

Castle of Cardona

Visit





Historical synthesis

The earliest human occupation of the site dates back to the Iberian period. With the Roman conquest and subsequent Romanisation, this early habitat lost importance in favour of other sites closer to the salt workings. And so things remained until 798, when Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne, ordered the castrum Cardonam to be occupied as a prelude to the conquest of Barcelona and the formation of the Spanish March, the southern frontier zone between the Carolingian empire and al-Andalus.

The counts who were vassals of the Carolingian monarchs expressed their interest in Cardona. Around 872, count Guifré I granted an initial, which was subsequently continued by a second charter granted in 986 by his grandson Borrell II. It was at this time that the count granted tenure of the castle to Ermemir, son of the line of the viscounts of Osona. Decades later, his heirs permuted their title in order to link it with the lordship of the castle, which then became the family residence. From then on, the viscounts of Cardona dominated the Cardener basin thanks to the revenues from the salt. At the same time, the influence attained by the senyors de la sal made Cardona and its castle one of the political epicentres of Catalonia, first as a viscounty and later as a county and dukedom.

In the early modern period, Cardona castle was one of the many mediaeval castles around Catalonia. From around 1450 onwards, the lords were absent for longer and longer periods in favour of their palaces in Barcelona and elsewhere. By the late 16th century, their chambers had lost their former splendour to house the ducal prisons, then crowded because of the violence and banditry that was typical of the period.

The Catalan Revolt (1640-1652), or Reapers' War, and the subsequent Peace of the Pyrenees (1659) reversed the situation. Its occupation in 1643 by French soldiers revealed the interest of Cardona as a strategic stronghold to dominate the armed factions in central Catalonia, as well as to control the salt mines and their revenues. For this reason, once the castle was regained by Philip IV's troops in 1652, it remained continuously garrisoned by Castilian troops.

However, the conversion of the castle into a modern fortress did not begin until 1691. The failed rebellion of the duchy of Cardona in favour of the king of France revealed to the king the need to ensure internal order in the country. In spring 1692, work began on the new ring of bastions that was to encircle the mediaeval castle. The work was directed by the engineer Pedro Borrás, a disciple of the Brussels military academy, and his famous director of works Sebastián Fernández de Medrano.

The new defences proved their usefulness in the course of the War of the Spanish Succession (1700-1714). Cardona, loyal to the cause of the archduke Charles of Austria, had to withstand the attacks of Phillip V's troops. A siege of more than forty days in the autumn of 1711 lent the castle the reputation of never having been conquered by the force of arms. Thus it remained until 11 September 1714, when Barcelona capitulated. As the city's safety was conditional on the surrender of Cardona, the governor, Manuel Desvalls, was obliged to surrender the fortress on 18 September. Thus, Cardona and its castle were the last bastion in which the Catalans defended their sovereignty and their own institutions of government.

Once the war was over, the castle continued to be a military stronghold. Its defences were reformed and improved until they attained their present layout in response to the series of major conflicts the country suffered, such as the French Revolutionary Wars (1793-1795), the Peninsular War (1808-1814) and the Carlist Wars (1833-1876). In the final instance, improvements in means of communication and the continual advances in artillery greatly reduced the stronghold's defensive utility. In 1890, most of the batteries were removed, and in 1903 the garrison was withdrawn and the military command ceased to exist. In 1931, the church of Sant Vicenç was declared a National Monument in response to the interest it had aroused amongst students of art, notably Puig i Cadafalch, as a paradigm of early Catalan Romanesque. Later, in 1949, this status was extended to the entire fortified complex.



1



Keep, or tower of La Minyona

10th - 20th centuries

Located on the highest point of the hill, the original structure was a round tower 10.5 metres in diameter by 25 metres high, typical of the early castles built in Catalonia in the 10th to 11th centuries as watchtowers from which to control the territory and represent the jurisdiction of the lord. Its current form, only 12.5 metres tall, is the result of the alterations carried out between 1794 and 1810 to avoid its serving as a reference point for artillery during a siege. It owes its name to an 18th-century legend that tells of the love of a daughter of one of the viscounts, la Minyona, for a Moorish prince.

Plane

2



Tower bailey

10th-20th centuries

At the foot of the tower there is a courtyard 25 metres long by 15 metres wide, which was the bailey, or fortified enclosure, of the original castle in the early stages of the fortification of the hilltop. Around it were arranged other structures to serve the keep, notably an underground cistern to store rainwater, thus ensuring a supply of water.

Plane

3



Chapel of Sant Ramon Nonat

17th-20th centuries

In this room in the old castle Sant Ramon is said to have received the Eucharist from the hands of Jesus, accompanied by angels dressed in the habit of the order of Our Lady of Mercy, shortly before his death in 1240. Between 1681 and 1683, the ducal family promoted the construction of a chapel, motivated by the extent of devotion to Sant Ramon and the Mercedarians. Since then it has undergone several refurbishments, the last of which, in 1962 under the direction of the architect Camil Pallàs, gave it its current appearance. The upper floor preserves the original altar frontal and retable of the ducal foundation.

Plane



4



Palace bailey

12th-20th centuries

Around this open courtyard were arranged the palatial chambers of the lords of the castle, which, between the 12th and 14th centuries, would have been in the old castle, by the keep. But from then until the mid-15th century the viscounts and counts of Cardona resided here with their family, in what was known as the House of the Lord. They were attended by numerous servants, headed by the steward and chamberlain, in a courtly setting that imitated the etiquette of the royal court in Barcelona.

Plane

5



Arcade: half castle, half monastery

11th-20th centuries

An arcaded structure that forms a transition between the courtyard of the palace and conventual buildings of Sant Vicenç. This division can be explained by the donation made to the abbot in 1040 of the eastern side of the castle hill, at the time of the consecration of the new church by Eribau, bishop of Urgell.

Plane



6



Cloister

14th-20th centuries

The location of the cloister at the west end of the church and not on its south side is a response to the need to adapt the church and the conventual buildings to the restrictions imposed by the site. This columnar structure is the skeleton of a small cloister 10.5 metres by 7.5 metres, with five openings on the long sides and three on the shorter ones, the columns of which are quadrilobate in section. Above this, there was an upper storey, or overcroft, which provided communication between the noble palace and the church of Sant Vicenç. It must be dated to around 1330 and its current appearance is the result of works carried out between 1968 and 1999. Note the carved decoration of the capitals with thistles (card in Catalan), the badge of the lords of Cardona.

Plane

7

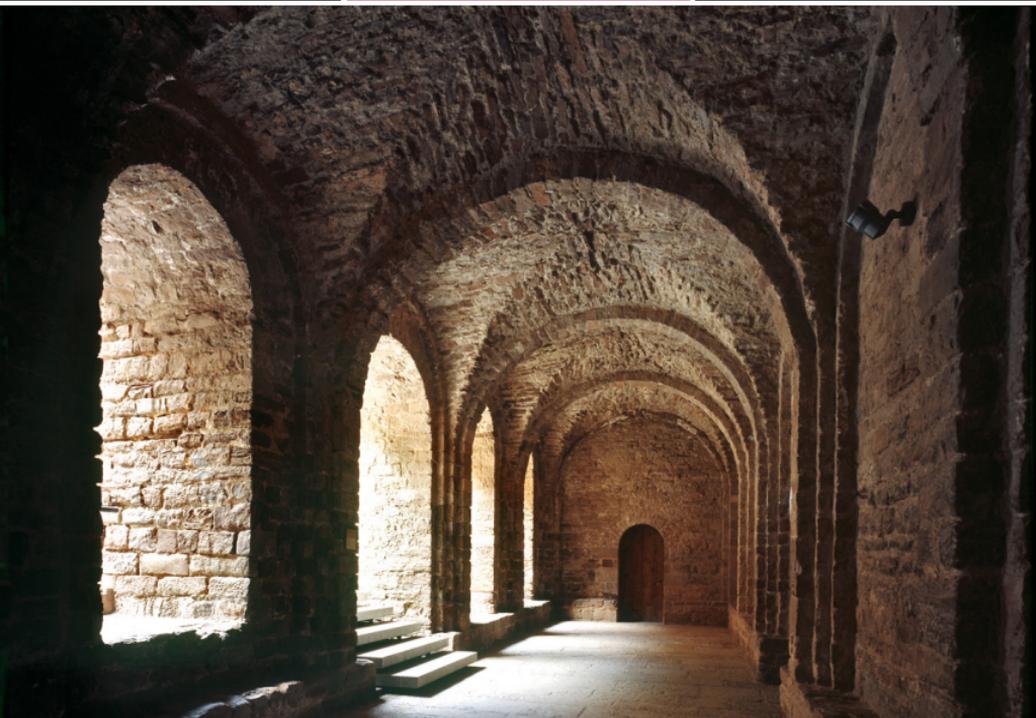


Church

1019-1040

Although the church is referred to in documents from 980, work on it began around 1019, promoted by viscount Bermon, who reformed the community with the institution of a canonical order. In 1040, the new building was consecrated. The life of the community of regular canons headed by an abbot under the patronage of the lords of Cardona continued until 1592, when the establishment became a college of secular canons. The subsequent conversion of the castle into a military barracks meant that the canons had progressively to abandon the conventual buildings, until in 1794 they were forced to leave the church, which thereafter was used as a storehouse. It was declared a National Monument in 1931, and its current appearance is the result of the restoration begun in 1949 by the architect Alexandre Ferrant. It is a basilica 51 metres long by 23.5 metres wide, with a three-aisled nave, leading on the east into a transept which is not very prominent, with a lantern over the crossing. At the east end there are three apses, the central one of which is preceded by a large presbytery. Its structure is the result of the influence of the Carolingian tradition (evident in the apse, the transept, the lantern and the tribune) combined with early southern Romanesque experimentation (in the treatment of the walls). The final result is a building that is considered to be prototypical of early Catalan Romanesque.

[Plane](#)



8



Atrium or galilee

1019-1040

The galilee provides a transition between the cloister and the interior of the church and served as a vestibule. It was the monumental setting chosen as a place of interment by the lords of Cardona and patrons of the church in the mid-12th century. As a result, in the 1190s it was decorated with paintings that covered the groin vaults, on a Christological theme, and by murals which were later overpainted with a representation of the defence of Girona led, in 1285, by viscount Ramon Folc VI against a French army. The murals and ceiling paintings are now in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

Plane

9



Tribune

1019-1040

Inside the church, supported by the vaults of the galilee, is the tribune used by the lords of Cardona. It could be reached both via the galilee and via the cloister overcroft.

[Plane](#)

10



Nave

1019-1040

The nave consists of three aisles divided by columns with a complex cruciform section. The central aisle is covered by a barrel vault reinforced with diaphragm arches, whereas the two side aisles are each covered with three groin vaults per bay. The central aisle, 6.5 metres wide and 18.7 metres high, is much higher than the side aisles (which are 2.9 metres wide and 12.1 metres high) and is lit directly by large windows, in an arrangement that is uncommon in 11th-century Catalan architecture. In the south aisle a stretch of the old paving can still be seen, at its original level.

[Plane](#)

11

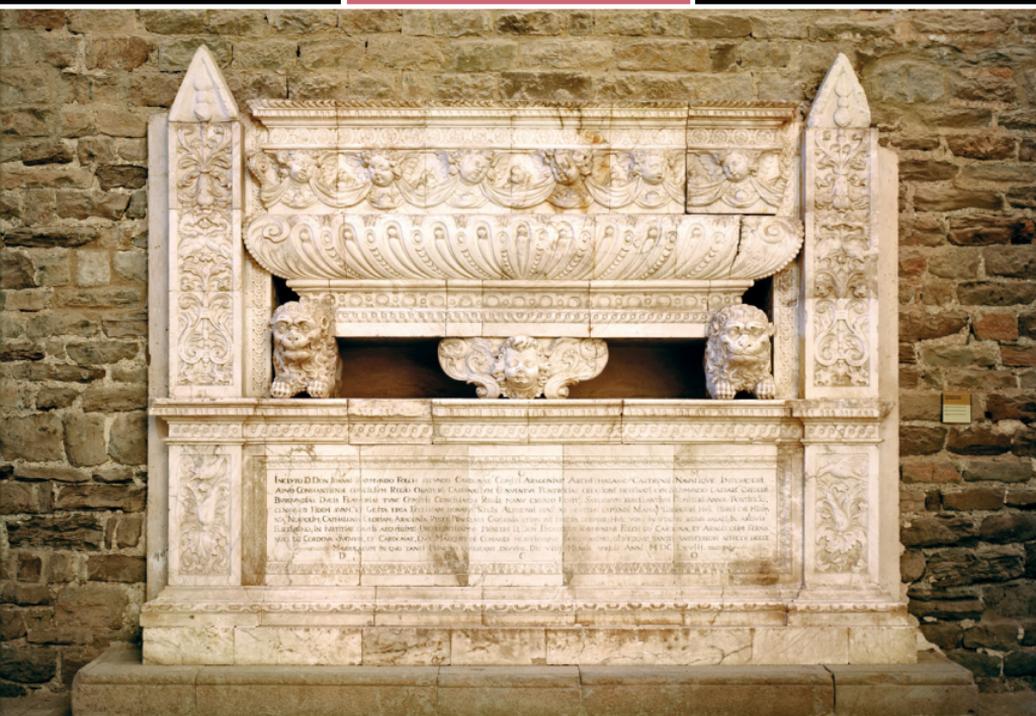


Transept

1019-1040

The nave leads on the east into a transept, which is the same width as the central aisle and is also covered by a barrel vault, with a lantern over the crossing. Twenty-three members of the line of the viscounts, counts and dukes of Cardona, until the 16th century, were interred here in their own church. When the lords of Cardona gave up this centuries-old custom, this space also accommodated the tombs of the abbots and canons of the collegiate church. Almost all the tombs were destroyed as a result of the subsequent military occupation of the castle. Between the nave and the transept can be seen some 12th-century wrought-iron railings; these were not originally placed here, but they are the only surviving remnant of the decorative furnishings of the church, now devoid of mural decoration or furnishings.

[Plane](#)



12



Tomb of count Joan Ramon Folc I

1668

In the south transept can be seen the remains of the tomb of Joan Ramon Folc I (1375-†1442), second count of Cardona. It dates from 1668, and was commissioned by duke Lluís Ramon Folc to receive the remains of his great-great-grandfather, which had until then been interred in a tomb in the galilee. It was executed in marble by the Grau workshop in Manresa.

Plane

13



Pantheon of duke Ferran I

Before 1539

In the north transept can be seen the alabaster tomb of duke Ferran Ramon Folc I (1513-†1543) and his wife Francesca Manrique de Lara (†1539), a 16th-century work in Renaissance style.

Plane

14



East end

1019-1040

The east end consists of three semicircular apses; the two side apses were dedicated to the Virgin and to Saint John, and the main apse to Saint Vincent the Martyr. The latter is at a higher level than the central aisle, with a wide staircase which was later divided to provide frontal access to the crypt.

Plane

15

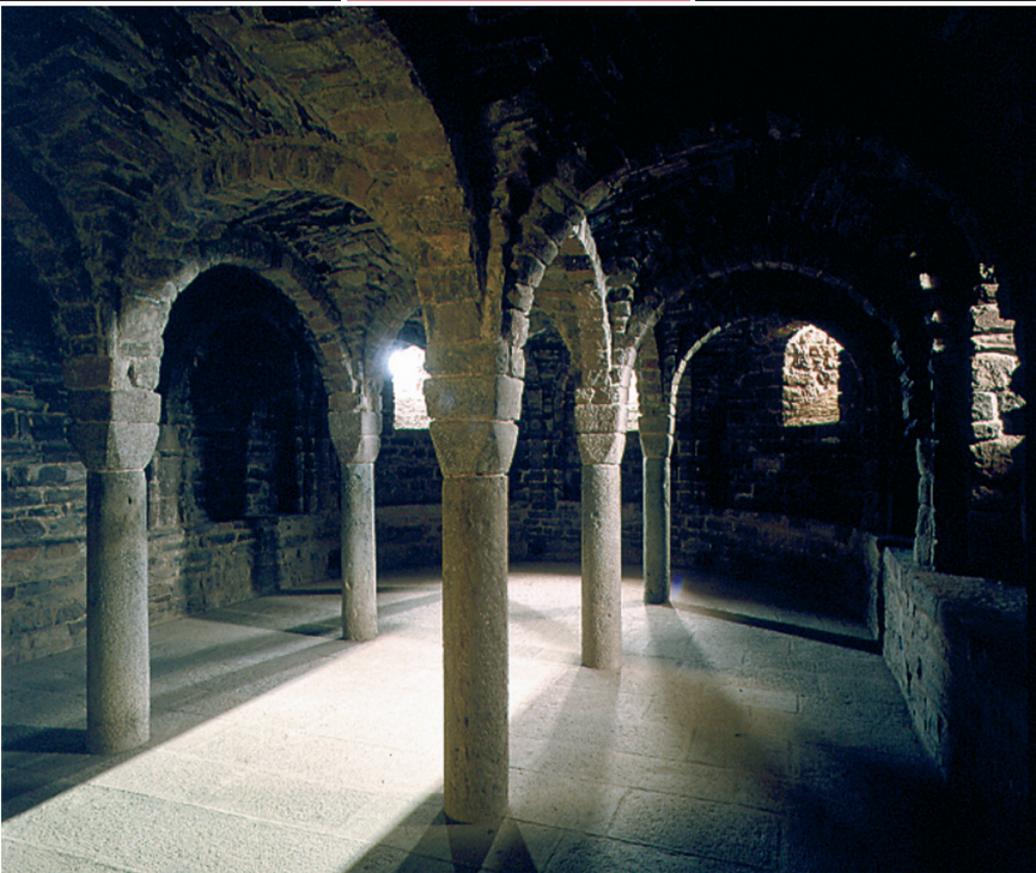


Presbytery

1019-1040

The main apse, with its wide presbytery, was where the lords of Cardona would swear a solemn oath to Saint Vincent before assuming their title and taking possession of their domains. They would kneel before the abbot to swear on the Gospels to respect the goods and privileges of the canons, including the custom of choosing to be interred in this church.

Plane



16



Crypt

1019-1040

Located beneath the high altar, this basement chapel was constructed at the same time as the rest of the church. It consists of three aisles, covered by groined vaults supported on monolithic columns topped by capitals in the form of truncated pyramids. Originally it was designated as the confessio of Saint Vincent. Since the church's notable collection of relics was also kept here, the chapel was also referred to as the Santa Espina (Holy Thorn) or, simply, as the chapel of the Relics. The original access was via the openings on either side of the side apses. The frontal access, with paintings representing saints Michael, Sebastian and Francis, dates from the rebuilding carried out under abbot Francesc Ferran (1597-1615).

Plane

17



Magazine

1718-1721

Below the church of Sant Vicenç on the southern side is the old powder magazine which was built on the site of the former house of canons, or communal dormitories.

Plane

18



Cemetery bastion

17th-19th centuries

To the east of the church is the Cemetery Bastion, so called because it is on the site of the cemetery of Sant Vicenç. From here you can appreciate the east end of the church, decorated with Lombard arcades between pilasters, which surround the whole building.

Plane



19



Ring of bastions

17th-19th centuries

The final result of the refortification works begun in the 1690s and finally completed a hundred years later, at the time of the French Revolutionary War (1793-95), is the ring of seven bastions that encircles the whole castle hill. Only four of them are pentagonal; the others adapt to the exigencies of the terrain. The outer walls are up to four metres thick and around the platforms are embrasures for about a hundred cannons. Sentry boxes are located in the outer angles.

Plane

20



Covered passage

17th-19th centuries

Communications between the castle and the town via the various levels was by the old bridle path, which, as the castle was refortified, was defended or covered with the bastion batteries. Its current form is the result of works carried out in 1737, 1794-1795 and, in particular, 1826-1828. It zigzags up the southern side of the hill, with steep, paved ramps and steps supported by inclined walls.

Plane

21



Casamata

1811-1813

This covered battery, or bunker, already existed in the 18th century, although the present structure dates from the time of the Peninsular War, a fact confirmed by the inscription on the lintel of the doorway which reads, "Reynando el Señor Don Fernando VII, que Dios guarde, en el año de 1811, se principio esta obra y se concluyo en el de 1813 [In the reign of king Fernando VII, whom God save, in the year 1811 this work was begun and in 1813 it was completed]".

Plane

