



Projet Erasmus+ Namur - Marsala

" Patrimonia "



A la découverte du patrimoine historique, architectural et culturel

Counts of Namur Castle



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ABSTRACT



General presentation

The Counts of Namur over time ...

Even if traces of occasional or prolonged human settling were found on the site since the Upper Palaeolithic (between -35,000 and -10,000), the story begins in the 3rd century, with the first building of a wooden fortification and stones on the rocky spur at the initiative of the Roman Emperor Julian in 358.

The city of Namur was born in « Grognon », the space at the foot of the Champeau hill between the river Sambre and the river Meuse and has gradually grown to overflow on the other side of the river Sambre.

From the 6th to the 10th century, the city seems to be a simple village without any particular status. It is often called « vicus » (urban agglomeration), but other texts also speak of « portus » (commercial site) or « castrum » (fortified place). At the time, the city was the center of a « Pagus Lomacensis », ie a Carolingian administrative province. The « Comes » (Count) assumes for the emperor the management of this province, future County of Namur. Little information is known before the arrival of the Counts of Namur.

In 843, the Empire of Charlemagne is shared between his sons. Lothario gets our regions. But Lotharingian « Comes » (Counts) are gaining importance and gradually want to grant themselves the prerogatives of the sovereign. Coveted by others, Lotharingia is absorbed by Germany in 925.



The history of the counts of Namur begins a little later, in 937.

« Comes » Béranger sets his residence at the « *castrum* » of Namur, the fortification at the point of the rocky outcrop. Its function takes on a hereditary character and Robert I, his descendant, is the first « Count of Namur » to manage his county independently of the imperial power. He is considered the founder of the « House of Namur ». The city is the capital city of the County and is part of the Holy Roman Empire.

During the Middle Ages, four houses take the head of the county of Namur. That of Namur starts the succession with its first representative, Robert I. It has been settled on the site for undoubtedly strategic reasons (the presence of wood fortifications) but also to take advantage of the economic development of the city.

After Robert I, the succession follows from father to son until « Henri l'Aveugle » (Henry the Blind) who due to his lack of child, bequeaths the management of the county to his nephew, Baudouin V, Count of Hainaut.

Philip the Noble, son of Baldwin V, having no heir, passed the head of the county to his sister, wife of Pierre de Courtenay.

It is now the House of Courtenay that has the title of Count of Namur. The last Count of Namur of the House of Courtenay is also Emperor of Constantinople and has his wars financed by the inhabitants of Namur. Unpopular, he is driven out of the city and sells the county to Guy de Dampierre, Count of Flanders.

By wedding a Henry the Blind's great-granddaughter, Guy de Dampierre linked again the County of Namur to the House of Namur.

Some House of Flanders' counts succeeded at the head of the county until Jean III who, deep in debt and without child, sold the county to Philippe the Good, duke of Burgundy, in 1421.

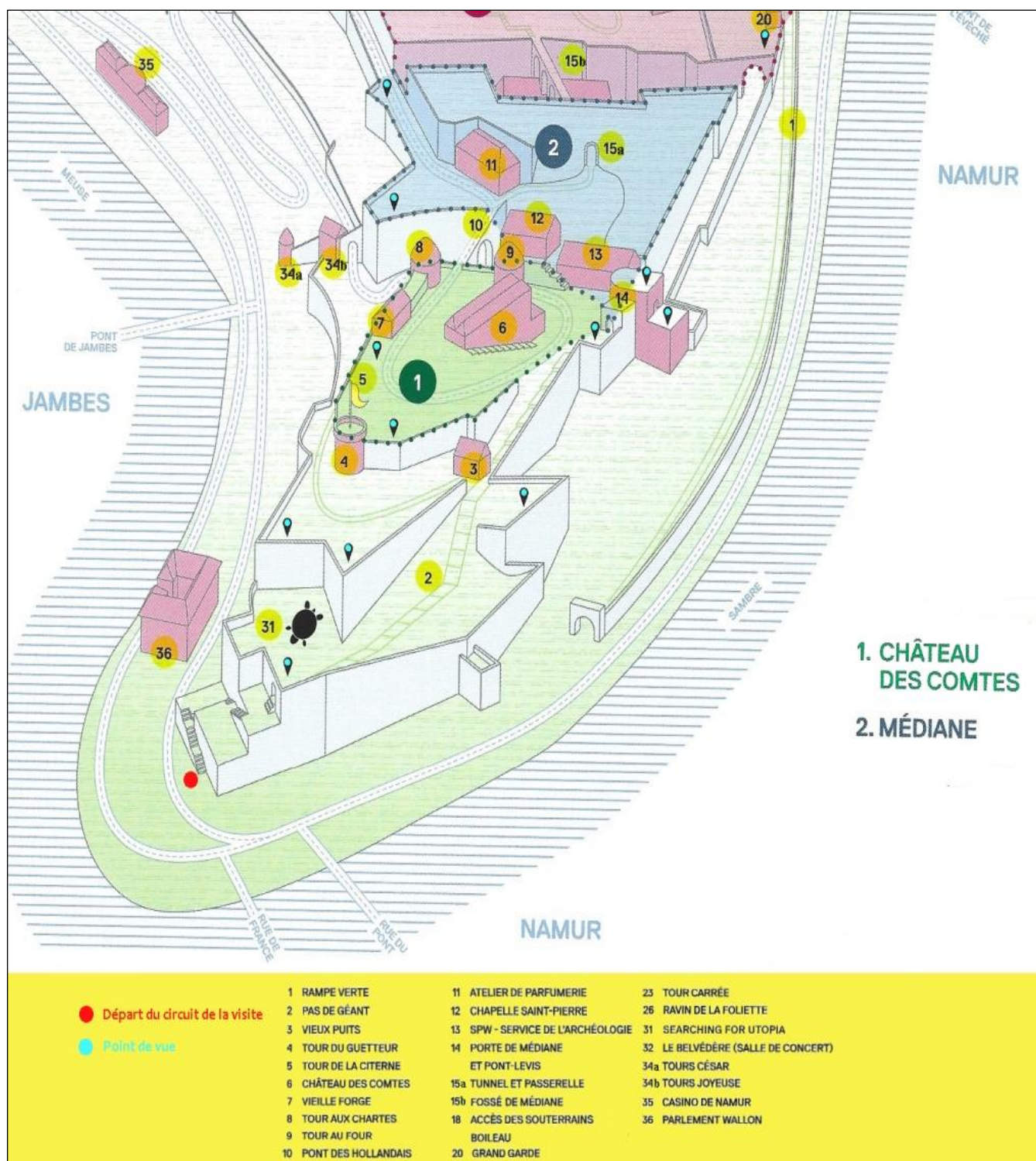
Philippe the Good, duke of Burgundy and count of Namur, doesn't live in Namur.

From now on, the county of Namur is a part of a bigger component. If the title of count of Namur still exists, it's just one of the titles of the sovereigns who don't live in the count's castle anymore. The castle loses progressively its accommodation function and has more and more a military role.

The county's authority is henceforth empowered by a prosecutor and a governor.



Sitemap Castel of the Counts and the « Médiane ».



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The Castle of the Counts over time ...

The first trace of a fortification on the Champeau hill dates back to the 3rd century. From this time, a natural hollow in front of the castle is deepened to serve as a defence.

But the first truly fortified residence only dates from 937. At that time, it was only a wooden tower surrounded by a fence.

The medieval stratum:

During the 12th century, under the sovereignty of Henri l'Aveugle (Henry the Blind), a collegiate church dedicated to Saint-Pierre was built inside the castle.

The 13th century sees the development of a truly defensive castle.

It is surrounded by four towers and includes a donjon, a collegiate church, the cannons houses as well as utilitarian buildings such as a bakery, a storeroom, stables, chapels, a falconry and wells.

Three of the four towers still remain: the « Tour au Four » (Oven Tower) **(9)**, the « Tour aux Chartes » (Charters Tower)**(8)** and the « Tour de la Citerne » (Tank Tower)**(5)**. As their name suggests, the first contained a bread oven, the second probably the important documents and charters and the third a rainwater tank.

Before 1370, an additional defence wall, called « *Barbican** », was built in front of the ditch. This advanced enclosure is composed of four towers and a door called « Porte de Champeau » itself defended by two towers. There remains only the door, at the entrance of the footbridge of the « Ditch of Median » and a tower, the tower « Bordial Top ».

The « Median » part

With the use of powder and the evolution of the armament, as the ramparts and the towers of the barbican are not designed to withstand the shooting of the guns, as of 1430, « *boulevards* » (a grassy hill in front of the fortification) will be added to the foreground. Its rounded fortification works are hillocks mainly composed of wood and earth. They allow to put guns in battery. The towers are also pierced with gun-loops.

However, the weak point of the castle remains: the southern slope. It is protected by a watchtower, the current « Caesar Tower » **(34a)** dating from 1474. But in 1488, the capture of the castle reveals the inadequacy of this tower. A second one is built higher to monitor the first one. It is called today the « Joyful Tower » **(34b)**.

The fortifications do not stop there. In 1511, the « *boulevard** » of wood and earth is rebuilt in stone. The terrace located today beside the « Porte de Mediane » (Median Gate)**(14)** is a trace of this old assignment.

The evolution of the artillery and the siege techniques end up making the castle indefensible with its simple protections. From 1542, a new defence zone, the « Median », is arranged at the front, higher on the Champeau.



A new form of defence is erected: the underground construction or citadel.
The principle consists in lower walls, wider and covered with a thick layer of earth.
The « Median » of the citadel of Namur (the citadel name for the site appears at this time) includes a *curtain** and two *bastions** outside which each contain a *casemate** canon. Despite later modifications, the layout of the premises is still visible, as well as the casemates.

The castle is no longer on the front line but it continues to be developed and modified to serve other purposes. The cannons shelters are destroyed and the dungeon is transformed into an artillery battery.

If the castle survived several centuries, 1746 a.d. was fatal. Indeed, during the siege of Louis XV, the explosion of a powder store destroys the Saint-Pierre-au-Château collegiate (1746) and half of the dungeon.

It is then the turn of Dutch engineers to leave their mark to the castle. Until 1759, they proceeded to arrangements and built a powder store **(6)** between the two towers of the dungeon. This one is always visible.

After two periods of dismantling the stronghold (in 1782 and 1804), the Dutch regime (1815-1830) undertook a complete rebuilding of the citadel. It is during these new works of fortification that the medieval barbican completely disappears under the bastioned front of Mediane in front of the castle. As for the dungeon, it is partly demolished and is replaced by artillery terraces, military buildings, a forge **(7)**, a bakery and workshops.

Finally, in the 19th century, the « Tour du Gnetteur » (Watchman Tower)**(4)** of a freely Middle Ages inspired style is erected near the site of the former collegiate church.

The Counts' Castle as we can see it today combines 13th century towers, a powder store of 1753, a bridge, a forge, a bakery and workshops dating from 1816 to 1827 and facilities of 1856. It still retains its medieval form.



Further modifications will be made in the 20th and 21st century in order to customize the buildings to new touristic purposes.

* Voir le glossaire



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