



# Critical and historical research on the Castle of Charles V in Monopoli, Italy

M. Barletta, A. Papio, S. Rotondo

*Department of Restoration and New Function of Ancient Building,  
Kyung Hee University of Architecture, Seoul, Korea*

## Abstract

In the most stretched place on the coast of ancient Minopolis, is situated the castle of Charles V. It doesn't come out from a unitary project but from a continuous development regarding pre-existent structures and successive adjustments for the new necessities of use. The castle was built on the early middle ages gate, afterwards included in the first town walls, and on the structures of a byzantine church (X century A.D.) that is leant against the town walls. The methodological approach to this historical study is based on the analysis of the building structure: alignments, thickness, height, materials and records. The hypothesis about the historical stratification and the changes that have been put forward on a metrological analysis, the reading of traces on the walls (about different material and different techniques) and thermographic enquiries, have been strengthened through researches in the archives in Spain (Simancas) and in Italy (Monopoli, Bari, Napoli, Roma, Venezia). In this way it has been possible to reconstruct the different historical periods of the castle.

## 1 The place and the pre-existences: the first “fortified installation”

The castle is situated in the most stretched place on the sea. This place, to the north of the area where there was the most ancient installation of the city, has always had a natural function of defence and at the same time a trading landing-place. A testimony of this is the presence, in this place, of some pre-existences, stratified in the centuries. A big gate built in block of squared stones (Figure 1 partic.b) with an offset for the vertical slide of a closing system (Figure 1 partic.a) is, according to the testimony of the local historians, the most ancient existence inside the castle. In this way it is possible to put in relation the gate with the first boundary walls like an admittance to the city from the side of the sea. To south-east of the gate it is possible to locate, through some traces on the outside and above all for a well



preserved space on the inside of its thickness (Figure 2; A) a stretch of boundary wall, in which the apse of the byzantine church of S.Nicolas de Pinna leans. It is possible to locate a correspondent and very similar space to the NW side of the gate too: it is in perfect alignment; it has the same breadth and the same splayed niches with a narrowing towards the outside, even if they are more spoiled and a little larger. This part of boundary walls is recognizable also for its slope and for its part on the top that it has been found under the floor of the court-level.

An other long and narrow passage, with an nearly orthogonal alteration of direction, points out the course of the ancient walls from the inside. Along a passage, a narrow ascending barrel vault points out the position of a flight of steps (of which today there is no trace) that probably led to the top of the wall (Figure 1 partic.c). The directional alterations of the walls, the relations between different stones or between different state of preservation, give as the possibility to understand the layout of the walls included inside the castle. When the Aragonese were in Monopoli (1435), they used this place adapting it to a fortified installation. On the ground of this pre-existence and using all data we have described, it is possible to suppose the plan of the first small castle that was already existent since 1435. So in that period the space between the wall and the byzantine church was regularized and was covered by a barrel vault in order to obtain a large room with an admittance to the castle and it was positioned to a moat, in front of the square of Monopoli. Today this access is located underneath the present castle (wharf-level).

## 2 The caste in the XVI-XVII century “The fortified castle”

In the XVI century the architecture in the south of Italy had a great development in the coastal defence against the turkish invasion. In that period the discovery of gunpowder together with the defensive system, changed also the military architecture. From 1495 Monopoli fell under the venetian and spanish domination, becoming this later a permanent one in 1529 and during the following three centuries. In 1544 Don Pedro de Toledo, Naples's viceroy, fortifies the military defence of Monopoli and, maybe, in this period it starts the construction of the castle over the small fortified installation situated on the gate. In 1552 the construction was completed on the NW side, towards the sea, with a slope (diamond point shape) and a pentagonal bastion added to improve the defence. The castle uses for admittance the same of the XV century increasing in it only the thick of the wall towards the city and reorganizing the moat's outer space (Figure 3;4). From the admittance-room (A), that is connected on the right with the remains of the byzantine church (B) and on the left with the service-room (C) and the kitchen (D), it is possible to enter, through the included ancient gate (E), the big room (F), probably soldiers' dormitory. This space is connected by a stair to the parade ground (today court-level) in which the rooms with wooden covering are used as weapon and ammunition depot. Some spaces, that are included between the wall of the pre-existent and the new construction on the SE side, became big cisterns (H)

for the water reserve of the castle. The passages connecting trenches are situated on different levels and all around the building.

### **3 The trasformation in the XVIII century: “The castle-residence”**

The year 1660 is an important date in the history of the castle: new trasformation and amplifications that besides the interior arrangement, change its exterior shape. On the SE side, towards the city, there is a cylindrical building that includes a new admittance located on the entresol. On the analysis of the building structures and of records, it is possible to date back this site of the castle to 1645 whereas to 1660 the new arrangement of the court-level (ex-parade ground) in which the change from the covering roof to the barrel vault was the condition to increase the thickness of the wall. A new stair connects this level to a new parade ground on the covering (Figure 6). The most important changes of this period are: the sliding of the SW wing about 25 degree south modifying the direction of the wall, maybe, to protect that side from the wind and from the sea, and the addition of a triple arcade at double height to the front of the city, on the right of the entrance (Figure 5;6). Now, since the second half of the XVII century, together with the consolidation of the spanish domination, the castle loses the main aspect of the fortress to become a representative place of spanish power. With this new function, balconies and windows are introduced and inside the thickness of the wall are obtained small spaces of service and in every room is built a fire-place for the heating.

### **4 The XIX century: The castle-prison”**

In 1832 the castle became prison and station of military defence for the coastal line. From these necessities of use derive some new arrangements of interior space. The slope to Nw, that has been ruined in the centuries by sea-storms and cut off only in one side to connect the castle to the wharf, was demolished at the beginning of the 1950s to enlarge the pier's wharf. At the end of the 1950s F. Schettini, Head of Public Works in Bari, decided to demolish the arcade of the seventeenth century because he considered it as a superfetation, without historical value in relation to the original plan. Since 1969 the castle isn't a prison any more. It was neglected for ten years until 1979 when the works of consolidation and restoration started and at the present time are still in course of completion.

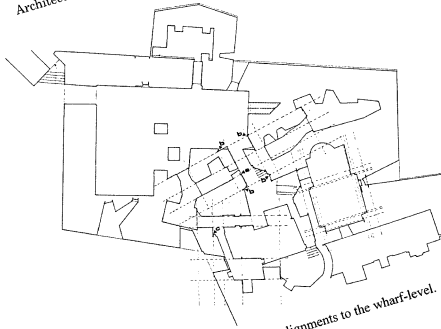


Figure 1: Plan of walls' alignments to the wharf-level.

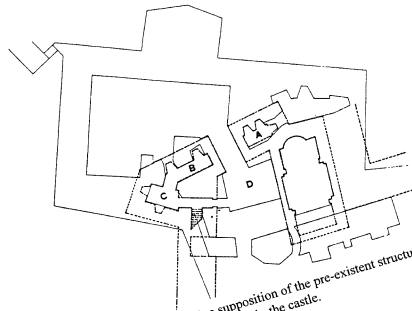


Figure 2: Reconstructive supposition of the pre-existent structures included in the castle.

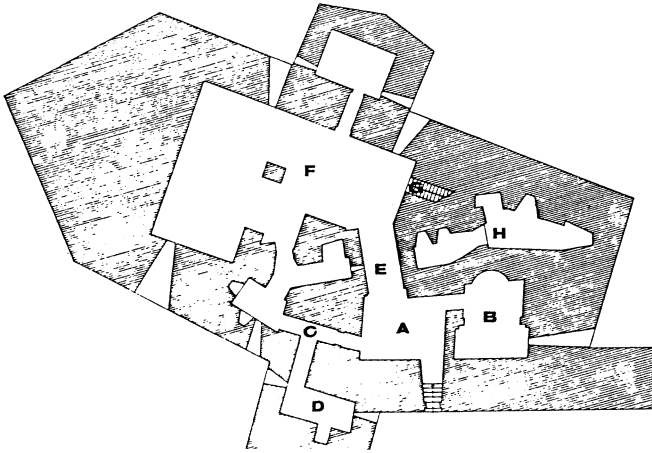


Figure 3: Reconstructive supposition of the XVI-XVII century (wharf-level).

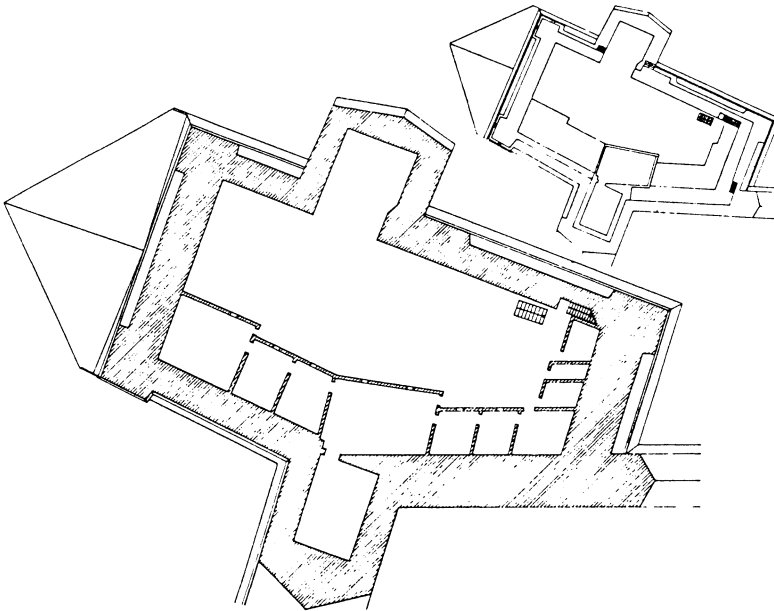


Figure 4: Reconstructive supposition of the XVI-XVII century (court-level and covering).

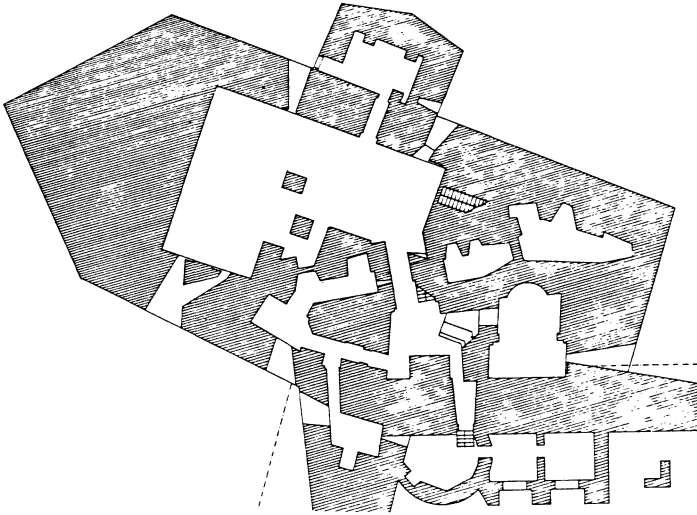


Figure 5: Reconstructive suppositio of the XVIII century (warf-level) .

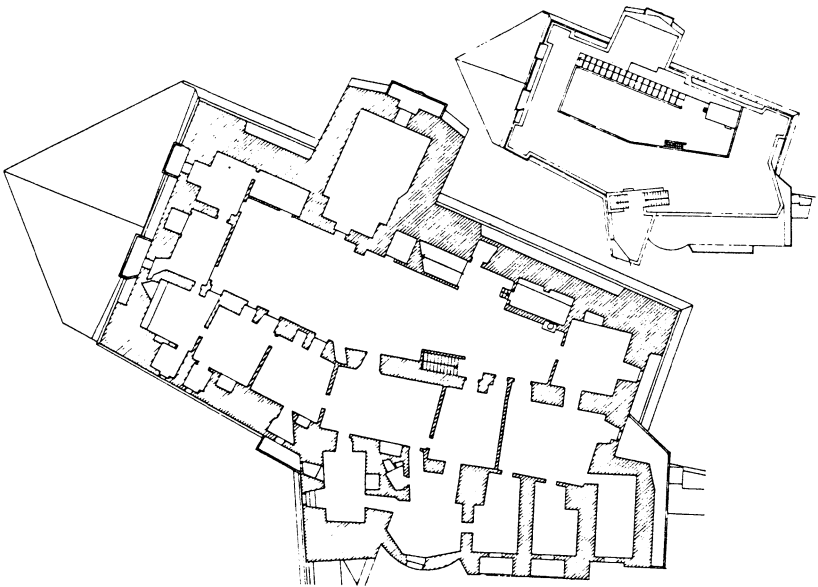


Figure 6: Reconstructive suppositio of the XVIII century (court-level and covering).

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