



THE HISTORY

Similarly to any old manor, **Castello di Spessa in Capriva del Friuli** is able to subtly enchant even the least attentive visitor. This is not only because of the refined elegance permeating each building or because of the grandeur of the secular park, but also thanks to its thousand-year-old history, which is rich in meaningful events and personalities.

The origins of the Castle date back to the Roman era. In fact, the peculiar conformation of the territory where it was erected and the finding of some handmade articles of Roman origins, give reasons to believe that a watch tower was built there **at the time of ancient Rome**. Furthermore, the finding of pottery, roof tiles, melting scraps and even a well-preserved terracotta bell, which unfortunately got destroyed, witness the existence of an old furnace, just at the foot of the Castle, where exactly the Restaurant La Tavernetta is now located, whose old toponym was indeed *Fornasate*. Some historians have even assumed the existence of a Roman villa, as it may be indicated by the finding of a bi-colour floor mosaic and of some remains of a lead piping connected to a water pool, 270 meters far away.

The year 899 represents a turning point in the history of the Friulian manor house. The Magyars invaded the Friulian territories and following to the destruction they left behind, also the village of modern Capriva got destroyed, as well as any other surrounding. It was just thanks to the orders of the Patriarchs of Aquileia that the village was thoroughly rebuilt, enclosing some of the nearby Slavic peoples, who repopulated the entire area. Thus the origins of the toponym **Capriva**, which might derive from *Kopriva*, a word that meant "nettle" in the original dialect spoken by the settlers. **The toponym Spessa**, on the other hand, quite likely represents the transformation of the **original Latin expression *silva spissa***, indicating the local thriving vegetation of that period.

Some other historians identify **the year 1200 A.D. circa with the foundation date of a building** located on top of the hill, which might have been property of the Ungrispach family. This hypothesis is likely to find evidence in the Ungrispach's coat of arms, which was quartered in the Eck's one and was evidently engraved in the well located beside the stone fountain in the garden facing the residential halls.

Ever since the 15th Century the history of the manor house has been connected to the events in the town of Cormons and to the stronghold situated on top of the Quarin mountain. In 1359 residential feudatory, Andrea di Floyana, resident in the castle of Cormons made his will, which, besides being one of the oldest ones ever handed down to us, provides extremely relevant information about the hill of Spessa, possessed in agistment by the feudatory himself. Upon careful reading of the document, it appears that in those years not only did **grapevines**, but also olive trees and fruit trees grow luxuriant there.

A further document dated 1532 marks the history of the Castle effectively. It is the testament by Raimondo Dorimbergo, who claimed to have been enfeoffed with the feuds of Spessa and Gorizia by the archduke Carlo of Austria. Raimondo left to his daughter Dorotea the possession of the feud of Spessa, which she brought as a dowry to family Rassauer de Ratscha, coming from Ratschach, in the Carso high plain, by marrying Giuseppe Rassauer. From this marriage in 1547 Giovannina Rassauer was born. She got married to baron Adamo Smetcovitz, manservant of emperor Maximilian II, making the bond with the court of Vienna tighter and tighter.



Once she became a widow, Giovanna consented to the proposal by Maximilian II of Austria to marry the count Sigismondo I della Torre, thus bringing along the feud of Spessa as her dowry.

Family Della Torre di Valsassina, who boasted illustrious ancestors, such as Charlemagne, was one of the most powerful families at the time, and **they owned the Castle for over three-hundred years**. Family Torriani had close relations with the Augsburgs, but they were also subordinated to the authority of Venice, thus making Spessa one of the key players in the main political and war events of the time. For instance, family Della Torre took part in the wars of Gradisca, also known as war of the Uscocchi, (1615-1617), where imperial troops fought against Venetian ones. Carlo VI della Torre, son of Sigismondo I, notwithstanding the fact that the Venetian government had recalled its feudatories for military service in favour of the Serenissima, decided to go to war supporting the Austrian government, fortunately without suffering any loss of territories. In his will of 1607, drafted in the Castle of Spessa, Charles VI named his legitimate sons as his heir. His son Sigmund II, perhaps the quietest person of the Della Torre family, recognised his first-born Charles VII as the sole heir of his father's wealth. Nevertheless, he was the one who started the first of the three generations of domineering and murderous people, hounded by the imperial and Venetian justice. The last of all the blood-thirsty people was Lucio della Torre who, in 1723, was publicly executed through a sentence signed by Emperor Charles VI of Augsburg, since he was the main suspect for his wife's murder and he had committed many other heinous crimes.

For Gorizia and its county, the 16th century was a period of great glory and cultural, social and economic development, where the Torriani family and their manor had an important role. Safe to say that in 1765 in Gorizia the "Cesarea Regia Società d'Agricoltura" was founded, which had the merit to increase wine and fruit production in the area. Among the first members, we should also mention Antonio and Germanico della Torre, wine-makers and owners of Spessa and of other twenty-two houses in the village of Capriva. **The wine was of prime quality** since Spessa ranked second among the nine classes which made up the "Classificazione de vini prodotti nelle unite principate Contee di Gorizia e Gradisca" (Wine classification of the united Counties of Gorizia and Gradisca).

Even **Giacomo Casanova**, one of the most celebrated guests of Spessa, appreciated its wine, as he wrote in his Memories (*"the earl's estate mainly consisted in his vineyards which produced an excellent white wine and yielded about a thousand sequins a year"*). In 1772 Casanova was in Trieste because he was awaiting the Inquisitors' permit to return to Venice. Here he met the owner of the Castle of Spessa, Luigi Torriani who, in September 1773, invited him to his estate. The two men spent many weeks together lazing and having fun, until the host caught his guest in the company of Gualda, a young lady working in the castle. That was the reason of their quarrel: they even came to blows. Therefore, Casanova hastily packed his luggage and fled to Gorizia, although the earl apologised and relentlessly invited him to stay in Spessa. **Lorenzo da Ponte**, Mozart's librettist, was invited by earl Luigi Torriani to spend an even longer time in Spessa, from September 1779 to December 1780.

In the early **17th century**, the Torriani family kept on selling their possessions, as Luigi had already started to do: in fact, his son alienated the right wing of the Castle to the Mally family from Trieste. Rodolfo Voelkl, a rich Eastern spice trader bought the whole castle between 1879 and 1880 and he appointed an **architect from Trieste, Ruggero Berlam**, to design the **complete restoring of the building which was concluded in 1901**. The façades were decorated with coats of arms and ancient stones, such as the outstanding stone medallions with the symbols of the four evangelists dating back to the 16th century. The church annexed to the building was restored in the Neo-gothic style.



After Voelkl the castle belonged to doctor Eduard Roeckereth of Leipzig; then came Demetrio Economo di San Serff, a baron from Trieste, who had the merit to create the park that still surrounds the castle.

In 1916 the underground part of the castle was confiscated from the Economo family. Cellars and basements were later garrisoned by the Italian army due to their safe and isolated location. Being a seat of military commands, Spessa hosted both **Gen. Cadorna** and **Gen. Diaz**. In 1927 **Emanuele Filiberto d'Aosta** stayed here. During World War II, the castle was occupied by US officers. **The bunker built in 1939**, which has seventy steps from the medieval cellars to the deeps with two exits halfway through the hill, was used as a shelter and a warehouse for the German troops.

Anna Sartorio and Salvatore Segrè were the owners of the Castle of Spessa from 1925 to 1949. The coats of arms of the Segrè Sartorio e Sartorio family can still be seen on the different façades of the building. Their adoptive child, **Giorgio Stavro di Santarosa**, set up **an important wine farm and a gallop thoroughbred breeding farm** called "Allevamento di Spessa".

In the mid-Eighties Giorgio Stavro's heirs sold the estate of Spessa to the present owner **Loretto Pali**, who started to restore the central building and the annexed houses. **In 1990 Pali created the Castello di Spessa winery** and meanwhile he started an enhancement project of the structures of castle also for tourism purposes. Today the manor (which has been converted into 15 elegant suites with 18th and 19th century furniture from the Italian and Central European) is the heart of the elegant **Castello di Spessa Golf Wine Resort & SPA**, with a **18-hole golf course** and the adjacent Hosteria del Castello (open also to non-golf players), the Winery and the **Wine Shop** where you can find excellent local wines and delicacies, the Bistrot Il Gusto di Casanova where to eat friulian delicacies, the ancient country-houses, later transformed into an inn, now host **La Tavernetta al Castello**, a superb gourmet restaurant, and 10 country-chic rooms with balconies overlooking a wonderful landscape made up by hills and the golf course.

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