that protected the city, interspersed with square towers; these can still be reread on the planimetric plant and on the masonry of the building.

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