

2-The Dordogne

In the Middle Ages, along the meandering course of the Dordogne river, flat hulled boats called Gabarres transported walnuts, chestnuts, wood, or wine from the Périgord region. Each one of them necessitated a right of passage from the Lord of Beynac. From the 12th century onwards, the dominion's fisheries, renowned for the quality of

their salmon, established themselves in the river below the castle.

Beynac's strategic position facilitated the control of the roads and waterways, increasing the castle's economic power and making its lord a powerful figure in the twelfth and thirteenth century.

8 The spur building terrace – Panoramic view

4 A residential fortress

In the 17th century the castle is extensively over-hauled. The Feudal Age has ended and the image of the castle has profoundly changed. The defensive preoccupations are now secondary and the castle's residential function becomes its primary focus.

6 The Oratory

5 The state room of Perigord

3 The Guard room

2 The high court – Panoramic view

The Castle of Richard I



Ademar of Beynac does not leave any direct heir, and is therefore legitimate in allowing Richard I to offer the castellany of Beynac to one of his most loyal companions, a man to whom he also confided the responsibility of his castles of Aquitaine during his absence: the warrior Mercadier.

Pons of Beynac, brother of the deceased lord Adhemar, prepared to conquer Beynac. He will have to wait for the opportune moment, since Mercadier's power and resources are formidable. The fortress of Beynac therefore remains in Mercadier's hands for 6 years.

In 1152, Eleonore of Aquitaine, repudiated by her husband, the King of France, marries Henry of Plantagenet in Poitiers, future King of England. She brings him the duchy of Aquitaine, of which the county of Perigord forms a part. In the following years, Eleonore gives Henry II five sons and three sisters, including the future King Richard I and his brother, the future King John.

Richard I dies in 1199, struck by the shot of a cross-bow while inspecting by moonlight the demolition works on the siege of the castle of Châlus, at a hundred kilometres from here. A few months later, on Easter Monday 1200, Mercadier is assassinated in broad daylight in the streets of Bordeaux. Eleonore, queen of England, daughter of France and Aquitaine dies in 1204 at the age of 92 in the abbey of Fonterault, where she retired. She now lies there, buried alongside her son, Richard I.

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Here is where we will complete our visit. We thank you for having accepted to travel back in time with us. I wish you an amiable stay in this Perigordian land, home of the medieval fortress of Beynac.

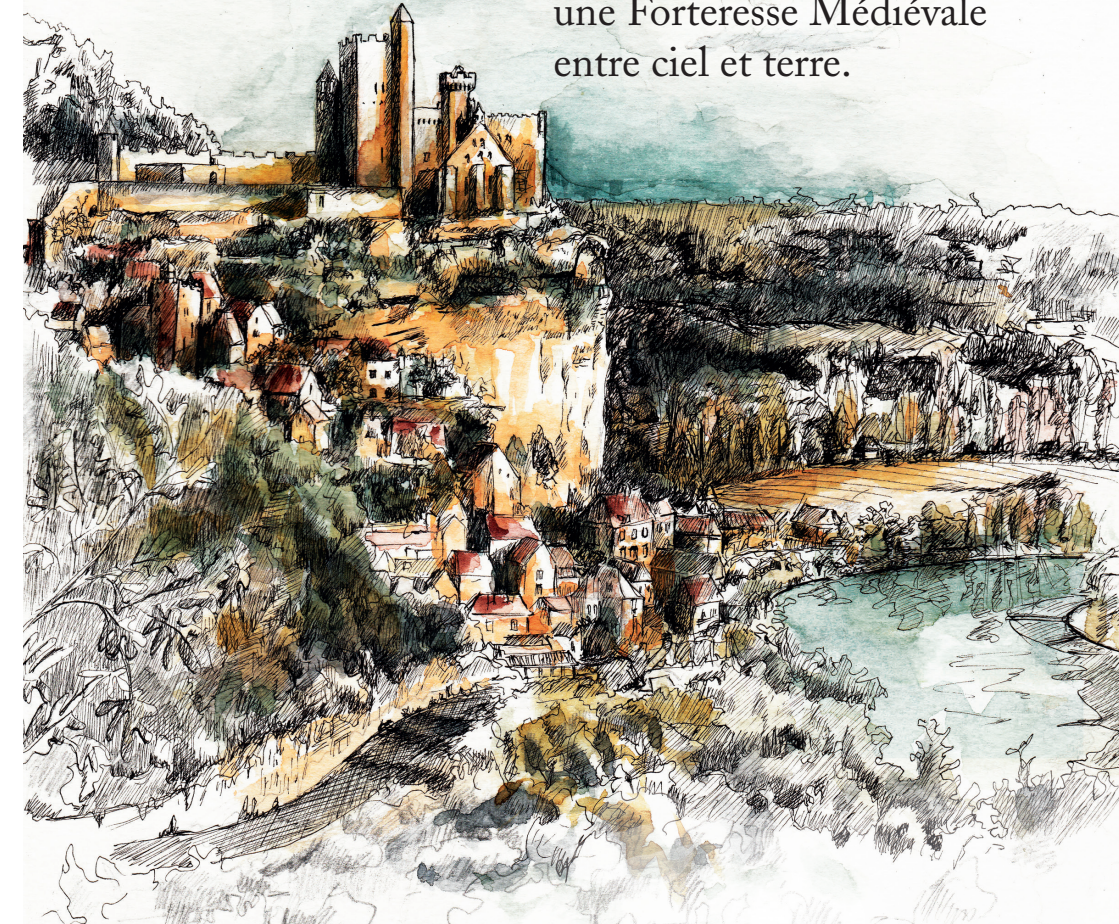
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The Castle of Beynac

une Forteresse Médiévale
entre ciel et terre.



Visitor, welcome to the feudal fortress of Beynac. Here, between sky and earth, time has stopped. Perched high up on a cliff at breath-taking heights, the castle acts as a stone sentinel that has watched over the Dordogne for the past nine centuries.

This 12th Century fortress is noted for its well-conserved authenticity, and offers, from the height of its medieval keep, a magnificent view of the valley of five castles. Perched up at 150 meters against the cliff rock, the

fortress dominates the meandering turns of the Dordogne down below. Its thick walls carry the trace of those who once strode through its corridors: Richard I "the Lion-Heart", Simon de Montfort, the lords of

Beynac and the four baronies of Perigord who held council in the 15th and 16th Century in the great hall of the castle, the Hall of State, that you will soon discover.

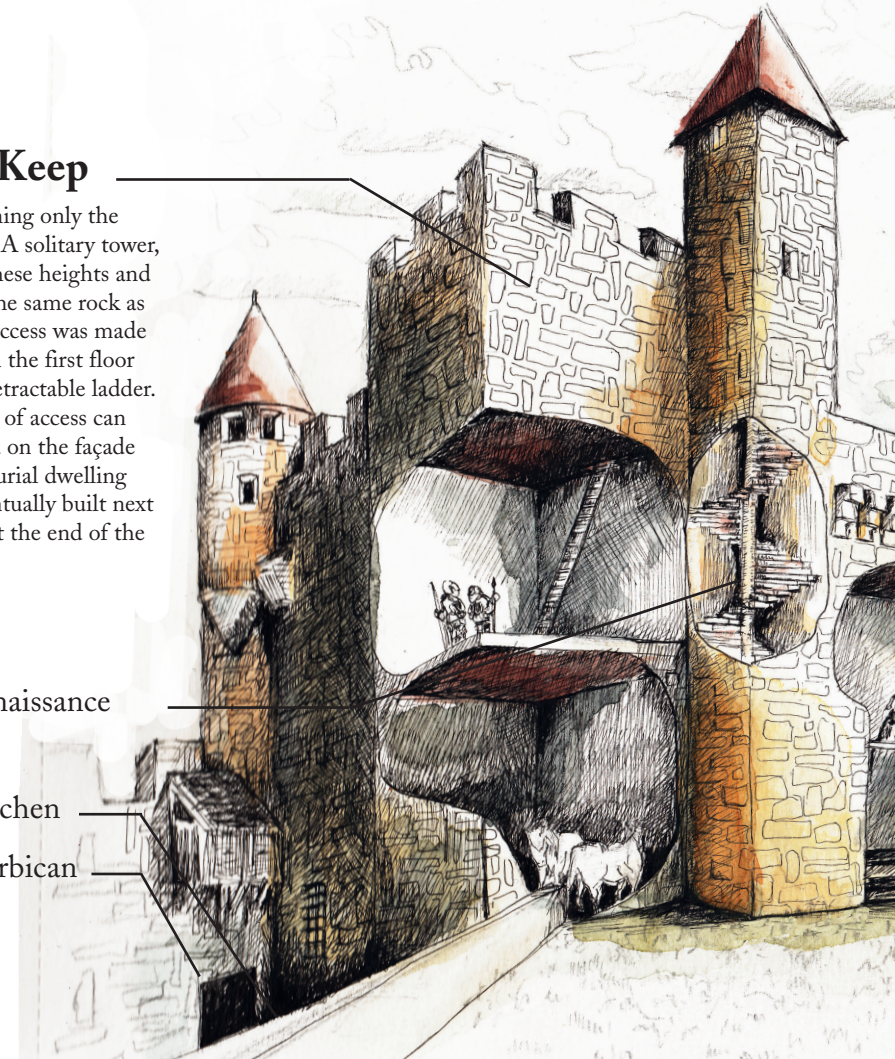
1-The Keep

In the beginning only the keep existed. A solitary tower, isolated on these heights and built out of the same rock as the cliff. Its access was made possible from the first floor thanks to a retractable ladder. This method of access can also be found on the façade of the seigneurial dwelling that was eventually built next to the keep at the end of the 12th century.

7 The Renaissance stairs

9 The Kitchen

10 The Barbican



3 - The Guard room

The guard room was attached to the Keep at the end of the twelfth century. The lord and his armed men would enter here with their mounts. At the end of the room, near the spiral staircase, can be found a stables adapted for the lower hall of the keep.



4 - A residential Fortress

Almost 200 years, separate the primitive keep of this dwelling from the more luminous construction on the verge of the cliff. The windows are flanked by seats carved out of stone, integrated into the masonry and originally covered in cushions. The window-seats acted either as a monitoring bench, to carefully watch the surroundings, or, as it was most probably the case here, a seat enabling its user to enjoy a ray of natural light to read, write or work on some handy-craft.



5 - The state room of Perigord

Here, more than elsewhere, the architecture seeks to underline the power of the Lords of Beynac. It is the center-piece of the building, attached to the original keep. The State Room owes its name to the council meetings that took place, most probably between the four Barons of Perigord in the 15th century, Bourdeille, Biron, Beynac and Mereuille. When the room did not serve for the exceptional purpose of gathering the 4 baronies of Périgord, it served as a banqueting hall and tribunal.

7 - The Renaissance Stairs

In the 17th century, the castle has profoundly changed. The feudal age is now ancestral history and the castle has adapted to new times. This stairwell with the straight ramp, is of Italian inspiration, is built into the inner-court of the fortress to simplify circulation from one building to another.

6 - The Oratory

The little chapel, enclosed inside the lord's Hall was dedicated to prayer. The oratory is adorned with remarkable frescoes dating from the 15th century. You can make out the Last Supper, the Pieta and Jesus dying before his resurrection on the third day.

8 - The spur building terrace

Here lies the true treasure of Beynac: the unmissable view offered to these Lords from the heights of the fortress. You should be able to recognise them with ease. Marqueyssac is perched on a hill-top on your left, like Beynac, to the north of the Dordogne. An 18th Century manor house and its gardens has since replaced the fortress of yesteryear owned by vassals of the lords of Beynac, destroyed by the English at the end of the Hundred Years war. Opposite, on the other side of the river is Feyrac, which was for a time controlled by the fortress



9 - The Kitchen

Added during a period of renovation carried out in the 13th Century, their edification will profoundly change the appearance of the castle.

The hooks fixed onto the ceiling make it possible to keep the supplies out of reach from the rats. The pisé floor frays a path through the cliff-rock against which are built the castle kitchens.



Beyond these hills, the Keep of Montfort, of Domme, of Roque-Gageac, Castelnaud and of Beynac, watched each other closely. At times allies, but otherwise sworn enemies.



10 - The barbican

This enclosed space is the barbican of the fortress, an advanced fortification designed to protect the principal entry point of the castle and slow the advancement of a potential enemy. In this reduced space, the assailant finds himself stuck between the cross-fire of the defenders. These men are posted at the arrow loops, or the protected wooden structure, built with scaffolding to conceal cross-bow men. From the heights of the fortress are thrown rocks, quicklime and pitch.