

## CARACCIOLO CASTLE



First Lord of the fief and Oppidum Burgentium (late 11th century) was a certain Aaron.

Later we have a document from a certain Guillelmo De Saponara the Elder, from which we learn that in 1097 there was a Castrum Burgentiae where he resided.

In the time of Frederick II of the House of Hohenstaufen, the castle and fiefdom were held by the noble Gentile of Petruro, who was deprived of it as a result of the Ghibelline insurrection (1188) and it passed from him to Rainaldo De Poncellis.

On November 2, 1428, Giovanna II D'Anjou sold the entire fiefdom to Petraccone Caracciolo for about 1,000 ounces of gold.

As a result, the manor was named after the Caracciolo family, who were lords of Burgentia until 1875, when Giulia, having no heirs, transferred it to her nephew Luigi Barracco.

The Angevins first and the Caracciolos later expanded the Norman manor and gave it its present shape and size.

Around the 5th-6th century AD, on the so-called major hill developed the first inhabited nucleus, probably, surmounted and protected by a keep (i.e., a very strong square tower typical of Lombard settlements). This first nucleus rose in the area later named contrada "Trucedda" and, specifically, in the area currently occupied by the ruins of the Church of San Martino dating back to the 9th century AD.

In Norman times (10th century), at the time of William of Altavilla, they began to build (in stone) incorporating the pre-existing donjon (in wood) the castle nowadays called Castel Caracciolo as attested by a Latin transcription of the 11th century (1097). Later the fief was assigned by Frederick II of Swabia (the stupor mundi) to the noble Gentile da Preturo and in the 13th century by the Angevins to the de Pancellis, thus becoming part of the Principato Citra. On November 2, 1428 Queen Giovanna II sold the land of Brienza to the noble Petraccone Caracciolo for 1,000 ounces of gold. The Angevins first and the Caracciolos later expanded the Norman manor and gave it its present shape and size.

The west-facing slope has a series of windows arranged on two floors, on the opposite side (east) one notices the three towers: the circular one located to the northeast -where the Lombard donjon presumably stood-, the semicircular one in the center of the walls, and the square one, from the Norman period, located further south almost next to the main entrance above and guarding the parade ground.

It gradually assumed a more articulated form, lost its peculiar defensive character and accentuated that of a stately residence.

In the 16th century the "Mastio," at the behest of Marcantonio Caracciolo, was converted into a prison.

A substantial renovation was desired by the patron marquis Don Litterio Caracciolo in the 18th century. Although legend attributes three hundred and sixty-five rooms to the castle, the actual rooms were about forty divided on three levels and two alee. Marquis Litterio's apartment was located on the second level of the east wing, while the rooms on the level facing the court were used for storerooms. The west wing saw the presence of basement rooms, one of which is currently visible. While the rooms on the upper level were divided into a large hall for gatherings and spaces for kitchens. Finally, the second level was divided into several small rooms that housed the servants and the castle's small garrison.

The manor was partially destroyed by the December 16, 1857 earthquake and, after Barracco, had various owners in the following decades. At the beginning of the 20th century, given the state of abandonment that had now prevailed, the castle began to be used as a real quarry from which to obtain material useful for other purposes.

The Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Heritage, by its own Decree of April 28, 1993, declared, the castle and the entire village, of particularly important interest under Law 1089/1939.

Toward the end of the last century, complex restoration works were undertaken that are still ongoing.

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On the edge of Piazza del Sedile in ancient times there was one of the gates to the borough, from which two winding and steep little streets branch off on the hill, that of Santa Maria, on the left, and that of San Michele dei Greci on the right, which cleave with their offshoots the rigid compactness of the two districts. On the opposite side, the "Postelua" or "Posterla," Italian for "little door," which is one of the secondary access gates to the medieval village, is still visible in the castle walls.

The medieval village developed mainly after the year 1000, on the opposite side from the settlement of its origins. It has the typical "ad Castellum" layout (i.e. circular bundles of dwellings at the center of which is the castle). The village consists of the wards of: Santa Maria, Sant' Elisabetta (via Archi) and San Michele dei Greci. The visitor is immediately struck by the 'ancient and mysterious aspect of the village, which makes Brienza one of the most interesting centers of medieval origin in southern Italy.

### **The legend of Bianca from Brienza**

It is said that among the many personalities hosted over the centuries at the Caracciolo Castle in Brienza (counts, ladies, nobles and knights) one in particular left an indelible imprint in everyone's memory. This is Bianca da Brienza, a beautiful woman who lived in the castle around the mid-1300s.

Bianca was a lady who loved to live in luxury and opulence, and it seems that she possessed a huge treasure, made up of gold, precious stones, jewelry and jewels: of the latter, Bianca was literally in love to such an extent that, during the feasts and receptions that were often held in the Castle of Brienza, she would show up dressed only in jewelry, and that, at times, she would bathe in a tub full of gold coins.

Legend also has it that the treasure was kept in the castle's secret and inaccessible three hundred and sixty-sixth room, which only Bianca and her faithful handmaiden knew the way to access. However, one day, while traveling to Amantea, Bianca was kidnapped by pirates and taken to Algiers, where a wealthy pasha fell in love with her and kept her with him. From that moment all trace of Bianca da Brienza was lost, and above all, nothing more was known about her treasure, which -it is said- is still hidden in the secret room of the castle, still untraceable today. Whoever is lucky enough to find this room will be able to take possession of Bianca's treasure.

### **TEXT AND TEXT REVIEW**

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### **PHOTOS**

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