

Miravet castle

Visit





Historical Summary

Iberians and Muslims. The earliest remains found on the castle site are Iberian, from the 2nd century BCE. The oldest parts of the Moorish castle date from the 11th century. Between the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th the fortress was rebuilt and extended, probably to protect the frontier of Al-Andalus from the military pressure of the Catalan counts. Part of the constructions in the upper bailey and the walls are from this period.

The time of the Knights Templar and the Hospitallers. In the second half of the 12th century and during the 13th another stage of construction took place after the conquest of Tortosa and the surrounding area by count Ramon Berenguer IV during the process of Catalan territorial expansion. Between 1151 and 1153, Miravet and Siurana, the last Moorish redoubts, were conquered by feudal lords.

Ramon Berenguer IV gave the castle of Miravet and its lands to the order of the Temple. The Templars transformed the Moorish castle into a Templar fortress: during the second half of the 12th century and the 13th the main wings of the upper bailey were built, including the church, the refectory and part of the defensive walls.

Notable amongst events that took place in the mediaeval period was the order, in 1307, by James II of Catalonia and Aragon for the detention of the Templars and the confiscation of all their assets. The Templars did not accept the order and held out in Miravet castle, which was then besieged until they capitulated in 1308. With the dissolution of the order of the Temple, these assets passed to the order of the Knights Hospitaller and Miravet castle came under the jurisdiction of the castle of Amposta. The Hospitallers continued to occupy Miravet until the first third of the 19th century.

Between 1462 and 1472, during the wars of John II, the Hospitallers abandoned the castle of Miravet, which passed into the hands of the supporters of the Catalan Generalitat. The royal army retook it in 1466, after a siege.

From the 17th to the 19th centuries the castle's buildings were adapted to the technical changes that had taken place and new military requirements: during the Reapers' War the fortress was adapted for use with artillery.

In 1609 the king of Spain ordered the expulsion of the Moriscos from his domains. The Morisco population of Miravet, the majority, had to abandon the village and the Hospitallers adopted measures to repopulate it.

Between 1640 and 1652, during the Reapers' War, the castle alternated between the different forces. In 1707, during the War of the Spanish Succession, in which the archduke Charles, with the support of Catalonia, confronted Philip of Bourbon, duke of Anjou, Miravet castle was stormed by the Bourbon army.

In 1835, when the old regime was crumbling, Miravet castle ceased to be a noble possession and was sold to private buyers.

Carlist Wars. Between 1833 and 1839 the first Carlist War took place, in which Liberal supporters confronted the Carlist pretender. During this period, Miravet castle was occupied at different times by the Liberal and Carlist forces. Between 1872 and 1876 the third Carlist War took place and in 1875 the castle, which had become a redoubt of the Carlist forces, was seized by the Liberal army.

20th century. During the Spanish Civil War, Miravet was occupied by the Nationalist forces in April 1938, but the Republican army recovered it, only to lose it definitively in November the same year.

In 1990 the owners of the castle donated it to the Generalitat de Catalunya, which declared it a Site of National Interest and opened it to the public in 1994 after excavation and restoration work had been carried out.



1



Lower bailey

The lower bailey forms a sort of antechamber to the castle proper (the upper bailey) and probably originated in the albacar, or defensible enclosure, of the Moorish period. Covering the whole surface of the hill-top down to the vertical crags was a way of preventing any organised assault on the upper bailey; furthermore, the enclosure served as a refuge for the people of the village and their animals during difficult periods.

Plane

2



Stable

The Templars attached great importance to horses and their military and agricultural uses. However, this semi-subterranean construction was named the stable in the modern period, although we do not know how it was used in the Templar period; probably it was a large storehouse. The upper floor may have been a granary.

Plane

3



Outer terraced court

The lower bailey is divided into three terraced courts to cope with the changes of level: an upper terrace, with the stable and a cistern, a southern terrace, and this outer terrace, in which there were several modest buildings, such as stores or corrals, probably wooden, as well as a vegetable garden and an olive grove to serve the castle's inhabitants.

Plane

4



Tower

As well as the five large towers that defend the upper bailey, the castle has four other towers to defend the north side of the lower bailey, which was not protected by the sheer crags of the side facing the river. One of these towers is in the outer terraced court and the other three are in the upper one. Their main function was to cover the path that led to the castle gate.

Plane

5



Southern terraced court

This terrace had three main functions. The first, to cope with the increasing change of level; the second, to prevent access to the fortress from the crags below, and the third, related to the first, was to communicate with the outer terrace of the castle, where many of the castle's lay workers carried out their duties.

Plane

6



Upper bailey

The upper bailey forms the castle proper and is the most strongly-defended part of it. It is formed of a group of buildings arranged round a courtyard in such a way as to form a practically monolithic, impregnable bastion. This type of defensive solution can be seen in many castles in the Holy Land.

Plane

7



Gatehouse

The only entrance to the upper bailey is in the form of a passage, the right side of which forms a ramp, roofed with a barrel vault, leading into the inner court, while on the left there is a small guardhouse to house the sentries. It is therefore clear that the sole purpose of this construction was to impede access to the castle's main rooms by hostile visitors.

Plane

8



Cistern

The rocky sites of the great majority of Catalan castles made it impossible to dig wells. Water was therefore stored in large cisterns cut out of the rock to gather rainwater. This arrangement can be found in most fortifications in the Mediterranean area, where the climate is predominantly dry.

Plane



9



Inner court

The castle's life revolved round this inner court; in the same way as a monastic cloister, it communicated the different parts of the upper bailey. The walls on the west and south sides, of considerable thickness, are remains of the original Moorish castle. Today this court is larger than it was in the middle ages, as a result of the demolition of some buildings on the west side.

From the inner court, on the upper floor of the gallery in the north wing, can be seen the windows of the knight commander's chambers, which are not at present open to visitors.

Plane

10



Kitchen

The kitchen was of capital importance in the daily life of the Templar community. The Templars, unlike other religious orders, were allowed to eat meat three times a week, and their diet was appropriate to their military role. Here food was prepared for the knights, the sergeants and those working in the castle, such as servants and slaves.

Plane



11



Refectory

This large room, roofed with a pointed barrel vault, known in modern times as the refectory (or common dining-hall), was almost certainly used as such during the Templar period. It is very similar to other rooms for the same purpose, both in castles in the Holy Land and in the comparatively nearby ones of Montsó or Peníscola, both of which were Templar castles. The rule required that a cleric would read from religious works during meals.

Plane

12



Granary

The mediaeval diet relied heavily on cereals; hence, all castles had a building exclusively devoted to the storage of grain, to save it both from the weather and from vermin. Normally, this grain came from the castle's own lands. The granaries were particularly useful in times of siege, when large stores of provisions would be laid in.

Plane

13



Storeroom

This storeroom, together with the cellar and the granary, is in the basement of the building which is known to have housed the knight commander's chambers. As in the cellar and the granary, it would have been used to store the tribute or tithes that the Miravet estate received from local farmers, possibly salted meats. Like the granary and the cellar, this storeroom is roofed with a barrel vault.

Plane



14



Cellar

Located under the church, in the 17th century this large room was known as the cellar, although at that time it was used mainly as a prison; food was given to the prisoners through a trap-door in the ceiling. As a cellar, it must have contained a press and barrels for the wine, which in the middle ages was regarded as an invaluable complement to the diet. The remains of a Moorish press have been found.

Plane



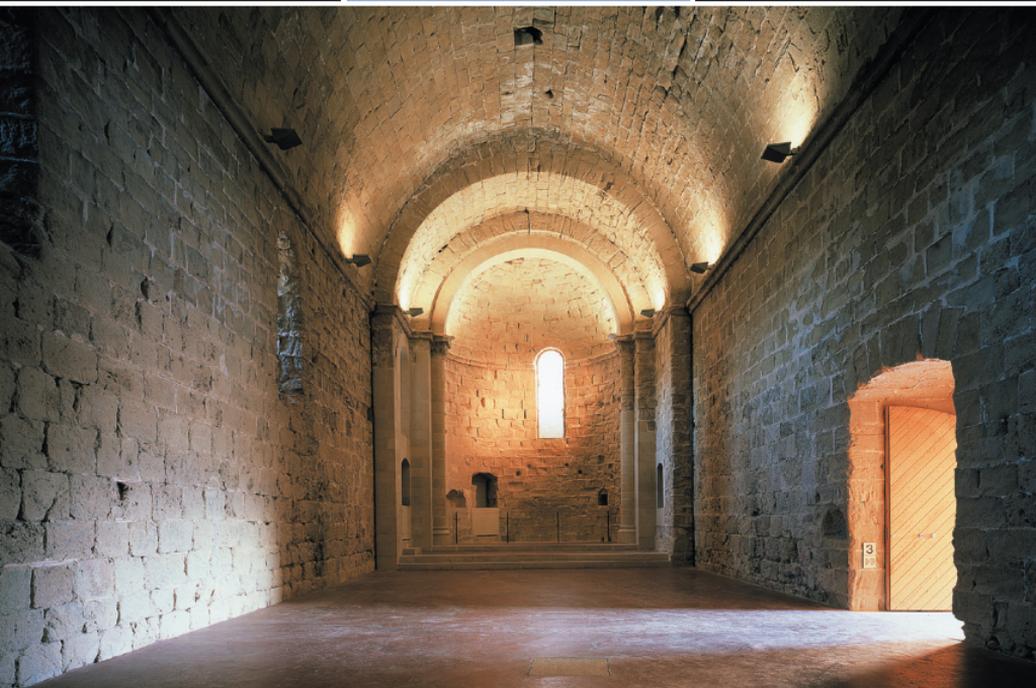
15



Gallery

Formerly, as in other fortifications, this gallery would have been reached from the inner court by means of wooden steps that could be dismantled to facilitate the defence of the main floor containing the church. It acted as a small cloister and gave light to the church entrance. This arrangement is typical of some Catalan Templar castles and is also found in the Holy Land. The gallery has four window openings with semicircular arches and the ceiling is a barrel vault composed of ashlar masonry.

Plane



16



Church

The Templar rule laid required the observance of various canonical hours and masses in the conventual church. According to surviving documents, the church contained rich liturgical items; however, the rule demanded that the decoration be very austere. Later, the church was used as a sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Grace, to whom a Baroque altar was raised which has now disappeared.

The church is on a basilical ground plan, the ceiling of the nave is a slightly pointed barrel vault, while the semi-circular apse contains the sacristy and the access to a narrow passage leading to the Treasure Tower, now practically demolished. From the west end of the church a spiral staircase leads to the roof terrace.

Plane

17



Terrace

Now heavily restored, this terrace was used as a look-out point, as a defensive structure and to communicate between the other roof-top defences. The parapets were almost certainly pierced by loopholes, from which all the castle's surroundings could be covered. It is not known whether there were other, possibly wooden, constructions.

Plane

18



Cistern

This cistern, of which only the entry hole can be seen, is much larger than the one under the kitchen, 12 metres long by 5 wide and 6 deep. However, it would have become useless if a hypothetical enemy took the lower bailey.

Plane

19



Barbican

Castles often had outer defence works to block the path of approaching enemies. Although there are more spectacular barbicans than this one, it is sufficient for its purpose: to prevent a hypothetical enemy making a direct attack on the entrance gate.

Plane



20



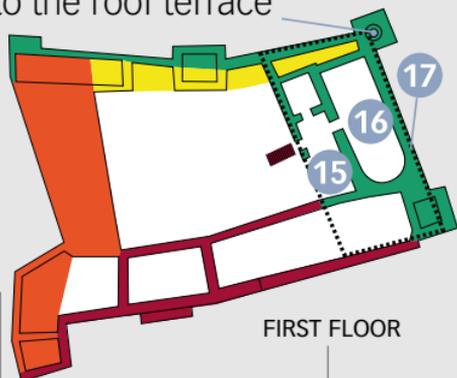
Wall

Three main types of defensive wall can be distinguished at Miravet: the first is that of the upper bailey, which, with its towers, forms a practically monolithic redoubt; the second is the type that protects the northern side of the outer bailey, not as strong as the first, but which effectively defended the castle on that side, and the third is the type that defended the sides close to the crags, which is much less strong and which in some places has in fact disappeared. From this point can be seen the wall of the upper bailey, 25 metres high.

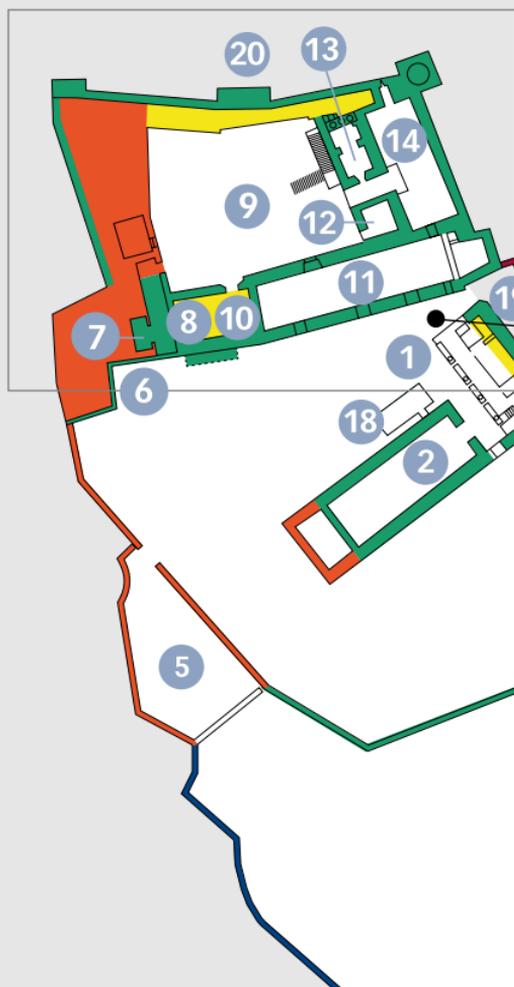
Plane



Spiral staircase access to the roof terrace



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

Start of visit

Moorish period, 11th–12th centuries

Templar period, 12th–13th centuries

Wall earlier than the 17th century

Structures from the first half of the 17th century and later

Structures from the 18th–19th centuries