

Episode



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ITALY



The castle and the surrounding area; castles or buildings belonging to the culture of migrant students.

Hello everyone, today we have a new podcast for you: a fantastic journey into the history of castles and fortresses, fascinating architectural structures steeped in history and legend.

In this new episode, we'll take you with us to discover castles and fortresses from around the world. Our school is located in Sarzana, and we all love our city, even if we're not all from here, and our families often come from other parts of the world.

Some are from Morocco, some from Tunisia, others from Albania, and still others from Santo Domingo!

And in other classes, there are children from countless other areas.

We've discovered that castles and military fortifications of many different types exist in various regions of the world. These structures all had a defensive purpose and were built in strategic, naturally defensible locations, such as promontories, hills, and cliffs overlooking the sea. However, they also present differences, for example, in the materials they are made of: the availability of stone, wood, earth, and other local materials influenced the construction techniques and appearance of the structures.



Even today, they hold great historical, cultural, and social importance for the areas in which they stand, strongly shaping them by attracting a large number of tourists, who influence their economy and the way they manage resources and heritage.

Now that you understand what we're going to talk about, you're ready to embark on our journey. Let's start with our beautiful Sarzana, ready? Off we go!

We're in our city, Sarzana, located in a beautiful region of Italy, Liguria.

Do you know what made it so important so many years ago? Imagine a very ancient road, a bit like our highways today, but built specifically for travelers on foot or horseback. This road was called the Via Francigena, and it was a bit like a "corridor" connecting many European countries. And, just imagine, Sarzana was located right where this road met other important routes coming from Tuscany and Emilia! Being such an important place, Sarzana was a bit like a treasure trove. Conquering, for this reason, has often been at the center of great battles and wars.

A special construction that we can still see in the heart of Sarzana's historic center is the Genoese tower! Imagine a large, sturdy, and imposing tower. This tower, built by a very important Genoese group called the Banco di San Giorgio, was constructed way back in 1513, when Sarzana was ruled by the powerful city of Genoa, also nicknamed "the superb," a bit like saying "the best."

The Genoese tower was not an isolated tower; it was part of a much larger defense system. There were very high walls that surrounded the entire city, a bit like a large castle, and another even larger fortress called the Firmafede citadel. Sarzana didn't only have the Genoese tower to defend it. Along with our tower, there were other imposing fortresses such as the Sarzanello one, which was located on a nearby hill, and the citadel Firmafede, which we've already talked about. But it doesn't end there! There were also other "towers," each with a special name: the Star Tower, the San Francesco Tower, and the Testa Forte Tower. These stone guardians were placed at strategic points to protect Sarzana from enemies and to make Genoa feel secure in its dominions.

Although so many years have passed since its construction—think of it, over 500 years!—our tower is still there, almost identical to how the Genoese built it. It has retained its original shape!

And if you look closely, you can still see two drawings carved into the stone, true "3D drawings" from many years ago. These drawings are called bas-reliefs and depict a very ancient story: Saint George fighting an evil dragon to save a princess. This image of the saint defeating the dragon was actually the symbol of the city of Genoa, a bit like their "flag" or their "logo."

And do you know what else is special? Today in the tower? It's become the "home" of a truly interesting association called "senza tempo." What do these friends do? Well, they bring history to life! They dress as knights, ladies, and characters from a distant era and show us how people lived in the past. It's like watching a live historical film!

We leave our majestic tower and fly to another place made of colorful houses, huddled together. Can you smell that spicy scent in the air, a little sweet and a little spicy? We're in Safi, a city in Morocco, right on the Atlantic Ocean.

And do you know what we're going to visit? A magical place called Ksar el Bhar!

Ksar in Arabic, the language spoken in Morocco, means castle. El Bhar means sea.

What an adventurous name, don't you think?



PODCASTLE



Imagine a large castle, right there, near the waves crashing on the beach. But this isn't a fairytale castle, with towering towers and princes and princesses. This is a somewhat special castle, built many, many years ago by people from another country, Portugal.

These Portuguese were very brave travelers and sailors, and long ago they arrived here with their ships. They built this fort right by the sea to protect the city and the port from enemy ships. It was like a large fortified house with thick walls and cannons pointed toward the ocean, with the soldiers of the time gazing at the horizon, ready to defend their fortress.

The castle of the sea isn't just an old building. It's a place that tells us many stories. It tells us about adventurous journeys, about battles, but also about how people from different countries met and learned from each other.

Today, Ksar el Bhar still welcomes many curious visitors like us who come to admire its beauty and imagine its past.

We bid farewell to the colorful cities, gigantic deserts, and mountains of Morocco to continue our fascinating journey to Tunisia, a place full of sun, history, and ancient castles in North Africa!

Here, in a landscape of sand dunes stretching as far as the eye can see and rocky mountains rising against the blue sky, we find the ksars, ancient fortresses built starting in the 12th century by a proud and wise people: the Berbers. They are found primarily in the south of the country, particularly in the Tatoonine governorate.

The Berber people, with their wisdom and knowledge of the land, have been able to make the most of local resources to build these extraordinary buildings. Clay, sand, and desert stone have been transformed into sturdy walls and a simple yet incredibly effective architecture, perfectly integrated into the surrounding landscape. It almost seems as if the ksars were born from the earth itself!

The word "ksar" comes from Arabic and, as we've said, means "castle" or "fortress." But their original function was somewhat different from that of the castles we may know here in Italy. Ksars were primarily designed as large fortified warehouses. Think of them as giant pantries, built to safely store grains, sweet and juicy dates, and all the other goods necessary for the life of Berber communities. It was a clever way to protect food supplies from raids and ensure there was always enough to eat, even in the most difficult times.

From simple warehouses, over time they also became important places for the social life and defense of Berber communities. Their sturdy walls and often elevated positions offered a safe haven in the event of enemy attacks or danger. It was like having a protected refuge where people could feel safe with their families and their most precious possessions.

(Albania)

Rozafa Castle is located in Shkodra, Albania. It stands on a hill from which you can admire the entire city.

Its structure has an elliptical shape (like the trajectories of the planets around the sun!). It has three walls, making it the largest fortress in the country.

Its history is very ancient; many peoples have attempted to conquer it: Romans, Turks, and Ottomans. The latter transformed the Albanian church into a mosque and the bell tower became a minaret.



PODCASTLE



It was then conquered by Serbian-Montenegrin troops.
In 1939, Italian troops attempted to besiege it, but failed.
The story of the founding of Rozafa Castle is legendary.
It is said of a girl named Rozafa who was walled up in the castle's foundations as a sacrifice to ensure that it remained intact.
To this day, the castle remains intact and is a museum that preserves artifacts from the city's history from the Illyrian to the Ottoman period.
Rozafa is commemorated by a sculpture that flanks the entrance.

(sound of sailors on the ship)

Much less legendary, but equally fascinating, is the story of the founding of La Navidad Castle in Haiti, one of the very few castles in the Americas.
This fortress owes its name to the fact that it was founded on December 25, 1492.
What happened in 1492? Do you remember?
It was the year Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas!
When the Genoese explorer reached the coast of Haiti, one of his caravels (the Santa Maria) ran aground on the rocks.
Columbus then decided to demolish it to obtain materials for a fort.
But why build a fort there?
Columbus had decided to found a settlement to extract the gold in which that area was particularly rich.
But the Spanish were not alone: the territory was inhabited by indigenous tribes.
Columbus left eleven men behind, then returned to Spain to tell the queen of his discoveries and organize a second fleet for a new expedition.
On his return to Haiti, however, he found the eleven men dead on the beach and the Navidad destroyed. He therefore decided to found a new colony in what is now the Dominican Republic in honor of Queen Isabella.
It was the first European settlement in the Americas. Its remains are still visible today, including a church (the first in the Americas) and a museum.

This concludes today, dear listeners, our journey through the ancient walls and fascinating legends of castles.

But our exploration doesn't end here!
We'll meet again next school year when we continue our exploration of this world rich in history and mystery.

So, don't miss our next appointment with history and architecture! We look forward to seeing you for another adventure within the walls of castles, here on our podcast. See you soon!