

CASTRUM CAPELLE

The “reconquest” of the castle, with the desire to revive the ancient military garrison as a living space, scientific studies and cultural meetings, open to the participation of citizens, began in 2018 thanks to the commitment and dedication of the „San Vigilio Working Group on the Castle of Bergamo“ which became „Castrum Capelle“ in 2019. The association, formed through a participatory process, coordinated by the “Association for Upper City and the Hills”, brings together architects, historians, archaeologists, artists... and continues the legacy of Master San Vigilio.

Honoring the experimental agreement signed with the municipality of Bergamo, the association, determined to protect and enhance the monument, part of the city fortifications, declared World Heritage by UNESCO, not only presented an articulated proposal for the recovery of the parts in ruins and the reuse of the whole complex, but since 2018 has been giving social and cultural life to the monument, hosting guided tours, conferences and meetings on architecture, urban planning, history and art; exhibitions and installations of photography and visual arts; theatrical and musical performances; seminars and workshops of holistic and botanical disciplines, theatre, group dances and yoga... Initiatives organized both independently and in collaboration with other institutions, associations and schools, among which we mention: FAI, the Italian Institute of Castles, the University of the third age of Bergamo. Moreover, thanks to the collaboration with the ENGIM school, the rebirth of the „garden of perfumes and butterflies“ has begun in the courtyard of the Captain’s house.

Via al Castello S.Vigilio, Bergamo Alta

For informations and updates
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Cesare Malacreda, Plan of the covered road and of the ramparts, 1664..

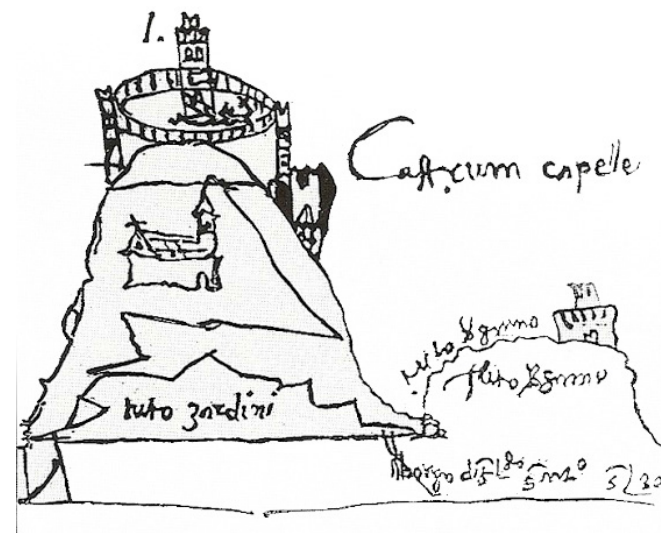


Bird's eye view of the castel.



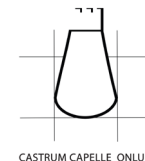
Underground tunnel. Upper casemate of the Belvedere Tower.
Courtesy Massimo Glanzer, Bergamo Speleological Group le Nottole.

THE CASTLE OF BERGAMO IN SAN VIGILIO



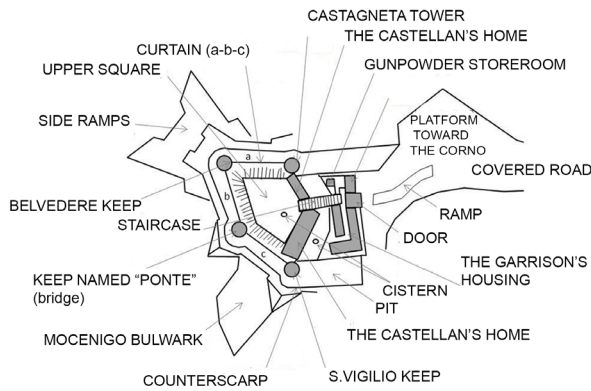
Part of the UNESCO site
„Venetian defense works between
the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries“

*World Heritage Sites belong to all the peoples of the
world, regardless of which country they live in.*

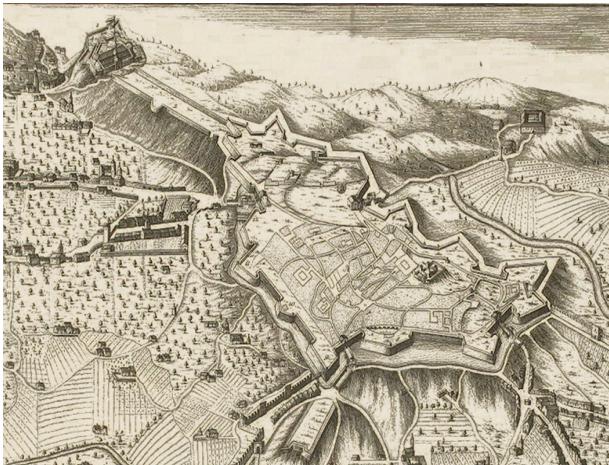




Giuseppe Rudelli. The Door, before demolition, probably designed by Mauro Codussi. Post 1829



GianMaria Labaa. Reconstruction of the main parts of the fortified work. 1988



Pierre Mortier. Detail. "Bergame Ville de Venitiens", in Nouveau Théâtre d'Italie, 1704, Amsterdam.

SHORT

Located on the hill of San Vigilio, it dominates the Upper Town of Bergamo to the East, with a wide magnificent view over the plane to the South, Bastia's hill to the West and the Pre-Alps to the Nord. Probably in Roman times, there was already a watchtower, but the first documents of a fortification date back to the 9th century, with the mention in its interior of a chapel dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene. The name of „Castrum Capelle“, for a long time remained prevalent, to be replaced in modern times by that of “Castello di S. Vigilio”, name given to the hill after the construction in the 10th century of the underlying church, dedicated to this holy martyr.

Theatre of wars

In its long history, the fortress suffered repeated assaults, destruction, rebuilding and reconstruction. Arnulfo, son of Carloman, made the first ascertained conquest in 894. He had its valiant defender, the clerk Gottifredo, executed and then he took possession of the city. Its strategic importance was always evident to the occupants who had alternated up to the Venetian Republic, which in 1428 occupied Bergamo. „Chi à la Capella is Signor de Bergamo“, as Marin Sanudo wrote in 1483, namely: „whoever holds the castle, controls the city“. In 1509 the Venetian superintendent was besieged by the French, who, three years later, suffered the same fate: led by a Gascon, Odet de Caucens, they managed to keep the Venetian troops in check for several months. A year later the Venetians took refuge there, attacked by the Spaniards. The last siege, between 1515 and 1516, was the hardest: the Venetians surrounded the Spaniards, making extensive use of cannons and culverins, but only with the help of the French (led by the aforementioned Gascon!) they finally opened a breach in the bastion walls.

What remains of the castle today

Strengthened during the Visconti domination, the fort was enlarged by the Venetians in the 15th century, on the eve of the war with Ferrara. The four round towers date back perhaps to this time. Important modifications were introduced after the construction of the Venetian walls, between the end of the 16th century and the first decades of the 17th century: to give more space to the garrison

HISTORY

and increase the number of guns, the great tower in the center, typical of the medieval castle, was demolished; it was then enlarged towards the city, with the building of the Castellano's house and the soldiers' quarters, and joined to the San Marco Fort (western rampart of the walls) with an embankment, on which ran a „covered“ road, that is a road protected by walls. The external defense was later strengthened with other fortifications, giving the fort almost a star shape.

After Venice

Entering the city in December 1796, the French immediately took possession of the castle. In 1803 the castle lost its status as a state fortress and was auctioned for private sale or rent. Afterwards, in 1815, the Austrians settled in. Since the fortress had no longer any strategic interest, they carried out various demolitions, such as that of the monumental entrance door, attributed to the architect Mauro Codussi.

In 1912 the whole hill of S. Vigilio underwent a parceled sale and also areas of the fort were built as a place of residence or vacation. In 1934 part of the ancient site was ceded to the Soregaroli family, who lavished energy and resources to readjust the staircase and the battered walkways of the castle, rediscovered by the people of Bergamo thanks to the funicular, inaugurated in 1912 (suppressed in 1976, it was re-activated in June 1991).

The Municipality of Bergamo returned to the main portion of the castle only in 1957. After a first restoration between 1960 and 1961, it became accessible to the public again, with the Castellano house becoming the seat of a café. Unfortunately, in 2003 the Municipality realized a few devastating interventions and irrelevant buildings in the open areas to the North (a fountain, a suspended bridge and moat basins, toilets built against the bastion), in fact downgrading the fortification to a public park. In the following years, the lack of maintenance worsened the state of abandonment of the castle, a deterioration stopped from 2008 to 2014 by Master San Vigilio, directed by the architect Fulvio Valsecchi, and the presence of students from the École nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris-Malaquais, who carried out design studies of the fortified complex.