1 of 15



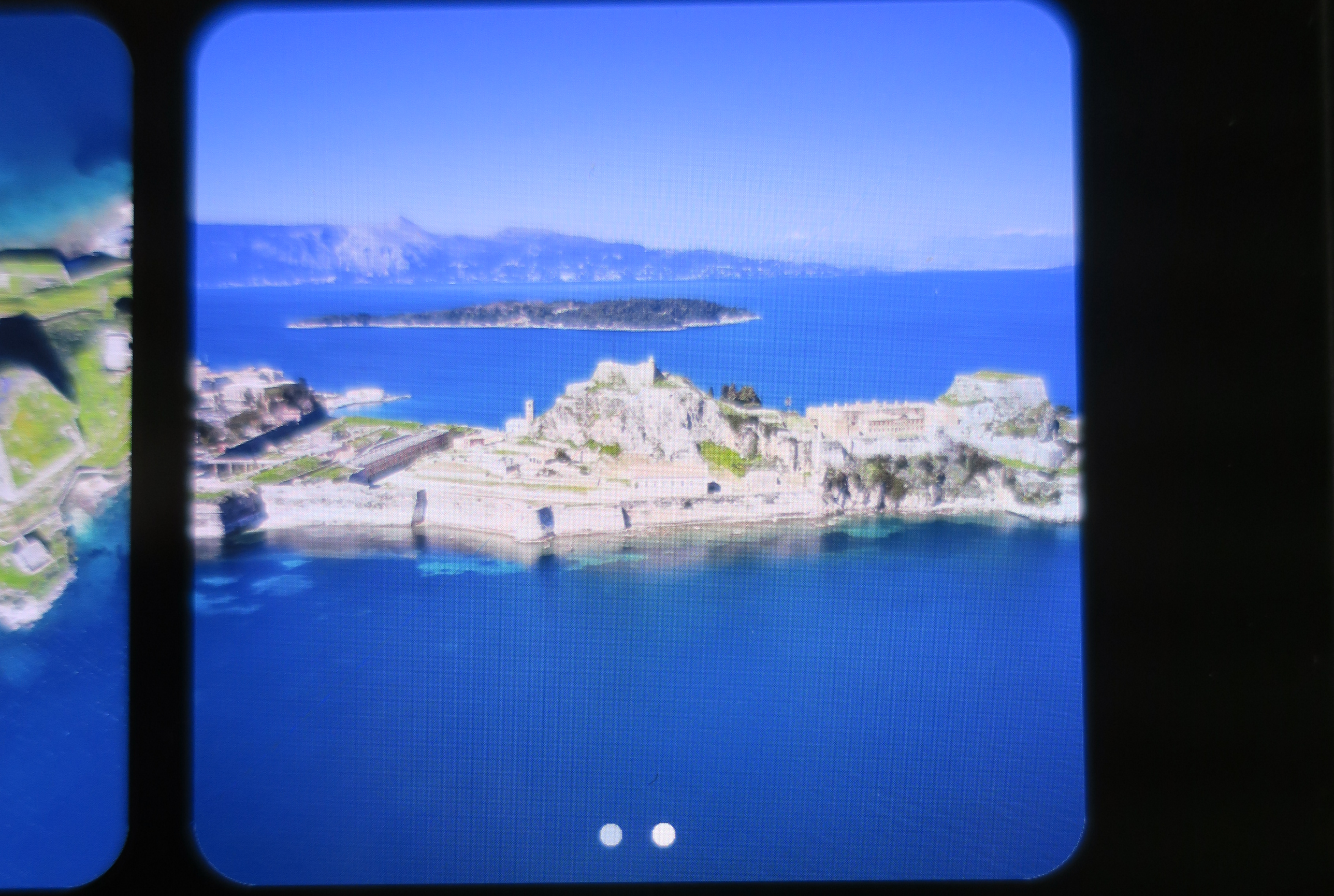
Introduction to the Old Fortre

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ction to the Old Fortress of Corfu

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Transcript

The Old Fortress of Corfu boasts a long, uninterrupted and tumultuous history. It was built at a highly fortified position, at the eastern edge of the city, on a small peninsula artificially cut off from the land across by a fossa, or moat. This site ensured the safe and gradual development of the Byzantine city of Corfu, which was named “Koryfo” *(core-ee-FOH)*, meaning “peak”, after two rocky peaks. During the era of Venetian rule, this name was corrupted into Corfu or Corfou, which survives to this day.

Since the mid-6th century AD, inhabitants of the ancient city called Chersoupolis *(her-SUE-pall-iss)*, which was located in the area of present-day Paleopolis, gradually relocated due to raids by the Goths and began to settle in this fortified location, which offered them greater security. The first fortification works at the Fortress began during the middle Byzantine era, probably around the 10th century AD. At about the same time, the eastern peak must have been initially fortified with a construction that was later called the “Tower of the Sea”, also known as “Castel di Mar” “or “Castel Vecchio”. During the 13th and 14th centuries, Koryfo was successively ruled by the Venetians from 1204 to 1214, the Despotate of Epirus from 1214 to 1267, and the Angevins from 1267 to 1386. The Angevins must have fortified the western peak and built the New Tower, or Castel Nuovo, also known as the Tower of the Land, or Castel di Terra. The Byzantine city grew in the citadel area between the two peaks and at the same time the outer town, known as “xopoli”

Transcript

Tower, or Castel Nuovo, also known as the Tower of the Land, or Castel di Terra. The Byzantine city grew in the citadel area between the two peaks and at the same time the outer town, known as “xopoli” *(KSOH-po-lee)* or “borgo”, started being created. During the era of Venetian rule, this area evolved into the city of Corfu.

The Venetians

From 1386 to 1797, during the era of Venetian rule, the fortress walls were gradually replaced with new fortifications, better adapted to the military needs of the times. Due to its strategic and commercial importance, Corfu was key in preserving the thalassocracy of Venice in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Venetians fortified the citadel area, or citadella, and began building the large moat, known as contrafossa, which separated the small peninsula from the rest of the land, transforming it into an artificial island. For defensive reasons they also created an undeveloped zone between the fortification and Xopoli, the present-day area of Spianada *(spee-ah-NAH-dah)*. These works aimed at protecting the island and at repelling first the Genoese and especially the Ottomans, who were becoming a dominant force in the Mediterranean.

After the unsuccessful siege of the Fortress by the Ottomans in 1537, led by the famous Hayreddin Barbarossa, the Venetians once again modernised the existing fortifications. The works was carried out according to the designs of the renowned engineer Michele Sanmicheli and his nephew Giangirolamo

Transcript

the existing fortifications. The works was carried out according to the designs of the renowned engineer Michele Sanmicheli and his nephew, Giangirolamo Sanmicheli, who created the characteristic form of the Fortress by applying the principles of the bastion system. From the end of the 16th century and after the inhabitants had relocated to Xopoli, the Fortress remained in use as a military base.

After Napoleon dissolved the Republic of Venice in 1797, Corfu was briefly ruled over by the French First Republic, the Russian-Turkish fleet in 1800, and the First French Empire in 1807. After the fall of Napoleon in 1814, the island was placed under British protection, along with the other Ionian Islands.

The British

From 1815 to 1864, Corfu and the rest of the Ionian Islands comprised the United States of the Ionian Islands as a protectorate of the British Empire. During this period, the Fortress remained an important military base of the British Empire. A series of major projects were completed during this period and several buildings were built, including barracks and a hospital.

The Modern Era

In 1864, Corfu was ceded to Greece and the Fortress became the seat of the Greek army. During World War II, the fortifications and many Venetian buildings within the Fortress were heavily damaged by bombing.

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Transcript

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The Modern Era

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Today, many of the existing facilities have been restored by the Ministry of Culture and many house public services, while others host various cultural events. The Old Fortress, an important monument of defensive art and military architecture, with intense evidence of Venetian and English interventions during the 19th century, is the oldest fortification in the Old Town of Corfu, which was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2007.



The Spianada

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The Spianada

101

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Transcript

The large square in front of the entrance of the Old Fortress is called Spianada. It is a defensive shooting range, clear of any buildings, that was created by the Venetians, in the Xopoli, or borg, meaning the city outside the fortress, following the siege of 1537 that proved disastrous to the Ottomans.Its final transformation into a defensive range must have taken place later, when its limits were expanded and the buildings that stood in this part of the city, which was the most densely populated, were demolished. During the second French Occupation, from 1807 to 1814, trees were planted in the area and it started being used as a square, as it remains to this day.

The statue of Matthias Johannes von der Schulenburg

The statue found to the left of the Fortress entrance depicts Matthias Johannes von der Schulenburg, who lived from 1661 to 1747and was a German Field Marshal, to whom the Venetians entrusted the defence of the city during the Ottoman siege of Corfu in 1716, which he successfully organised. Von Schulenburg reinforced the city of Corfu with new fortifications in order to face the large enemy force, numbering around 33,000 soldiers, contrary to the defence force, which numbered just 5,000 soldiers.

The Venetian Senate bestowed exceptional honours on him, including a statue, which was originally placed within the Old Fortress. It is the work of the Venetian sculptor Antonio Corradini and is made of

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The Sea Moat

102

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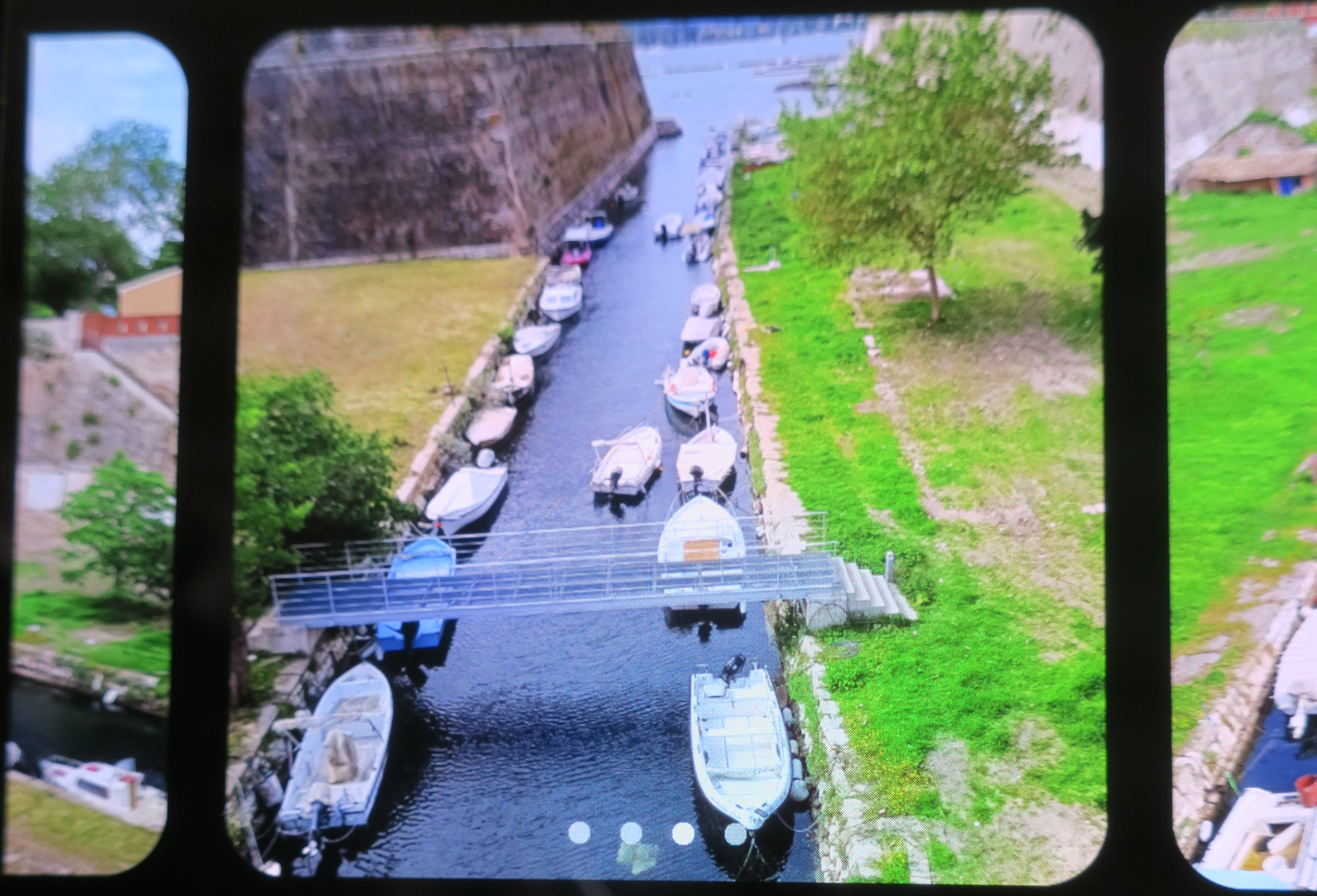
The Sea Moat

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The Sea Moat

102

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Transcript

On the western side of the Old Fortress there is a large water moat, one of the most important defence works of the fortification that were completed during the era of Venetian rule on Corfu. The fossa, or moat, was a key element of bastion fortresses, particularly since the mid-15th century, when the development of artillery led to changes in the fortress architecture of the time, making defensive constructions more effective.

The water moat started being constructed during the first decades of the 15th century. Along the western side of the moat, toward the city, stands a wall called contrascarpa, or counterscarp, which was connected to the city's perimeter walls. Work on the contrascarpa was completed in 1558 according to plans by Sforza Pallavicino, the general commander of the Venetian troops and a renowned military engineer, who was also responsible for other interventions in the Fortress.

The Bridge

The Fortress is accessible from the city via a bridge, which started being used around 1558. Initially it was made of wood, half movable and resting on pillars. This bridge was replaced in 1819 by a wooden, immobile bridge, and in the early 20th century it was replaced by the bridge visible today, with a length of 60 metres and a height of 15 metres above the water moat.

The Bastion Front of the Fortress

Transcript

immobile bridge, and in the early 20th century it was replaced by the bridge visible today, with a length of 60 metres and a height of 15 metres above the water moat.

The Bastion Front of the Fortress

The side of the Old Fortress facing the city consists of a fortified front formed by the two large pentagonal bastions of imposing volume and robust construction along the Old Fortress. They joined up via a straight wall called a cortina. These are the bastions, also known as bastioni or balluardi, of Savorgnan and Martinengo, fortifications built by the Venetians in the 16th century. They are named after military commander Gerolamo Martinengo and military engineer Giulio Savorgnan.

The interior of the bastions consists of defensive areas across two levels that can access each other, as well as the dry moat. Inside the bastions, apart from the gunports on the “sides”, there were also skylights and ventilation shafts to allow for the removal of artillery smoke, as well as storage areas for supplies and gunpowder. Sloping corridors lead to exits at sea level.

The defence front, designed by Veronese architect Michele Sanmicheli, started being constructed around 1540 and was completed in 1558.

The main gate of the fortress can be found at the centre of the defence front, between the bastions.



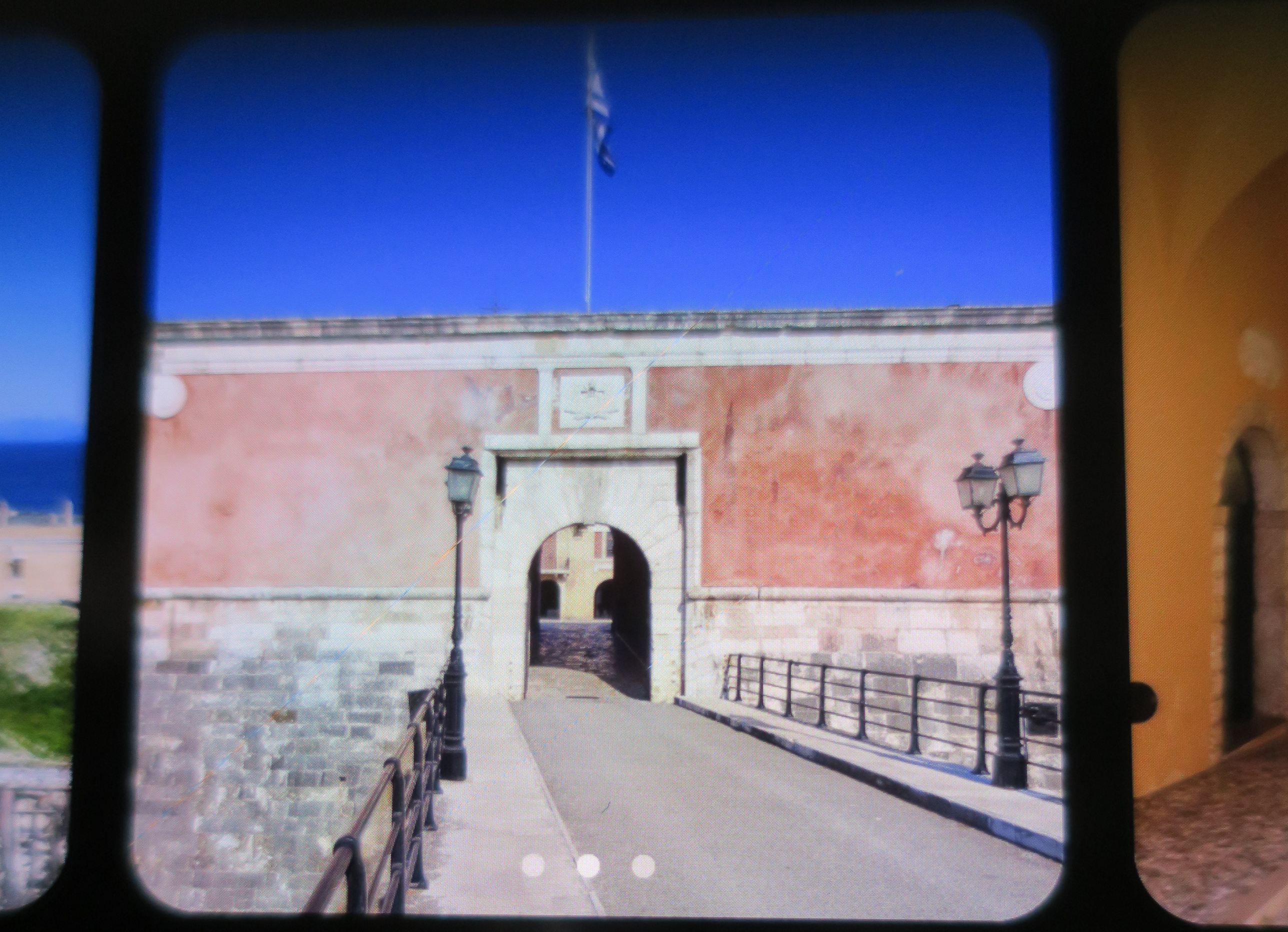
The Central Gate

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The Central Gate

103



The Central Gate

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Transcript

The central gate of the Old Fortress was built by the Venetians during the era of great fortification works that began after 1537, the most important being the reconstruction of the defence front on the land side. For security reasons, the gate was created between the two towering bastions of Savorgnan and Martinengo, in the middle of the straight wall, or cortina, connecting them.

The gate is arched and is surrounded by a stone frame. At the top, there was a winged lion of Saint Mark, a symbol of the Republic of Venice, carved in relief, which remained there until the late 18th century. In its place visitors can now see the coat of arms of the Greek crown, placed there after Corfu became part of Greece.

Internally, the gate consists of a gallery covered with three groin vaults, to the right and left of which there are two vaulted halls that catered to the needs of the garrison. At present, the hall on the left serves as an exhibit room and gift shop of a showroom – gift shop of ODAP, the Hellenic Organisation of Cultural Resources Development. The hall to the right houses an interesting collection of exhibits from Byzantine-era Corfu.

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ge over the Dry Moat - the Catho

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of Madonna del Carmine The

104

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Transcript

Access via the main gate to the main Fortress area is possible over the arched stone bridge of the dry moat, with an arch opening of 22 metres, which was built by the Venetians in 1603 to replace the wooden bridge that originally stood there.

The church of Our Lady of Carmel (Madonna del Carmine), belonging to the order of the same name, was built on the bridge over the dry moat. This small church survives with several 20th-century modifications, completed during a time where it mainly served military purposes. Inside, the two columns and capitals with stylised leaves at their corners probably originate from an older monument. According to travellers, during the era of Venetian rule, this is where those condemned to death would remain for 24 hours before their execution. At present, the building hosts temporary exhibitions.

The English Infantry Barracks

At the eastern end of dry moat, opposite the main gate, stands the English barracks building, which extends along the moat. It is an imposing, two-storey, brick building, built around the mid-19th century. It consists of two rectangular wings, in the middle of which there is a large entrance with three corridors, leading to the interior of the Fortress. This building replaced the Venetian arsenal (also a two-storey

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Following repairs, the English barracks building now houses the Public Library and Historical Archive of Corfu, a branch of the General State Archives and one of the most important archives in Greece.

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The Versiada

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The Versiada

105

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Transcript

The area that occupies the southern side of the middle fortification level of the Old Fortress is called the Versiada *(verse-ee-AH-dah)*. It is bounded by the south-eastern Venetian wall. Reconstructing and strengthening the walls of the Versiada was a concern for the Venetians since the early years of their rule. By the early 16th century, the most important works to configure the defence of this area had been completed.

During the final period of Venetian rule, the 18th century, the Versiada also included military buildings, a number of private residences, as well as churches that were demolished in the 19th century. The main building at the site remains the Church of Saint George, built in 1840.

In the Versiada, a building carved out of stone, located at a lower level and touching the inner side of the sea wall, was used for **Cookhouse** and was built before 1845 to cater to the needs of the adjacent English barracks. A large underground cistern stands in the first section of the present-day plateau, with visible spouts.

Following the bombing during World War II, the Versiada became an open space and is now used, mainly during the summer months, as a venue for cultural events.

cultural events.

The Church of Saint George

The church of Saint George is located in the Versiada, on the southern side of the fortress, and was built while Corfu was under the amical protection of the United Kingdom, from 1815 to 1864. It is built in the basilica type, with a portico and six columns on the façade, giving the impression of an ancient Doric temple. It is an example of the Georgian architectural style. It was designed by English military engineer Anthony Emmett and started being built in 1840 to serve the religious needs of the English garrison of the Old Fortress.

In 1864 it was converted into an Orthodox church to serve the religious needs of the Greek army and was dedicated to Saint George, patron saint of the infantry. During the World War II, the church sustained damage that greatly altered its internal structure. The present-day iconostasis of the church originally belonged to the Church of Saint Spyridon and was donated by the Voulgaris family, a renowned noble family of Corfu. Certain icons of the iconostasis were fashioned by Emmanuel Tzanes *(jah-NESS)*, a renowned 17th-century Cretan painter.

The church holds a service once a year on the feast day of Saint George. Periodic exhibitions and musical events are held at its premises.

East of the Church of Saint George stands a relatively small building. This is the **Venetian**

the Old Fortress.

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The church holds a service once a year on the feast day of Saint George. Periodic exhibitions and musical events are held at its premises.

East of the Church of Saint George stands a relatively small building. This is the **Venetian powder house**, one of the few surviving Venetian buildings. According to the inscriptions embedded in the eastern and western sides, the building was constructed between 1727 and 1731. In its eastern entrance there is an embedded inscription dated to 1731 and the coat of arms of the Superintendent General of the Sea, Marco Antonio Diedo, who lived from 1728 to 1731, while in the western entrance there is the coat of arms of Francesco Correr, who held the same office from 1726 to 1728. The building now houses a collection of Venetian sculptures from the Old Fortress.

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: Palace of the Venetian Superinte

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Sign Language



tendent (Palazzo del Provveditor

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Transcript

During the era of Venetian rule, the supreme ruler of Corfu was the Bailo *(BY-loh)*. Around 1420, two Counsellors were added, as well as the Provveditore, or Superintendent, and the Capitano, or Captain, who commanded the army. From the 16th century onwards, Corfu served as the seat of the Superintendent General of the Sea, who also ruled over the rest of the Ionian Islands and commanded the fleet.

The Palace of the Superintendent stood opposite the Venetian arsenal, which was later replaced by the English Barracks. The building no longer survives, as it was destroyed by bombs during World War II, which also damaged other buildings within the Fortress. Due to the slope of the ground, the building was constructed at a higher level. Its ground level could be reached via a large external staircase, which was supported by a number of domes, some of which have survived.

The building comprised three stories and featured a beautiful symmetrical façade. The large arched entrance opening at the centre was framed by rectangular windows. On the upper levels there were balconies with beautiful parapets consisting of colonnades.

Between 1818 and 1824, the era of British rule, the

Transcript

Between 1818 and 1824, the era of British rule, the building was originally used as the residence of the Commissioner and later housed the Ionian Academy. After 1840 it was used as the residence of the English military commander.

Today, beneath the arches of the building's balcony, Venetian emblems carved in relief are on display, with the majority originating from the walls of the Old Fortress or other Venetian fortifications of the city.

The Secretariat Building

A short distance to the left stands another building, of which only part survives, as most of it has been destroyed. It is referred to as the building of the Secretariat of the Administration of the Venetian Superintendent. There was a prison on the ground level behind the palace.

The Offices of the Archaeological Service – The Cistern

The building visitors come across on the left while heading up to Fort Campana has been restored and now houses the offices of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Corfu of the Ministry of Culture. In front of the building stands the polygonal spout of a cistern, which met the water needs of the soldiers and inhabitants of the fortress in case of siege. Its stone spout is adorned with the coats of arms of N. Erizzo and Z. Balbi, Venetian commanders of the Fortress, and bears the date 1732.

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The Northern Side of the Fortress

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he Northern Side of the Fortress

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Transcript

The northern side of the fortifications of the Fortress extends below the Land Tower and the perimeter wall towards the sea, where the Venetian port of Mandraki *(man-DRACK-ee)* was located. At the western edge of the sea wall rises a cavalier, while at the eastern end, where Cape Kavosidero *(cah-voh-SEE-they-roh)* begins, stands the semi-circular bastion of Mandraki. This fortification is among the first Venetian fortification works of the Fortress and must have been completed by 1520. At the entrance of the site, opposite almost the cavalier, stands a three-storey building made of carved stone, which was built during the British occupation as **an Officers' Barracks.** It is dated to 1850 and was designed by military engineer Edmund Ogle. The building currently houses the Department of Music Studies of the Ionian University.

This side of the Fortress included several Venetian military buildings, many of which were destroyed in 1718 when three powder houses at the Land Tower and the citadel exploded after being struck by lightning. The central part of the present-day plateau was occupied by a large, elongated, three-storey **barracks also known as Barracks of Pasqualigo or of the Schiavoni**, built by the Superintendent General of the Sea, Giorgio Pasqualigo, between 1718 and

of Music Studies of the Ionian

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The building was destroyed during World War II and today only few of its remains survive. Behind the Barracks of Pasqualigo, an uphill stepped path leads to Fort Campana.

Past the barracks, the downhill paved road leads to the port of **Mandraki**. The part of the wall that rises from the side of the sea featured various fleet bunkers, while on the upper side was the wing of the Venetian Prison Hospital. This building was also destroyed during World War II and only few of its remains survive to this day. Opposite the vaulted gallery, an underground passage led to Cape Kavosidero.

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Mandraki

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-02:21

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Mandraki

108

00:04

-02:17

Transcript

Mandraki, the artificial Venetian port, is located on the northern side of the Old Fortress. The word "Mandracchio" is often found in areas ruled by the Venetians and means a natural bay for the mooring of ships, which is closed off by chains. Corfu was a very important station for the commercial ships of Venice that were travelling to or from the East, therefore it was necessary to create a port to protect them. The site chosen for this purpose was the most suitable, as the rock of the Fortress itself protected the port from the strong southern winds, while also being close to the city.

The port, with a capacity of about ten ships, started being built in the early 15th century. Its inner side is traversed by the straight northern wall of the middle fortification level of the Fortress, while at one end, where the gate leading to the rest of the fortress stands, rises a semicircular bastion that protected it from the eastern side. These Venetians started building these fortifications to strengthen the fortress in the 15th century and must have completed them in 1520.

When the bastion front was completed in the west around the mid-16th century, the previous sole passage connecting the land to the Fortress across a wooden bridge was dismantled. The bridge led

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When the bastion front was completed in the west around the mid-16th century, the previous sole passage connecting the land to the Fortress across a wooden bridge was dismantled. The bridge led to the first Venetian gate of the Fortress, the **Porta Soranza**, located in the port area, which is now walled off. Decisions of the Venetian Administration inform us that north and east of the port there were two breakwaters, as is the case today, with a length fixed at 165m. and 53m. respectively. In order to lay their foundation, old ships filled with stones were sunk in the appropriate places and the breakwater was built using ancient blocks. The western entrance to the port was closed off with chains to ensure the ships' safety.

A stone building dated to the era of British rule currently houses the Corfu Sailing Club.

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avosidero (currently closed to the

109

00:00

-01:03

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the public)

Kavosidero (curren

109

00:07

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Transcript

The name Kavosidero comes from the Italian "Capo San Isidero", meaning Cape of Saint Isidore. The cape, which marks the end of the eastern section of the Old Fortress, received this name during the era of Venetian rule. The area was the last to be fortified during the 16th century, after repeated requests made by the Corfiots to the Venetian administration, so that the urban population could flee here in case of attacks. Its fortification began around 1552 and is attributed to the architect Giangirolamo Sanmicheli.

The walls surround the eastern steep cape and end in the south, at the edge of the Land Tower. Most of the walls were founded on the rocky slopes of this side. During the era of British rule, certain military installations were also built here, such as the eastern powder house.

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The Fortress Citadel

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00:00

-01:21



The Fortress Citadel

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-01:14

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The Fortress Citadel

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00:12

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Transcript

The citadel is mentioned in written sources and maps of the Venetian era as the walled area of the Fortress sitting between the two fortified peaks, the Land Tower to the west and the Sea Tower to the east. It took on its fortified appearance during the era of Venetian rule, when a strong perimeter wall, adapted to the terrain of the rock (mainly on the southern side) connected the two peaks.

The first Venetian fortification works began in the 15th century, but the most important ones were completed in the early 16th century. At this time, the area was levelled and many houses that had been built there were demolished. The citadel, which currently includes the large British Hospital, contained the church of the Saints Peter and Paul, originally an Orthodox metropolis and later a Catholic metropolis of the medieval city.

During the final era of Venetian rule, in the 18th century, the citadel included mainly military buildings, including powder houses, barracks, prisons and arsenals, most of which were built after the extensive destruction that occurred here in 1718 following the powerful explosion of three powder houses.

6:06

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Fort Campana

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00:00

-02:31

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Fort Campana

111

:05

-02:26

Transcript

From the plateau where the Palace of the Superintendent stood, a paved uphill path leads to the upper part of the fortification and to Fort Campana, which is built on the north-western rocky outcrop and protected the citadel gate. At the same time, it covered the lower parts of the fortress with ammunition fired from high and far away. Fort Campana was built by the Venetians after the siege of 1537, as part of the modernisation of the fortifications of Corfu. It is believed that a small belfry stood at the same location, after which it was named. A gate at the base of the Fort leads to the citadel through a gallery. At the northern entrance of the gallery there is a lion of Saint Mark, the symbol of the Most Serene Republic of Venice, carved in relief. This fort marks the starting point of the strong fortification circuit of the northern side of the citadel, which ends at the Sea Tower on the eastern peak.

From Fort Campana, to the left of the entrance gallery, a stone staircase leads to the northern part of the middle fortification level and to site of the Barracks of Pasqualigo, which no longer survive.

The Clock Tower

Near the fort and the western gate of the citadel rises the Clock Tower, built between 1848 and 1850 by the

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The Clock Tower

Near the fort and the western gate of the citadel rises the Clock Tower, built between 1848 and 1850 by the British who occupied Corfu. It quite possibly replaced an older Venetian clock tower, after which the nearby fort was named. The belfry tower is 12m. tall. Of its three bells, one is Venetian and is dated to 1732, while the other two were are English-built and are dated to 1827.

The Prison Building

Past Fort Campana, on the right side of the road and at the foot of the Land Tower, stands the prison building. It is a two-story rectangular building, with small openings at the top of the ground level with stone frames, originally built during the Venetian period. On its north-western side there is an inscription dated to 1786. The upper level, more simple in appearance, is made of bricks and was added during the era of British rule.

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The British Hospital

112

00:01

-00:49

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The British Hospital

112

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-00:37



The British Hospital

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-00:32

6:06

Transcript

A large brick structure was built by the British in 1836 at the edge of the Sea Tower to serve as a military hospital. Several Venetian buildings stood at the same site and were demolished to make room for its construction. It is an impressive building complex with large wings comprising many rooms and surrounding two internal courtyards. The Hospital was bombed during World War II and sustained extensive damage. It also functioned as a Greek military hospital, while after the war it housed the Corfu School of Reserve Officers.

Behind the British Hospital there is a path leading to the lowest fortification level, Cape Kavosidero.



The Sea Tower

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-01:35

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The Sea Tower

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-01:30

Transcript

The Sea Tower is built on the eastern rocky top of the Fortress and at the eastern end of the citadel. The edges of the rock where it was founded are surrounded by the sea walls of the Fortress' lower level, the Kavosidero area. The fortification layout that survives to date is the result of Venetian fortifications built in this position, mainly in the early 16th century to replace the so-called Old Tower, or Castel Vecchio, which was built before the era of Venetian rule. Historical sources refer to the peak as being fortified during the 13th century, when Corfu, after the despots of Epirus, came under the rule of the Angevins, from 1267 to 1386.

In fact, it cannot be ruled out that walls had already been built on the rock during the Byzantine era. It possibly formed the core of the Byzantine citadel, Koryfo, which is referred to in written sources during this period as already being walled off.

During the era of Venetian rule, the Sea Tower featured an underground powder house, which survives in its southern side, as well as a small church and a guardhouse.

The eastern peak looks over the wider area of the Old Fortress, thanks to its various of fortification levels and morphology, as well as over the "strait" between Corfu and the opposite mainland coast.

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The Land Tower

114

00:00

-02:06

15 of 15



The Land Tower

114

-02:01



The Land Tower

114

-01:54

Transcript

The Land Tower is located on the western rocky top of the Old Fortress, reaching a height of about 70m. The Sea Tower, the citadel area and the Land Tower form the upper fortification level of the Fortress. Its fortification is mostly Venetian-built, with some modifications completed by the British during the 19th century. The most important fortification works were completed in the early 16th century and replaced the older pre-existing ones. It is known that, during the era of Angevin rule, from 1267 to 1386, the New Tower, or Castel Nuovo, had already been built, before later being replaced by the Venetian Land Tower.

The Land Tower supported the defence of the city of Corfu (Xopoli or borgo). An underground defence area, carved into the rock, ends at a fortified front with four gunports in a radial arrangement, which were restructured during the era of British rule. On top of the Land Tower, at its southern end, a lighthouse was built in 1822, and remains in operation to this day.

The Lighthouse

The lighthouse, known as Sideros *(SID-err-oss)*, was built in 1822 by the British, based on European techniques of the era and the know-how of Augustin-Jean Fresnel, who invented and presented the first catadioptric lighthouse mechanism in 1819.

6:07

Transcript

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The Lighthouse

The lighthouse, known as Sideros *(SID-err-oss)*, was built in 1822 by the British, based on European techniques of the era and the know-how of Augustin-Jean Fresnel, who invented and presented the first catadioptric lighthouse mechanism in 1819. The lighthouse forms part of the walls of the Land Tower and is named after Cape Kavosidero. It is a cylindrical tower, 8.5m tall, with a focal height of 78m. The lighthouse keeper occasionally lived in a residence surviving on its northern side.

The lighthouse remains in operation to this day and functions independently, without human operation, offering a luminous range of 13 nautical miles.