

Castello Sforzesco (English: *Sforza Castle*) is a castle in Milan, that used to be the seat and residence of the Duchy of Milan and one of the biggest citadels in Europe and now houses several of the city's museums and art collections.

The old little fortress called 'di Porta Giovia' was built in the period from 1360 to 1370 along Milan's medieval walls, of which it includes the gate with the same name. Galeazzo II Visconti decided to have this fortress built basically as a defence. Then, his successors Gian Galeazzo and Filippo Maria went on with the building. In particular, the latter made the fortress his residence and arranged the great park in the northern area. A tower was built in each corner of the Visconti's Castle.

The last descendant of the Visconti family, Filippo Maria, died in 1447. He had no legitimate heirs, so the citizens from Milan proclaimed the Republic. The fortress was demolished and its stones were used to restore the town walls.

Three years later, in 1450, general Francesco Sforza, a great leader who had married Bianca Maria Visconti, Filippo Maria's illegitimate child and sole heir, became Duke of Milan. The Castle was rebuilt upon the ancient foundations of the Visconti Castle.

In 1466, Francesco Sforza's successor Galeazzo Maria transformed the courtyard inside the Castle facing the park into a luxury residence, which was named the Corte Ducale. Next to the Corte Ducale was a square-planned complex called the Rocchetta. Really a fortress inside the fortress, the Rocchetta was provided with a high tower called Torre di Bona.

In the late XV century, Ludovico il Moro entrusted architect Donato Bramante and Leonardo Da Vinci with the building of a pretty little bridge overlooking the outer moat and the painting of the famous frescos on the walls inside the Sala delle Asse.

During the French domination in the years that followed the fall of Ludovico il Moro (1499), the Castle survived delicate historical events: battles, occupations, sacking and destruction. In those years, the Filarete tower was used as an ammunition storage area. During a stormy night in 1521 a lightning rod hit the tower and made it explode causing casualties and damage to the whole structure.

During the Spanish domination, which began in 1526, a star-shaped fortification was built around the Castle to make it impregnable, also because it was provided with supplies and fodder storage areas, as well as with a number of water wells.

In the late 17th century, according to a project by Emilio Alemagna, the area between the Castle and the Corso Sempione was transformed into today's Parco Sempione.

During the Austrian domination, which began in 1706 and lasted for about one century, the Castle was used for military purposes only. It saw several restorations until the assault by Napoleon's troops in 1796.

The assault by the Napoleon's army at the end of the 18th century caused severe damage to the old fortress, as the citizens from Milan mutilated its towers and the Sforza family coats of arms. Finally, Napoleon decided that the external structure of the building should be demolished and the Castle used to quarter the troops. The frescoed rooms at the ground floor of the Corte Ducale were even used as stables.

The "historic restoration" began in 1833 under the supervision of the architect Luca Beltrami who proposed a kind of "philological" restoration based on what was written in the antique graphic and literary sources. Beltrami started by lowering the circular tower situated on the east side, which was later used as a drinkable water reservoir. The restoration went on with the reconstruction of the top of the circular tower on the west side and the Torre di Bona, the digging of the moat, the rearrangement of the Ducal Courtyard and the Rocchetta, the demolition of the Ghirlanda and the Cavallerizza.

After the Unification of Italy (1861) , projects were started for the restoration of streets, squares, buildings and whole areas of Milan. A debate began in particular on the restoration of the city historical buildings, including the Sforza Castle and the big area around it.

In 1893, the castle was given to the City of Milan. Some citizens proposed its demolition because it was still largely regarded as a symbol of the old tyranny. Other people proposed to demolish only a part and to put in a straight avenue between the Cordusio and Arco della Pace.

The results of the first stage of the historic restoration were unveiled on the occasion of the Esposizioni Riunite, a major cultural event hosted at the Castle in 1894. About 43,088.50 liras were collected to go on with the restoration, which, from 1895 to 1897, regarded the reconstruction of windows , cornices, roofs and floors.

The old rooms were restored, walls scraped down rediscovering beautiful frescos lying beneath. Spaces for cultural institutes and for art and archaeological museums were set in the Ducal Courtyard and in the Rocchetta. Opening to the public was in May 1900. The restoration by Luca Beltrami ended in 1905, as the reconstruction of the Filarete tower was completed. The Castle was finally given to the Milanese people. Again, bombing raids in August 1943 seriously damaged the Castle, in particular the Rocchetta. Later restored, the Sforzesco Castle today represents one of the most interesting and entertaining arts centres in Milan.

The best known of the current civic museums is the Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, with an art collection which includes Michelangelo's last sculpture, the *Rondanini Pietà*, Andrea Mantegna's *Trivulzio Madonna* and Leonardo da Vinci's *Codex Trivulzianus* manuscript .

The Castello complex also includes The Museum of Ancient Art, The Furniture Museum, The Museum of Musical Instruments and the Applied Arts Collection, The Egyptian and Prehistoric sections of the Archaeological Museum and the Achille Bertarelli Print Collection.