

## **FILM 1- SOCIETY IN ROMANESQUE PERIOD**

Grandiose and moving, the five castles that stand atop the rocky spur at Chauvigny are precious testimony to feudal society. At the foot of the city, we meet with **Christian Rémy** to discuss the former lords and their power.

### **With Chauvigny as the backdrop, what was society like during this time ?**

The society was in motion. It was developing very quickly but the intellectuals of the time, that is to say the clergy, the literate people, started to project an idealized image of Romanesque society. They saw society as being divided into 3 social groups : the clergy, who prayed, the lords and knights, who waged battle, and everybody else, that is to say the peasants who worked to feed the first two groups.

### **And that is when the feudal system emerged ?**

Yes, exactly. Feudality was a form of social organization centered on regulations, dependencies and obligations between men at all levels. For example, the relations between lords and vassals were regulated. Vassals received fiefdoms from their lords, in the form of a castle or land, and in exchange, the vassals had to render services to their lords, notably by paying them tribute. The relationship between the lords and the peasants was also regulated. Peasants lived under the domination and the theoretical protection of their lords and they had to pay them taxes to use their mills and ovens. So there were relationships of dependency in all sectors.

### **Lords were building castles during this time. What was happening in these castles ?**

Castles were truly at the heart of society during this period. I would say that it was the finest hour of rural France. In each region, lords needed a castle to mark their domination. Castles were also the abode of the lords and their families, in the widest sense of the term. That included everybody who worked with them and who were at their service, so that amounts to a lot of people. Castles also enabled the lords to demonstrate their authority over the territory and the tax-paying populations they ruled. Castles were also displayed as the emblem of one's social supremacy.

### **What was life like during this period ?**

Life in these castles was not like anything we can imagine today. It was a rustic life, very far from the present-day notions of comfort. As we said, the lords and knights were soldiers, and they trained intensively and regularly. They took part in tournaments and trained themselves in handling weapons. They enjoyed hunting, because hunting is an outdoor activity that enabled them to highlight their physical capacities.

### **What did the castles look like ?**

During the Romanesque period, castles were often located on a mound or on higher sites. They were perched so as to overlook the land. They were often vast structures,

since they housed many people and many knights. Starting in the XIth century, towers began emerging everywhere, throughout all of France. We call these towers dungeons, and the dungeon is truly the symbol of the power of the lords.

### **We are at Chauvigny. What sets this place apart ?**

Chauvigny is an extremely interesting site because, in a certain way, it remains stuck in the Romanesque world. On the rocky spur, the castral structure, the fortified structure is composed of a lordly castle, which is the Baronial castle, and many towers in the foreground.

All of these towers, except for the church's belltower, were formerly the dwellings of the knights who serviced the lord. A city developed below with the support of the lord. There was a market place and artisanal and agricultural activities. There was a true urban center at the foot of the castle. What sets Chauvigny apart is that the castle's lord was also the Bishop of Poitiers. In the Middle Ages, clergymen - bishops and abbots - could also be lords.

*Romanesque treasures of Poitou-Charentes*, Poitou-Charentes region, 2014.

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