

# THE CASTLE'S HISTORY

The château d'Urfé was born at the beginning of the XIIth century, in a particular blurred context of political conflicts. The limits of the influence areas of both the archbishop de Lyon and the count de Forez are then ill marked. Guichard III de Beaujeu, overlord in Beaujolais and partly in the North-East of Roanne, takes advantage of this situation. Facing the count de Forez's properties, bordering the Bourbonnais and the Auvergne, he founds, around 1130, at the far end of the plateau d'Urfé, a fortified post which original layout is unknown. He settles there a dedicated vassal, Arnoul II Raybe, from obscure origin.

In 1173, when the archbishop of Lyon and the count de Forez, by a treaty, come to an agreement on the stretch of their influence area, Urfé is then quoted as a border castle. It is then a decisive stake for the Beaujeu. Three times during the conflicts between on one side Humbert III then Guichard IV and Humbert V de Beaujeu, and on the other Guy II then Guy III and Guy IV de Forez, Urfé goes temporarily to the hands of the latter. But as soon as 1222, it is permanently under the count de Forez' authority.

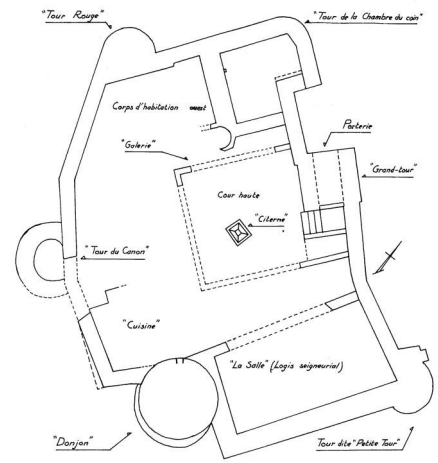
Around 1412-1415, it is ambitiously re-shaped by Guichard d'Urfé, direct descendant of the Raybe, who more or less gives it its present layout. The defensive potential given by the important slope of the rock platform is used in a shrewd way. The new building is in the shape of an irregular quadrilateral. From the previous building, the donjon is kept. Facing the highest spot of the Urfé mountain, though isolated from it by a wide deep dry ditch, the south angle of the new fortress is strengthened to favour defence in the most open area. The curtains, topped by a rampart walk behind a crenel line, are regularly drilled with shooting positions with straight loopholes. The walls are confined with round towers in the East and in the West, and of a fake tower in the North. A high tower on a square plan complicates and defends the fortress' entrance. In the middle of the courtyard, an underground water tank is fed by pipes collecting rain water. The outside rampart, bordering the ditch and carrying on along the curtains first very closely for the sake of efficiency, goes away from it in the West and in the North to envelop a wide farmyard. In a corner of it, the small church Saint-Étienne d'Urfé, seat of a modest secondary parish taking over a chapel quoted as far as 1225, ensures the divine presence within the castle's space. A sixth tower is later raised to strengthen defence on the South-East side and to adapt the building to artillery's improvements.

Once its military system being useless, the castle is modified for a new lifestyle, very likely by Claude d'Urfé, François I<sup>st</sup> et Henri II's ambassador. At the end of the XVth or at the beginning of the XVIth century, the West part, heightened, is provided with chimneys and with a spiral staircase built ahead of the front wall. The rooms within it start from the courtyard in wide crossings with moulded frames. Anne d'Urfé, Claude's grand-son, has the courtyard bordered, on three sides, with an openwork gallery with small columns above a triple portico of arches.

Later on, the residence is occupied only from time to time. The forezian heritage of the Urfé family is sold in 1766. In 1781, Durand-Antoine de Meaux buys Urfé, today still his descendant's property. Under the French revolution, the castle is looted: covering materials are taken away, the sculpted chimneys dismantled, the dressed stones scattered. Witness of the centuries during which the feudal system had won, the building begins to fall apart. It then gives an image of a mutilated fortress exiled in loneliness, which persistent legends wrap up in a disturbing atmosphere. During the post-romantic period, the nickname of *Cornes d'Urfé* (horns), still in use, is inspired from its ragged figure.

Founded in 1979, the Association pour la Renaissance d'Urfé dedicated itself to the task of preserving the remains of the monument that is indeed private property, and of preserving and keeping its site alive.

Norbert GROS



Association  
pour la  
Renaissance d'Urfé

[www.chateaudurfe.org](http://www.chateaudurfe.org)

[www.tourisme-paysdurfe.com](http://www.tourisme-paysdurfe.com)

