



LAS CARNICERÍAS REALES (THE ROYAL SLAUGHTERHOUSE/MEAT MARKET)

This building, once a slaughterhouse and meat market, was built between 1576 and 1579 by order of Priego town council. It was, therefore, a municipal project and had nothing to do with the monarchy, despite the fact that it has been known inappropriately as "real" (royal) for some years now.

Its architecture has a simple design, very much in line with the Renaissance style. Its basic floor plan is square, made up of a colonnaded patio, finished with four corner towers, open at the base. Two of them have two corbels below the eaves of the roof, in the form of fantastic, decorative human heads, probably designed as protection for the building and the activities carried out within.

Each side of the patio has three round arches, supported by strong, rustic columns which conform the corresponding colonnaded galleries that run along the perimeter. This was where the stalls were set up for the sale of meat.

The architectural project is attributed to Francisco del Castillo, a renowned architect trained in Italy, while the participation of Juan de la Monja as surveyor is confirmed in documentation. He transported the grey-blue limestone used for the columns and façade from the quarries of nearby Alcaudete, while local toscó stone or travertine was used for the rest of the building. The toscó arches were originally plastered and decorated with a range of painted vegetable motifs and geometrical designs, as can still be seen on the inside of one of the three arches closest to the entrance.

Heading down a magnificent spiral staircase, which has no central pillar in order to allow easy movement of meat and butchers alike, we come to the lower floor or semi-basement. With its vaulted brick ceiling, this was the site of the slaughterhouse and where the dead livestock was carved up prior to sale. Here you can see the stone slabs to which animals were attached during slaughter, as well as the mark left in the stone by the rubbing of ropes used to immobilise them. The slaughterhouse was cleaned making use of water from a channel that runs parallel to one side of the building.

However, the greatest artistic merit of the Carnicerías Reales building, is to be found on its façade. Access is via two dressed, banded pilasters, with broken entablature, a founding inscription, and a triangular indented pediment finished with pinnacles and a coat of arms that is illegible on account of being chipped, but which belonged to the Marquises of Priego. This is where the building exhibits the most Italian, Mannerist influence in its design, with parallels to be found in Roman constructions by master architects such as Vignola or Giulio Romano.



Detail of the façade where you can see the coat of arms and the following inscription:

"BUILT WITH LICENSE OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS MARQUIS OF PRIEGO, DON ALONSO FERNANDEZ DE CÓRDOBA Y DE AGUILAR, WITH THE TOWN MAYOR BEING THE ILLUSTRIOUS GENTLEMAN FRANCISCO ARANDA HERRREA 1579"



Detail of the original decoration



Spiral staircase



Facade of the building





THE CASTLE



Medieval Moorish ceramics, 9th and 10th centuries



The keep



Coat of arms of the Dukes of Medinaceli (Marquises of Priego)

Texts: Rafael Carmona

The Castle of Priego (declared National Monument) is an urban fortification that was gradually configured throughout the Middle Ages, from the 9th through to the 15th centuries, with some later additions and modifications carried out during the Modern and Contemporary periods. Most of it was donated to the town by the descendents of Víctor Rubio Chavarri, its former owner, in 1996.

Originally (9th and 10th centuries), the castle was the fortress of the Moorish town of Madinat Baguh (Priego), and residence of the town governor. Little remains of this original al-Andalus castle, and what we have of it comes from archaeological excavations that have been carried out: defensive walls, silos, doors, baths, necropolis, etc. This Moorish castle had a square floor plan, with towers at the corners and other towers and buttresses on the defensive walls.

After the Catholic conquests by Ferdinand III (1225) and Alfonso XI (1341), the castle underwent substantial remodelling by the new lords of the town, first the military order of Calatrava, and then the noble Fernández de Córdoba family. The works carried out at that time (13th-15th centuries) were so substantial that we could easily say that the castle visible today corresponds to that period. Hence, it was the Calatrava order that built the the grand keep, while the Fernández de Córdoba family were responsible for the majority of the towers and outer walls that can be seen today, including the highest ones that face El Llano Square.

When visiting we would recommend that you start by going up to the towers of the main façade (15th century). From here there is a wonderful aerial view of the whole fortress and its surrounding area: the La Villa neighbourhood, watchtowers on surrounding hilltops, and the layout of the various towers, defensive walls and cisterns of the structure itself. In these towers you can also see the firing chambers which still conserve their original loopholes and masons' marks.

Next we head down to the patio, which has numerous stone catapult balls from the 14th and 15th centuries, and we enter the keep. Before going in, be sure to look at the original doorway –a high, round arch– and the early staircase, alongside the current access. The keep was built between 1245 and 1327, and has three floors. The lower level has no access from outside and was used as a cistern. The remaining floors had multiple uses, according to necessities at the time: storerooms, living quarters, bedrooms, for receiving visitors, etc. The windows of the third floor have attractive horseshoe arches, clearly inspired in Mudejar style.

In the patio once again, we now explore the northern area of the archaeological excavations, where part of the old defensive walls can be seen, dating from the 9th and 10th centuries, along with other interesting elements such as an old door (10th century) and the embrasure (15th century). Once outside the castle, don't forget to take a close look at the castle's original doorway, protected from above by a projecting parapet.

