

EXPANDED HISTORY OF THE CASTELLET CASTLE

The river Foix, just after being joined by the waters of the Marmellar stream, takes a sharp turn, meandering, framing a rocky, narrow and raised peninsula. Just before its highest point rises Castellet castle. The location is very appropriate for the building of a fortress. Maybe, for this reason, Castellet castle has a 2,500-year history. The first fortress, dated archeologically, is from the Iberian period. Roman occupation of the same place has also been confirmed.

All construction is always carried for some reason. We are convinced that the main reason for our predecessors building this fortification was the control and safekeeping of roads and other means of communication. As is already known, the Iberians built the Heraclian Way, a wide road that crosses the country from north to south and that represents a great advance in communications of the period. In the past when it was difficult to open up new roads, the rivers, streams and even torrents were as much appreciated as a means of communication. In fact the water current naturally opened a way into the inland area of the region.

Castellet castle was the perfect vantage point and it was in an excellent position for controlling, at the same time, the traffic on the river Foix and the Heraclian Way, which ran more to the north. With the passing of time this building has acquiring a great added value, above all from when the Romans built the Augustan Way. This true ancient motorway, which followed a route similar to the Heraclian Way, was in use for many centuries. So, perched at the top of the main Castellet tower, they could watch the roads for many generations. The roads, in general, were a blessing that had to be defended, that is to say that attackers had to be prevented from troubling travellers or destroying the road itself. However, dangerous enemies that had to be detected as soon as possible could also arrive using these means of communication. For this reason, the towers on castles had a system of communicating to each other which consisted of lighting fires at night and using smoke or installing mirrors in the day, which were used to signal danger.

Until the 10th century, a time when documentation starts to appear about Castellet castle, we can say very little about its history. Despite this, some statements can be made. The occupation of the buildings, with different degrees of use, was maintained from the Iberian-Roman era up to the Condal era (era of the counts). The architectural structure of the main tower and some walls suggest renovations were carried out during the Spanish-Muslim period.

The documentation from the 10th century tells us of a fortress, but not specifically whether it was large or small. On the other hand it details all the extent of the land that was within the domain of this castle. In addition to the actual district of Castellet y La Gornal, also included within the Castellet

castle's territory were the districts of l'Arboç, Bellvei and Calafell. Within its extensive district were other fortresses and towers with which it communicated when necessary.

Medieval documentation tells us that in the year 977 this castle and its district were the property of Count Borrell II of Barcelona. On 11 June 977 the count sold Castellet to Unifred Amat. This person belonged to a family that owned extensive properties in different places in the county, and it was also they who started the important Castellvell lineage. The next person we find in the documentation is Bernat Otger de Castellet, grandson of Unifred Amat. He had other castles such as those in Pontons and Grevalosa, and also held properties in Albinyana and Calders. It is worth pointing out that both he and his son knew how to read and write. In 1076, after his death, his son, Rotllan Bernat sold half the Castellet castle to count Ramon Berenguer I. In 1099 Pere Bertran de Castellet was the new feudal lord of the castle.

According to archaeological information, in the 10th century the fortifying wall, the main tower and some signs of shacks existed. The beautiful castle church, located to the east, not far from the fortress and dedicated to Saint Peter, appears in documents for the first time on 7 February 1106. In the 12th and 13th centuries there were a series of lords of Castellet who all answered to the same name: Bertran de Castellet. One of them took part in the conquest of Ciurana. Another made a will in 1195 and from this document due to the large amount of bequests and transferred properties that it includes, we can say that he was a man who had many properties which stretched from the river Llobregat to Tortosa. His son was also called Bertran and his family had close emotional ties to Castellet; in fact in his last wishes he asked to be buried in the church of Saint Peter in Castellet.

On 18 August 1206, in the will of Berenguer de Castellet, canon of Barcelona cathedral we can read that he left the Castellet palace ("palatium") to his sister Saurina. Due to the amount of people living in the palace it must have been very large. There were also articles of silver and Saracen slaves.

In September 1229, Saurina of Castellet exchanged rights to her respective districts with Ferrer of Sant Martí. At the same time the king, Jaime I confirmed to Saurina de Castellet her rights over the Castellet castle.

In April 1307, Bertran de Castellet, son of Gispert de Castellet, swore an oath and swore allegiance to king Jaime II over the Castellet castle.

At the end of the 14th century, Blascó de Castellet declared holding the castle for the king as a fiefdom and left it to his son Bertran, and he transferred it to his brother also called Blascó.

The Torrelles family decided to acquire all the rights over Castellet. So in 1405, Pere de Torrelles bought the fiefdom of Castellet from Blascó and jurisdiction

over the castle from king Martin the Humane, that is to say, the pure and the mixed empire.

Pere de Torrelles y Gurrea, son of the buyer, sold Castellet to monsignor Francí Desplà on 16 December 1453. From the Desplà it passed to the Requesens and on 26 December 1472, Lluís de Requesens sold Castellet castle to Guillermo de Peralta, treasurer of the lord king.

From here began a period of lawsuits for the ownership of Castellet which continued for more than 50 years. The Torrelles, the Requesens and the Peralta fought tirelessly, above all against the Peralta.

Gràcia Roman y de Peralta, wife of Guillermo de Peralta, now widowed, had to face this string of lawsuits. In an era when women counted for little and maybe for this reason, they thought that Gracia Roman would give in when faced with the courts. Nothing was further from the truth and this woman's great bravery and courage should be emphasised. She defended the rights of her son, Benet de Peralta, with a determination that certainly surprised more than one man. The lawsuits and arguments did not finish and the Peralta family, probably tired, handed over Castellet to a cousin called Àngela Aguilar on 3 November 1550.

In 1606 Francesc d'Aguilar y de Peralta was the lord of Castellet. In 1615, his widow, Maria d'Aguilar y de Icart, made an inventory of her property. Just by its volume, 70 pages, we can get an idea of the amount of property and furniture they possessed. From the description that she makes of Castellet castle we can deduce that it was no longer in an era of splendour, above all as regards the furniture and household goods. The building had various rooms: a wine cellar, a stable, a kitchen, a bakery, a pantry, a prison, a cistern and a room called the cistern entrance, a weapons room, a lounge, a chamber near the flat roof, a bedroom, another bedroom which has a view over the old mill, the women's chamber, an un-named room, a milling room, a chamber called the "necessary wing" (that is, the toilet or bathroom), the "Aragon" chamber and the tower chamber.

All the rooms were furnished with the corresponding furniture although in some cases it is stated that it was not in good condition. It is also worth pointing out the large variety of utensils connected to the kitchen and eating divided among different rooms, in comparison to the small amount of clothing that is listed. In the weapons room there were, among other things, three halberds, a shotgun, five blunderbusses, seven crossbows and we should not forget a "breastplate" and a "backplate" that form part of the armour worn by Don Quijote, a contemporary of this inventory. In the prison there is a wooden stock in good condition.

After the description of the castle it goes on to describe a new shop located in Castellet square. Probably it means the square or esplanade that is in front of the castle, although it does not specify its location.

Francesc d'Aguilar and his wife Maria had a daughter, Dionísia d'Aguilar, who in 1616 married Cristòfor de Icart. She died young and her husband was then the Castellet administrator in the name of his daughter Maria d'Icart. Therefore Castellet passed from the Aguilars to the Icart. From the Icart it went, also through marriage, to the Queralts, counts of Santa Coloma.

In 1778 master builders and carpenters were contracted to carry out repairs in the "offices", the two mills, the new and the old, the ice well and also inside the Castellet castle.

In 1815, the lord of Castellet was Joan de Queralt, count of Santa Coloma. We know that in 1883 the castle was in ruins and portrayed a picture of a majestic romantic ruin. (**abertis foundation**, Salvador Llorac, *View of the Penedès at the end of the 19th century*, 2003, p. 79-80.)

In 1923, it came into the hands of Josep de Peray y March, an archivist of the Barcelona diocese, who, between 1928-1930, carried out neo-gothic style restorations.

In 1999 the company **acesa** acquired the building and carefully restored it. Nowadays the Castellet castle with its 2,500 years of history, as the headquarters of the **abertis foundation**, continues with its main mission, derived from its special secure position, to preserve and protect the roads and its valuables. Once again they would do what Ausiàs March would say about its view:

*"Tot mon parlar als qui no us hauran vista
res no valrà, car fe no hi donara".*

*"Anything I could say to those who have not seen you
Would be worthless, for they would not believe my words"*