



Projet Erasmus+ Namur - Marsala

" Patrimonia "



A la découverte du patrimoine historique, architectural et culturel

Bouillon Fortress



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ABSTRACT



General presentation

Built on three rocky peaks overlooking the Semois River, the castle of Bouillon, with the maze of corridors and huge vaulted rooms, is considered the oldest and most interesting remnant of feudalism in Belgium.

The castle has been listed as exceptional real estate heritage in Wallonia since May 26, 1975.

A bit of history...

Many historians believe that the long rocky ridge created by the loop of the Semois River was occupied since the Gallo-Roman era. A fortified camp was to be built at the end of the rocky outcrop at a place called « Ramonette », located south of the current castle. This hillock, a kind of watchtower, with a diameter measuring 9 meter, overlooking the valley, was surrounded by ditches cut into the rock.



In the 10th century, Bouillon was a seigniorship of the Duchy of Lower Lotharingia (959-1190). This watch post called "motte castrale" (*), belonged to the family of the Counts of Ardenne-Verdun (988), who also owned the "Château-le-Duc", a 2 ha property surrounded by walls located, not far west of the Menuchenet Forest.

In the 11th century, the castle became the seat of the Duchy of Duke Gothelon I, Duke of Upper and Lower Lotharingia who died in 1044 and great grand-uncle of the future Godefroid from Bouillon.

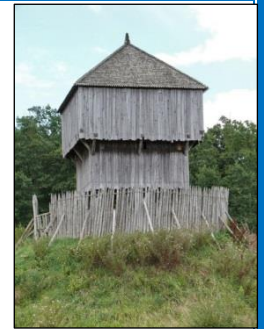
Around 1050, his son, Godefroy II le Barbu (« the Bearded ») (997-1069), who under the threat of Norman invasions, built the first real fortified castle on another rocky spur overlooking the Semois River.

Is it due to lack of water or for strategic purpose ? Whatever the reason, the site Ramonette has been neglected in favor of a more imposing rocky outcrop, less valuable and having a natural water reserve, the location of the future castle of Fort Bouillon.

The latter is also strategic because of its geographical position between Reims, Liège and Aix-la-Chapelle. The castle is envied by both the crown of France and that of the Holy Roman Empire. The city, a small market town between the rock wall and the Semois River, is also developing below.

Throughout the High Middle Ages, the Dukes engaged in the transformation of many "feudal mounds" (*) into a military fortress and not a princely residence.

(*) A castle hillock, often called "feudal mound", is a particular type of earth fortification widely used in the Middle Ages. It is composed of a voluminous embankment of circular ground also called "the mound"



The castle is attacked by Albert de Namur, then by the Bishop of Verdun, and resists the assaults. As the castle, which housed up to 200 soldiers, had the reputation of occupying an impregnable position on its rocky outcrop, the enemy preferred to use the siege technique to starve the defenders, especially in the winter.

But in the castle was everything planned. Access to a source of drinking water was available and living stocks were hoisted along a 30-meter-deep gallery. The pulley was powered by soldiers running around in a kind of wooden carousel. The steward of the castle exercised an essential function: he had to assess the quantity of food necessary to hold a siege.

In 1076, Godefroy III the Hunchback of Ardennes died and left the castle to his nephew Godefroy IV. The latter was immortalized as Godefroid de Bouillon, leader of the first crusade (1096) and confessed of the Holy Sepulcher who committed his duchy to the archdiocese of Liège to finance his expedition to the Holy Land.

In 1100, Godefroy died in the Crusades. Prince Bishop Otbert officially became the owner of the castle. His family will keep the title of Duke of Bouillon during 5 centuries.

In 1430, the Prince-Bishop of Liège appointed a governor to the castle of Bouillon. The 1st governor is Count Evrard III from La Marck.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the ambitious La Marck family proclaimed itself « Duke of Bouillon ». After this episode, the castle combines owners, usurpers and conflicts. The most destructive is that led by Charles V against Robert II of La Marck in 1521. The latter, owner of the castle, wanted to seize Luxembourg. The Emperor, in retaliation, destroyed all the property of Robert de La Marck, including Bouillon. In 1522, the Prince-Bishop of Liège Erard de La Marck recovers his rights on the Duchy of Bouillon.

After this looting, a new castle came out of the ground thanks to the Prince-Bishop George of Austria who built a tower bearing his name in 1551. He kept the dungeon as a residence and enlarged the whole.

In 1591, Charlotte de La Marck, sole heiress of Bouillon, married Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, future father of the famous Turenne.

In 1676, the city and the Duchy are possessions of King Louis XIV of France who asked Vauban to strengthen the place. The most important innovations and major works of development are signed by Vauban, Louis XIV's architect who integrated the city into the defence system of the castle (loopholes, drawbridge, etc.). The region experienced 120 years of peace and prosperity.

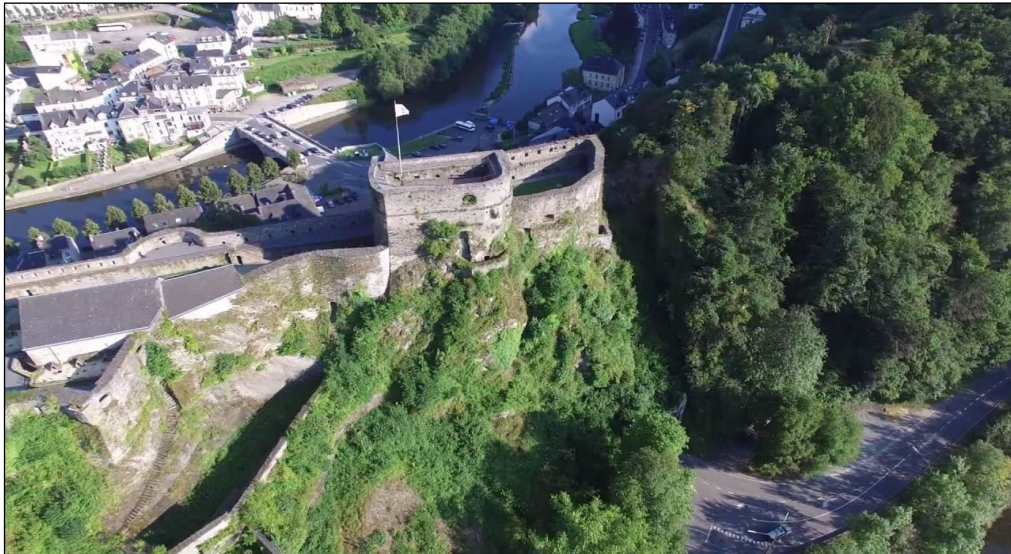
In 1794, the French revolutionaries seized the castle.

Around 1815, Bouillon is a possession of the Duchy of Luxembourg. Many arrangements are made by the Dutch with the destruction of a part of the medieval castle.

In 1830, Bouillon is again into Belgian territory.

In the 20th century, the Belgian state restores the site and opens it to the public.





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