FILM 1- SOCIETY IN ROMANESQUE PERIOD

The Romanesque Castles

The 11th and 12th century correspond to a period of change, first in the political, religious and economic sphere, and also in architecture. During these two centuries, nearly two hundred castles were built on the territory of present-day Poitou-Charentes. Around thirty stone constructions subsist today, at Chauvigny, La Roche-Posay, Moncontour and Niort in the Vienne and Deux-Sèvres region, Marthon and Montignac, Pons and Saint-Sornin (Tower of Broue) in Charente and Charente-Maritime.

The castles are testimony to the political, social and territorial organization of the Romanesque period. Poitou-Charentes was then divided into three main counties (Poitou, Angoumois, Saintonge) and castellanies. It was ruled over by a suzerain lord, the Count of Poitou, who was also the Duke of Aquitaine. However, some lords refused to be under his tutelage and attempted to extend their territory through combat. They had castles built without obtaining prior consent from the Count, and thereby affirmed their presence and prepared their defense.

As a place of defense, of power and sometimes of daily life, castles usually included a surrounding earthen wall bordered by a moat which delimitated the elevated site of the castle.

The fortified sites often included a circular earthen mound, sometimes surrounded by a second wall, and a courtyard of varying size. The main tower, the « dungeon », which often rose two or three stories high, was usually built

on the mound. The ground floor was often windowless ; the entrance door was at the level of the first floor. The courtyard sheltered one or many houses, stables, workshops and sometimes a chapel...

The wealth and power of the lords, as well as the defensive and/or symbolic role of the buildings, determined the importance of the castles. Castles could house the lords' families or shelter a garrison.

Romanesque castles, built of wood or stone, suffered a lot throughout the centuries. The mounds were often lowered, even levelled, the courtyards and the dungeons dismantled...But they left traces in the landscape, some modest some spectacular, which tell us a lot about the life of the lords and knights.

Illustration 2 : *The Medieval city of Chauvigny (Vienne), an example of the variety of Romanesque architecture.* © Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, inventaire général du patrimoine culturel / C. Rome,

Illustration 1 : The mound at Curzay-sur-Vonne (Vienne) © Christian Richard.

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Illustration 3 : *The castle of Pons (Charente-Maritime) : the Romanesque dungeon and, to its left, the 17th century abode*.© Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, inventaire général du patrimoine culturel / C. Rome, 2011.

Illustration 4 : The castle of Moncontour (Vienne), a fortified site in the Dive valley.

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Illustration 5 : *The dungeon of Niort (Deux-Sèvres), built by Henry II King of England or his son Richard the Lionheart*. © Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Inventaire général général / G. Beauvarlet, 2010.

Illustration 6 : *The chapel of Cressac at Cressac-Saint-Genis (Charente) and its late- 12th century frescoes*. © Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Inventaire général général / G. Beauvarlet, 2014.

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Illustration 7 : *The castral chapel of Marthon (Charente), built above the castle's entrance*© Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, inventaire général du patrimoine culturel / G. Beauvarlet, 2014.

Illustration 8 : A sculpted knight on a capital at the church of Béceleuf (Deux-Sèvres).

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Illustration 9 : *Crusaders, knights and soliders at Aulnay and Varaize (Charente-Maritime).*
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Illustration 10 : *The Tower of Broue at Saint-Sornin (Charente-Maritime), vestige of the former Romanesque castle.* © Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, inventaire général du patrimoine culturel / R.

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