

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture
Honors theses

The Ancient Castle of Testona: from the protohistoric site to nowadays perspectives

by Marina Milia

Tutor: Riccardo Bedrone

Co-tutor: Cristina Lucca

"For those who come from Moncalieri or Testona it appears like a huge conglomeration of ancient walls, modernized and strengthened by buttresses and with two round towers, that rise above a steep relief of the hill, bounded by deep ravines, carved by two rivers, the stream of Negri and the stream of Castelvecchio, cloudy for the showers and at the time of the rains, so that the relief is only accessible from the North side" (Eugenio Olivero, 1941).

MARINA MILIA

**IL CASTELVECCHIO DI TESTONA
DAL SITO PROTOSTORICO ALLA DIMORA
MODERNA**



TESI DI LAUREA MAGISTRALE

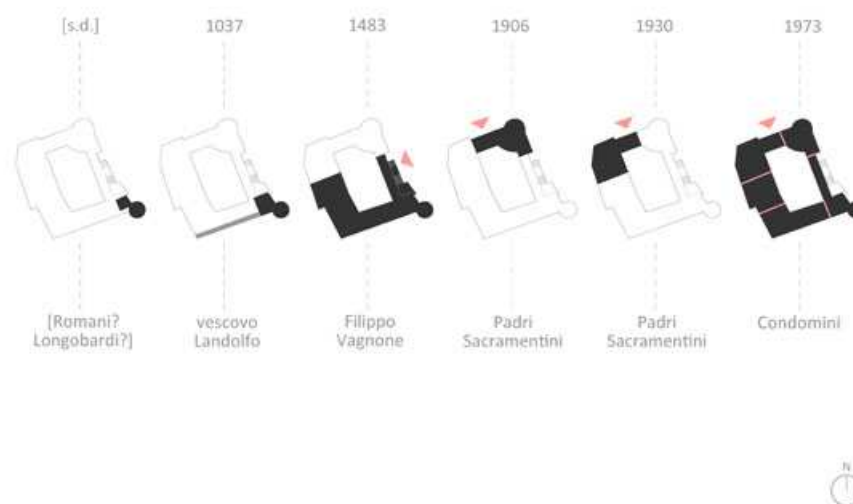
RICCARDO BEDRONE RELATORE
CRISTINA LUCCA CORRELATRICE

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The building is the Castelvecchio of Testona, an old building hidden by the green hill of Moncalieri. This construction is an example of the too many resources of our country that are so often undervalued. It is an invaluable piece of architecture, lying in a old area in which were discovered protohistoric remains. The first nucleus of the castle dates back to a period before the early Middle Ages, perhaps even back to Roman times or the Lombard. The first written record of interventions on the building is 1037, when Landolfo, bishop of Turin, raises the tower and the existing church and surrounds the castle by walls. In the following centuries it becomes a home and retreat of all bishops from Turin, during all the dangerous periods. From the thirteenth century, the castle loses the original connotation of "fortress" to come gradually transformed by the owners that follow. Owned by noble families, it is then, for years, claimed by the bishop, whose interference ceases only when Testona moves its headquarters in Moncalieri town, around 1230. In 1248 the building is definitely owned by the Savoy, who hold the propriety until the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Successione delle fasi costruttive e dei proprietari



After a series of families less worthy of note, from 1378 the building passes to the accounts Vagnone of Trofarello. Count Filippo Vagnone, perhaps the most famous of his family, transforms Castelvecchio "from fortress to resort": he decorates the yard with pointed arches and mullioned windows with terracotta cornices, restores the ancient church of San Martino and collects ancient Roman and Pre-Romanesque marbles, placing them on the east side facade wall. It is due to him a huge part of the appearance - except for the north part with his tower - of the Castle that we see today. After Filippo, the property passes to his daughter Carlotta and son in law Filippo Valperga, then to the Valperga Family, but returns to Vagnone family between 1559 and 1628.

The next noble family to be enfeoffed of the castle is Tana di Chieri, Verolengo line, who held the fief of Castelvecchio for over two centuries, until the death of the Marquis Camillo in 1834. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Castle passes from one owner to another and then, in 1906, is bought by the religious congregation of Padri Sacramentini. In the same year the congregation commissions to the engineer Enrico Mottura the construction of a tower and a new part, on the northern front. Later, around 1930, the same congregation raises the recently built part and realize a new forepart to achieve a complete closure of the complex. In the years between 1966 and 1973 Castelvecchio is owned by the Ente Comunale di Assistenza of Turin, who, although very willing to dedicate the building to a welfare function, for events probably related to its impending breakup is finally forced to sell it. In the early seventies, then, the castle becomes a residential building. It is not easy to discover the history of Castelvecchio, in order to highlight his importance as a historical monument: documents are often fragmentary and their interpretations are conflicting. This thesis is largely based on original evidences, such as plants and historical documents, than "tradition". The building is always linked to its local context. The result is a work which is just in part comparable with local authors'™ writings, but in other cases quite discordant. Historians of the place, in fact, have more than ones took what has been written by their predecessors for granted, repeating so many errors of attribution. A further difficulty encountered in the research is relying almost exclusively on written sources (from the ancient manuscripts, to Latin, to the first Italian), since a direct analysis is almost completely prevented by the layer of plaster which now covers the whole building and hides the texture of walls, which often "talk" more than many documents.

Rediscovering the castle is a very interesting and sometimes exciting "exploration", because within these walls, a palimpsest of different ages and interventions more or less respectful, have come and gone important people and bishops, who have possibly increased the majesty.

"If a superhuman imagination could conjure up the shadows of the famous people who lived in or visited the romantic place, an endless parade of princes, dukes, high dignitaries of the church, famous warriors, clerks of State, distinguished officials of swashbuckling, ladies and gentlemen appear at the look of the seer in a colorful picture of impressive vicissitudes and historical memories of our sub-alpine region" (Eugene Olivero, 1941).

The hope is that this work will help to draw attention to the history of the building, which has lost from too many years the importance that historically had been in the collective local mind, and shed light on some of the less-known periods of its history.

Anyone browsing, even casually, the pages of this story, can clearly see the term "condominium" who, approached to the Castle, undoubtedly does not accords. And anyone who intends to undertake the study of the building, looks at his current function with some diffidence, seeing in the last refunctionalization the end of its glorious history. In fact, even in this case, the issue of preserving an historical monument is much more complex than it seems, and the involvement of private people comes at the end of a series of events more damaging to the structures of the same monument. Since the Middle Ages, a period in which emerge the first evidence of interventions on the Castle, anyone who has lived there wanted to be remembered in some way, acting in a more or less deep way. Bishop Landolfo, for example, who has elevated the ancient tower and has strengthened the walls, or Filippo Vagnone, to whom we owe much of the appearance of the Castle today. From that moment on, the building has constantly changed appearance and vocation, from a warning and defense function to suburban home of a noble family. After nearly a century of changes of ownership, in 1906 the Castle was purchased, as already mentioned, by the Padri Sacramentini. The Congregation, requiring additional space and a church, has commissioned what today would be called "historical false", but for the time meant simply rework the original shapes in a harmonious way: a new tower on the model of ancient and a porch on the existing track. The super-elevation, in 1930, of the part newly built fit within the same line of thought. Someone argues, however, that the "destruction" of the castle starts when it was a students house and seminary of the religious order, because whole areas were partitioned losing their original volume and were introduced additional and degrading elements such as external flues. In this case, we must move the discussion from a critics to the single intervention to a broader reflection: after years of close and continuous changes of ownership, in which the building didn't have any type of restoration, this new function, even if not completely compatible, was really the downfall? Any doubt in this sense, the most important degradation suffered by the building is not to be ascribed to a particular property, but to the period in which this has not been inhabited. It is the period of time between 1966 and 1973, in which the Ente Comunale di Assistenza, intention was to allocate in the structure a home for the elderly and then a residence for subnormal children, but was finally "forced" to get rid of. The lack of a function, which is always "lifeblood" for a work of architecture, has affected the state of conservation of the Castle and attracted to it a series of vandalism.

Before making negative judgments about the uses it has been converted to and the actions which it was submitted by the current owners, it is necessary to give a first look at the photographs of the interior of the castle, the last three decades ago. You will be faced with plaster detached, uprooted heating elements, gaps in horizontal elements and in the coverage coats: what would be of this important historical record, without the intervention after 1973? Perhaps today we should not even ask the question of compatibility with the importance of the historical function of the complex, because we would probably face ruins infested with weeds. It would be fair, in some cases, to try to thank the rich people - as this group - who are responsible for the recovery of monuments (when it would be much easier to realize a more devastating "modern" subdivision), and don't forget to pay for the daily maintenance work and will allow us, in the future, not only to speak, but still to see the Castelvecchio.

For further information, e-mail:

Marina Milia: marinsina@gmail.com

marinamilia@hotmail.com