

LE CHATEAU DE COUDREE

PASSERS-BY OFTEN ASK FOR INFORMATION ON THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CASTLE, AND ON PAST EVENTS THAT IT MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH.

THE EXCELLENT " HISTOIRE DE SCIEZ ET DE COUDREE " OF MONSEIGNEUR L.E. PICCARD UNFORTUNATELY DOES NOT CONTAIN MANY DETAILS ON THE CASTLE ITSELF; IT REFERS MORE PARTICULARLY TO THE SUCCESSION OF FAMILIES WHO OWNED AND LIVED IN IT.

THE DOCUMENTS AT THE DISPOSAL OF STORY-WRITERS ARE SCARCE, AS MOST OF THE ARCHIVES OF COUDREE WERE DESTROYED IN 1873.

A CHRONOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION BASED ON CROSS-CHECKING AND A VERY LABORIOUS COMPARISON BETWEEN THE VARIOUS PARCHMENTS SAVED FROM DESTRUCTION, FOUND EITHER BY CHANCE OR DURING RESEARCH AS FAR AWAY AS CHAMBERY, BERNE, GENEVA AND TURIN, CANNOT, IN THE EYES OF THE HISTORIAN, OR EVEN OF SOMEONE WHO IS JUST INTERESTED IN OLD STONES, ANXIOUS NOT FALL INTO THE REALM OF FANTASY OR IMAGINATION, BE ANYTHING BUT IMPERFECT.

FROM THE WORK OF ABBE GONTHEIR, TH. LAPAREDE, PICCARD, A.BOURRIT, AND NAEF, IT IS ONLY POSSIBLE TO COMPILE AN INCOMPLETE HISTORY, BUT ONE THAT IS DETAILED ENOUGH TO SATISFY THE VERY NATURAL CURIOSITY OF VISITORS.

THE EARLIEST ORIGINS OF COUDREE APPEAR TO DATE FROM THE VIth CENTURY. IT WAS THEN A WOODEN TOWER - THE FORERUNNER OF A MEDIAVAL KEEP - FLANKED BY RUSTIC BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDED BY A FORTIFIED ENCEINTE COMPRISED OF MOATS, PALISADES AND EARTHBANKS,

LIKE THOSE BUILT BY THE GAULS AROUND THEIR VILLAGES AND BY THE ROMANS TO DEFEND THEIR TOWNSHIPS. AT THAT TIME IT WAS THE HOME OF A PRIOR WHO LOOKED AFTER THE PROPERTY IN THE REGION, BELONGING TO THE ABBEY OF SAINT MAURICE D'

AGAUNE. THIS ABBEY WAS FOUNDED IN THE FOURTH CENTURY ON THE VERY SPOT WHERE, AT THE END OF THE THIRD CENTURY, MAURITIUS, THE HEAD OF THE THEBAN LEGION, AND ALL HIS COMPANIONS WERE MARTYRED.

THE THEBAN LEGION, IN ACTUAL STRENGTH NO LARGER THAN A COHORT, WAS COMPOSED EXCLUSIVELY OF CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS RECRUITED IN THEBES.

THESE SOLDIERS REFUSED TO OFFER SACRIFICES TO THE GODS OF ROME AND WERE ALL CRUELLY MASSACRED BY THE ORDER OF EMPEROR MAXIMIANUS.

THIS WOULD SEEM TO HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH COUDREE, BUT AS IT IS AN EVENT THAT HAS A DIRECT LINK WITH THE ORIGIN OF THE CASTLE AND IS OF DOCUMENTARY INTEREST, WE THOUGHT IT WORTH RECOUNTING.

A SEMI-RELIGIOUS, SEMI-LAY COMMUNITY WAS GROUPED AROUND THE PRIORY, THEN CALLED "FORON". THE NAME "COUDREE" WAS GIVEN TO THE LAND, ACCORDING TO SOME AUTHORS ON ACCOUNT OF THE SHAPE OF THE GULF, AND ACCORDING TO OTHERS, IT WAS DERIVED FROM THE OLD FRENCH WORD MEANING "DRAINED LAND".

THE PRIORY REMAINED FOR SEVERAL CENTURIES THE PROPERTY OF THE ABBEY AND IT WAS ONLY IN 1245, AS A RESULT OF CERTAIN EXCHANGES, THAT IT BECAME THE PROPERTY OF BEATRIX DE GREYZIER, THE WIDOW OF HENRI D'ALLINGES. IN THE MEANTIME IT HAD UNDERGONE CONSIDERABLE TRANSFORMATION AND HAD BEEN MADE INTO A REAL FORTRESS, THE LIGHT CONSTRUCTIONS AGAINST THE INTERIOR WALLS HAVING BEEN REPLACED BY MASSIVE STONE BUILDINGS.

IT IS PROBABLY AT THE END OF THE TWELVTH CENTURY THAT THE PRESENT LAY-OUT WAS ADOPTED.

AS THE CONFIGURATION OF THE GROUND MADE IT POSSIBLE TO EMPLOY THE SYSTEM OF DEFENSE USED BY ALL THE MILITARY ENGINEERS OF THAT PERIOD, THE LACK OF ELEVATION WAS OFFSET BY VERY WIDE MOATS, OF WHICH THE COUNTERSCARP WALLS WERE FOUND IN 1911.

THE FORTRESS WAS, THEREFORE, PROTECTED ON ALL SIDES BY WATER; TO THE NORTH BY THE LAKE AND ON THE OTHER THREE SIDES BY MOATS. TO THE NORTH A SEMICIRCULAR VAULT IN THE ENCEINTE WALL, WHICH WAS LATER WALLED UP BUT IS STILL VISIBLE TODAY, PERMITTED BOATS, ONCE THE PORCULLIS HAD BEEN RAISED, TO COME RIGHT UP TO THE COURTYARD OF THE CASTLE ALTHOUGH ALL FORMS OF COMFORT WERE STILL UNKNOWN AND FURNITURE WAS REDUCED TO ITS SIMPLEST FORM, THE ALLINGES FAMILY MADE THE BUILDING MORE HABITABLE AND MORE WORTHY OF A BARONICAL

HALL. IT IS, THEREFORE, VERY LIKELY THAT IT WAS AT COUDREE THAT, ON TWELVTH JANUARY 1269, THE TRUCE OF SCIEZ ARBITRATED BY AYMOND DE MONTHENAY, BISHOP OF GENEVA, BETWEEN COUNT PHILLIPE OF SAVOY AND GUIGUE, SEIGNEUR OF FAUCIGNY AND DAUPHIN DE VIENNE, WAS CONCLUDED AND SIGNED.

DURING MANY YEARS, THE FORTRESS OF COUDREE SUFFERED NUMEROUS ASSAULTS FROM BERNESE, SAVOYARD AND GENEVESE TROUPS, THE LATTER BEING REINFORCED BY THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS SENT TO THEIR AID BY HENRI IV AND COMMANDED BY M. DE SANCY.

THE CASTLE WAS BADLY DAMAGED DURING EACH SIEGE AND EACH TIME IT WAS RESTORED ITS APPEARANCE AND DEFENCES WERE ALTERED TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CURRENT PROGRESS IN MILITARY STRATEGY AND WEAPONS.

BETWEEN 1567 AND 1589 MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL CHANGES WERE CARRIED OUT. THESE INCLUDED : THE PIERCING OF THE LARGE TIERCE - POINT GATEWAY IN THE NORTH EAST FACADE AND OF THE SMALL NEARBY POSTERN NEXT TO THE GUARDROOM, THE INSTALLATION OF A MORE UP-TO-DATE DRAW-BRIDGE, THE CONSTRUCTION OF A WINDING STAIRCASE TO REPLACE THE LADDERS THAT GAVE ACCESS TO THE UPPER FLOORS OF THE KEEP REPLACING THE NARROW MULLION, POINTED OR BRACKET WINDOWS WITH LARGE CASEMENT WINDOWS.

THE SYSTEM OF DEFENCE WAS REINFORCED BY A SECOND, LOW ENCEINTE FLANKED BY FOUR CYLINDRICAL BASTIONS, IN THE BASE OF WHICH EMBRASURES WERE MADE FOR ARTILLERY.

THESE ALTERATIONS WERE ONLY JUST FINISHED WHEN THE CASTLE WAS ALMOST ENTIRELY RAZED TO THE GROUND BY FIRE (1590-1591).

DUE TO THE LACK OF DOCUMENTS, THE HISTORY OF THE CASTLE DURING THE FOLLOWING CENTURY IS UNKNOWN. IT MUST HAVE GONE THROUGH A QUIET PERIOD UNMARKED BY ANY IMPORTANT EVENT.

IN THE XVII CENTURY, THE OWNERS AGAIN UNDERTOOK A SERIES OF ALTERATIONS AND EMBELLISHMENTS, THE PRINCIPAL BEING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE LARGE GATEWAY ON THE LAKESIDE THAT GIVES ACCESS TO THE MAIN COURTYARD.

A LITTLE LATER, THE SPACE BETWEEN THE FLOORS WAS ALTERED SO AS TO MAKE ROOM FOR A SECOND FLOOR IN THE ATTICS.

IN, OR ABOUT 1785, COUNT VITTORIO ALFIERI, THE WELL-KNOWN ITALIAN PLAYWRIGHT (HE WAS COMPARED TO CORNEILLE), A RELATION OF THE ALLINGES FAMILY, CAME, ACCORDING TO THE CHRONICLERS OF THE PERIOD, TO LIVE HIS REMANTIC LOVE STORY WITH THE COUNTESS OF ALBANY, THE

WIDOW OF THE LAST OF THE STUARTS, WHOM HE MARRIED IN 1788. IT WAS PERHAPS IN THE PEACE AND QUIET OF THE DOMAIN AND INSPIRED BY THE PAST HISTORY OF COUDREE, THAT HE CONCEIVED THE THEMES OF SOME OF HIS EPIC POEMS AND TRAGEDIES.

IN 1840, THE LAST MARQUIS OF ALLINGES-COUDREE DIED WITHOUT LEAVING AN HEIR AND THE PROPERTY PASSED INTO THE HANDS OF HIS COUSINS DUC AND RICCI WHO, IN THEIR TURN, LEFT IT TO THE MARQUIS CESARE ALFIERI DI SOSTEGNO, A WELL-KNOWN ITALIAN DIPLOMAT AND A COUSIN OF THE POET. IT IS THOUGHT THAT IT IS HE WHO GAVE ORDERS FOR AVENUES TO BE LAID IN THE BOX-SHRUBBERY, IN THE FORM OF A STAR THAT RECALLED THE PLAN OF HIS NATIVE TOWN, TURIN.

COUDREE, SUBSEQUENTLY, BELONGED TO THE GREAT ITALIAN STATESMAN, CAVOUR, THE SON OF CESARE ALFIERI, CARLO, BEING CAVOUR'S LIEUTENANT AND NEPHEW BY MARRIAGE.

BARON CAVOUR TOOK NO INTEREST IN THE PROPERTY AND THERE IS NO RECORD OF HIS HAVING VISITED COUDREE.

IT IS AT THIS PERIOD THAT THE CASTLE SEEMS TO HAVE GONE THROUGH A PERIOD OF DECLINE. THIS WAS DUE TO NEGLECT AND IS DOUBTLESS THE MAIN REASON FOR THE LACK OF INTEREST ON THE PART OF CAVOUR. THE CASTLE WAS, IN FACT, REDUCED TO THE CONDITION OF A FARM : THE FARMERS AND THEIR DOMESTICS LIVED IN THE EAST WING, WHILE THE WEST WING WAS OCCUPIED ON THE GROUND FLOOR BY FARM MATERIAL AND CATTLE, AND ON THE OTHER FLOORS BY FODDER AND GATHERED IN CROPS.

THE STORY GOES THAT THE MAGNIFICENT TAPESTRIES THAT ARE STILL IN THE MAIN DRAWING-ROOM WERE HUNG BY THE FARMERS IN THE DOORWAYS OF THE STABLES. THIS WOULD HELP TO EXPLAIN THE EXTRAORDINARY BRIGHTNESS AND FRESHNESS OF THEIR COLOURS, REVIVED BY THE AMMONIA-IMPREGNATED STABLE ATMOSPHERE.

FINALLY, IN 1858, COUDREE BECAME THE PROPERTY OF M. ANATOLE BARTHOLONI, WHO, AFTER THE HAUTE-SAVOIE WAS ANNEXED TWO YEARS LATER BY FRANCE, BECAME THE FIRST FRENCH DEPUTY OF THIS DEPARTMENT. HE HAD, IN FACT, BEEN ONE OF THOSE INSTRUMENTAL IN ITS ANNEXATION.

M. BARTHOLONI HAD ASSISTED PRINCE LOUIS BONAPARTE IN THE PREPARATION OF THE COUP D'ETAT BY WHICH HE BECAME EMPEROR. NAPOLEON III SUMMONED M. BARTHOLONI TO THE TUILERIES WHERE HE CONFERRED ON HIM THE IMPORTANT OFFICE OF MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY AND MASTER OF CEREMONIES.

M. BARTHOLONI MARRIED THE GOD-DAUGHTER OF MME DE CHATEAUBRIAND, MARIE FRANCE FRIVEL, A PERSON FAMOUS FOR HER BEAUTY, CHARM AND WIT, AND WHOM THE EMPEROR SAID "SHE WAS A POWERFUL ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF ANNEXATION".

IN 1904, AFTER M. BARTHOLONI HAD DIED, HIS WIDOW MADE THE PROPERTY OVER TO HER SISTER-IN-LAW, MME F. BARTHOLONI, THE MOTHER OF THE LAST OWVER OF COUDREE, M. RENE BARTHOLONI.

THE LATTER MARRIED LOUISE GRIMALDI, A RELATION OF THE GRIMALDIS, THE REIGNING FAMILY OF MONACO. HE, TOO, BECAME DEPUTY FOR THE HAUTE-SAVOIE, AND A CAVALRY OFFICER. HE WAS MADE A CHEVALIER OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND HE LEFT BEHIND, IN THE COUNTRY, THE MEMORY OF A GOOD, GENEROUS AND FRIENDLY MAN.

HE WAS A KNOWLEDGEABLE AESTHETE AND IT WAS HE WHO WAS MAINLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE CASTLE. HE ENTRUSTED ITS RENOVATION TO TWO GENEVESE ARCHITECTS, MM PEYROT AND BOURRIT, WHO ACTED UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF M. NAEF, THE RESTORER OF THE CHATEAU DE CHILLON AND ALSO OF THE FAMOUS CASTLE OF HOCHSHEIMBURG, THE FORTRESS THAT WILLIAM II CLAIMED FROM ALSACE AFTER 1870.

BETWEEN 1911 AND 1914, THE OUTSIDE OF THE CASTLE WAS FREED OF THE LAYER OF ROUGH-CAST THAT DISGRACED ITS WALLS AND RESTORED TO ITS ORIGINAL STATE. THE POINTED GATEWAYS, THE PORTCULLISES, THE VESTIGES OF THE DRAW-BRIDGE, THE ARROWSLITS, THE LOOP-HOLES, THE OLD CASEMENT WINDOWS, A PIECE OF ARTILLERY, COATS OF ARMS, ETC..., WERE REPAIRED. THE SURROUNDING FORTIFICATIONS WERE EXCAVATED.

AS REGARDS THE INTERIOR OF THE CASTLE, M. BARTHOLONI DESIRED THE DECORATION AND FURNITURE TO RECALL THE SARDINIAN ORIGINS OF COUDREE. HE CALLED IN THE LEONARDI BROTHERS, ITALIAN ANTIQUE DEALERS FROM PARIS, WHO LEFT THE MARK OF THEIR PREFERENCE FOR THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE STYLE.

ALL THE PAINTED, COFFERED AND PANELLED CEILINGS WERE LOOKED FOR AND FOUND IN ITALY; THE PANELLING OF THE RENAISSANCE DRAWING-ROOM, REFERRED TO AS THE FRANCOIS PREMIER DRAWING-ROOM, CAME FROM FLORENCE AND ITS POLYCHROME FIREPLACE AND THE EMBRASURES

OF THE DOORS AND CASEMENT WINDOWS FROM THE VALLEY OF AOSTA; THE PAINTING ABOVE THE FIREPLACE, REPRESENTING MARS AND JUPITER, IS A FRAGMENT OF A FRESCO FOUND IN FLORENCE.

THE FIRE-PLACE IN THE DINING-ROOM IS ITALIAN RENAISSANCE, LIKE THE FIRE-PLACE IN THE GOTHIC DRAWING-ROOM. THE LATTER IS ADORNED BY A SPLENDID GOTHIC STRING-COURSE OF SCULPTURED OAK THAT MUST COME FROM THE WORK OF A MONK ENDOWED WITH THE GIFTS OF AN

ARTIST AND...PATIENCE. IT IS THOUGHT TO COME FROM THE LYON REGION.

THE PANELLING OF THIS DRAWING-ROOM (THE PRESENT HOTEL BAR) WAS BROUGHT FROM SPAIN, LIKE THAT OF THE GOTHIC ROOM. THEY ARE BOTH SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

IN THE CHAPEL, THE POLYCHROME CEILING IS AN EXACT COPY OF THAT OF THE SWISS GUARD'S CHAPEL IN THE VATICAN. THE SCULPTURED OAK DOOR, NEAR THE CANNON, WITH MAGNIFICENT ALTO RILIEVO CARVINGS ON BOTH SIDES, WAS FOUND IN ABOUT 1865 IN THE COURTYARD OF THE CHATEAU DE CHILLON AMONGST THROWN AWAY WOOD !

THE FIRE-PLACE AND WOODEN FLOOR IN THE LIBRARY ARE OF THE STYLE AND PERIOD OF LOUIS XIV, WHILE THE PANELLED CEILING AND PANELLING, LIKE THOSE OF THE MAIN BEDROOM ON THE FIRST FLOOR, DATE FROM LOUIS THE FIFTEENTH. THESE WERE SAVED FROM THE DEMOLITION OF AN OLD TOWN-HOUSE IN SAINT-OUEN.

IN THE MAIN DRAWING-ROOM, THE MONUMENTAL HENRI II FIRE-PLACE COMES FROM THE BEARN. IT WAS FOUND IN A MERIDIONAL MANOR-HOUSE, THE OWNERS OF WHICH WERE FRIENDS OF HENRI IV IN HIS YOUTH. WHEN HE BECAME KING OF FRANCE, THEY DECIDED THEIR HOME WAS TOO RUSTIC TO OFFER THEIR SOVEREIGN A BEFITTING RECEPTION AND SHOULD BE RENDERED MORE STATELY. THE EMBELLISHMENTS INCLUDED THE ROUNDED SCULPTURE OF THE STRING-COURSE OF THIS FIRE-PLACE, A STRING-COURSE THAT, IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING, IS OF THE STYLE OF.....HENRY IV.

THE MAGNIFICENT TAPESTRIES THAT ADORN THE MAIN DRAWING-ROOM PHILOSOPHY, MUSIC, RHETORIC AND WAR, ARE FLEMISH; THEY WERE EXECUTED AFTER CARTOONS BY RUBENS (ONE OF THE FIGURES IS THE WIFE OF THE PAINTER) AND ORDERED BY LOUIS XIV AS A PRESENT FOR COLBERT. IT IS NOT KNOWN HOW THEY CAME TO COUDREE.

MANY OTHERS DETAILS OF THE DECOR REMAIN TO BE IDENTIFIED AND LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN TO RESEARCH AND IMAGINATION.

AS IT STANDS TODAY, AFTER THE MANY VICISSITUDES OF THE PAST AND FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE BEEN SAVED FROM DEMOLITION OR FROM FALLING INTO THE HANDS OF DISINTERESTED OWNERS, THE CHATEAU DE COUDREE, DESCRIBED BY CHASTILLON AS "WORTHY OF NOTE", HAS PRESERVED NOT ONLY ITS NOBLE ASPECT, BUT ALSO THE CHARACTER OF A STATELY HOME THAT AROUSES THE ADMIRATION OF ALL WHO VISIT IT.