

Fortress of Sarzanello

SARZANA

Location: The fortress of Sarzanello overlooks the Magra valley from atop the hill of Sarzanello.

Type of castle: Fortress

Construction period: The construction was started in 1493 by the Florentines.

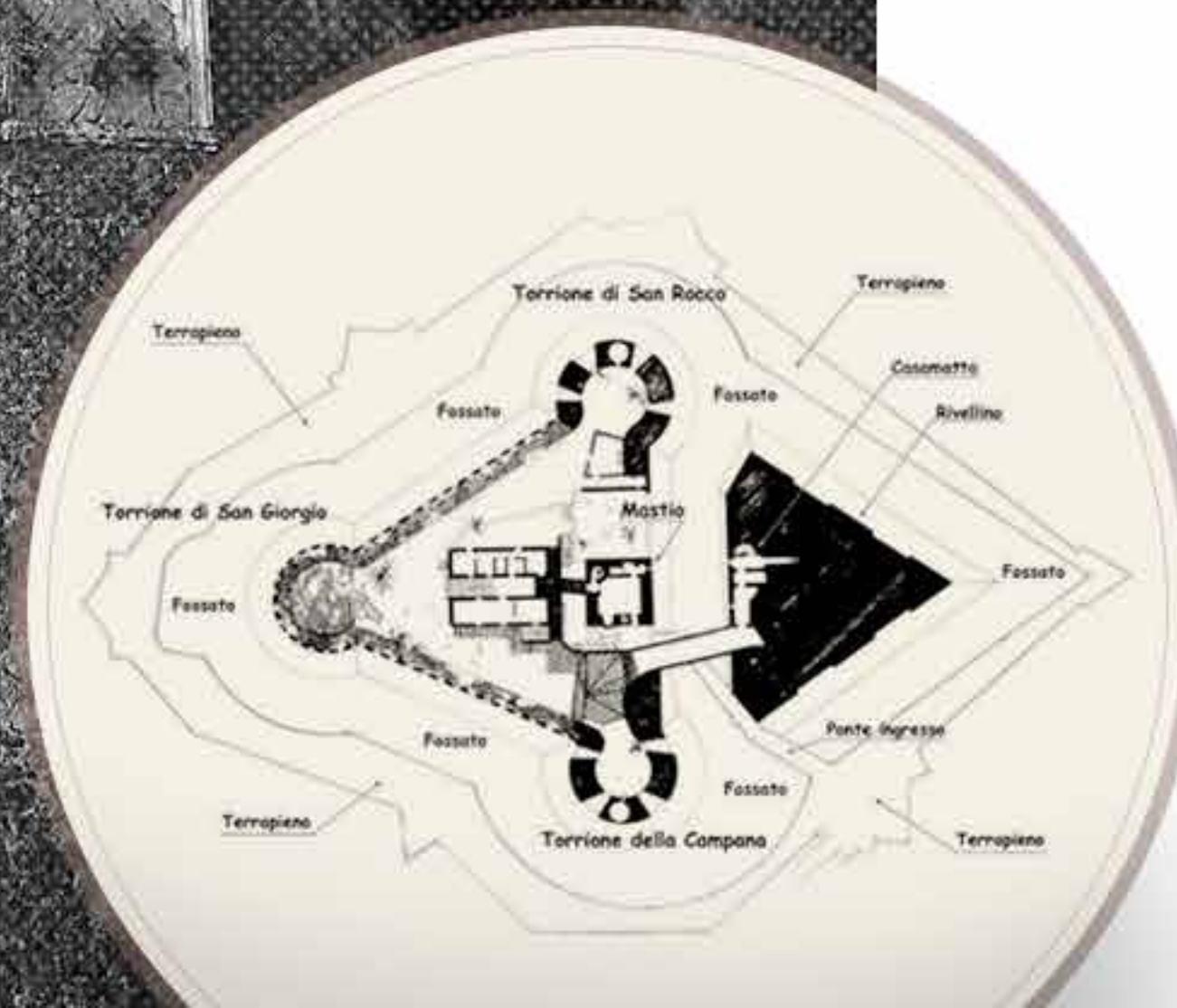
First appearance in historical sources: The first records regarding a fortress in Sarzanello date back to the 10th century.

Strategic role: Control of the valley and of the inhabited built-up area of Sarzana.

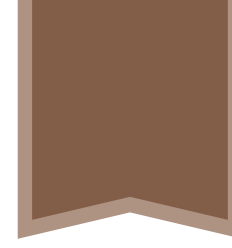
Further use: Ended the military use in 1797, now Fortress of Sarzanello is a cultural centre for organization of events and guided tours.

Current condition: The fortress is in good condition and has recently been restored.

Viewing: The building can be visited, visitors can find the opening hours at www.fortezzasarzanello.com







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History: The origin of the impressive fortress of Sarzanello dates back to the 10th century, when the first records of a fortress with an annexed village can be found. The tower and part of the original core are included in the ravelin and were examined during recent archaeological excavations. They were built by Tommaso di Capofregoso from Genoa, who settled in Sarzana in 1421. The town of Sarzana was located in a strategic position and, thanks to Tommaso di Capofregoso, was able to reconquer the Lunigiana area.

Towards the end of the 15th century, the Florentines conquered the fortress and allowed Francione to restore it. The works started in 1493, and by the following year were already at a good stage, but were later stopped because of the French incursions. In 1496 Sarzanello was once again under the rule of the Genoese, who completed the structure. In 1502 the works were finally completed and the fortress took on its defensive role for the eastern territories of the Genoese's estate until 1797.

Structure: The fortress of Sarzanello is a triangular equilateral tower. At its centre there is a quadrangular fortified tower. To protect the entrance there is a triangular ravelin situated directly in front of the original site. A deep moat surrounds the fortress. This structure is an example for the typical defensive structures built during the 'Age of transition'. The fortified tower's style is typically medieval, but from the first half of the 15th century, the structure was able to resist firearm attacks. The ravelin is the main witness of this transformation in military architecture: its smooth façades were used to expose enemies to the canons located in the casemates at the bottom of the bastions, whose embrasures are perfectly disposed for shooting over the walls. From a historical point of view, Sarzanello is a prototype of the defensive fortresses which were built in Europe during the second half of the 15th century. The defensive techniques were developed in the Florentine state, mainly thanks to the Medici and their architects. Among those were Luca Caprina, Francione, Baccio Pontelli, Giuliano da Sangallo, while in Siena there was Francesco di Giorgio Martini. The restoration works of the 19th century demolished the 16th century's battlements, which are still visible on the two southern fortified towers. The demolished ones were replaced by the current Ghibelline battlements.