

*Welcome to  
the Château de Ségur*

# castrum

The Château de Ségur stands on a rocky hilltop nestling in a meander of the Auvézère ('Haute Vézère'), below the surrounding plateaux. This fortified site of Carolingian origin is divided into two parts: the viscount's core and its forecourt. The tour takes visitors on a journey through the layout of the castle from the end of the Middle Ages, set in a natural environment of the highest quality, and takes them back in time to understand its ancient organization, when the viscounts resided on the site and the forecourt was populated by numerous families of knights. In the first centuries of its history, the Ségur castral complex formed a small noble settlement (in Latin: *castrum*), made up of knights (the Hélié de Pompadour, Pérusse des Cars, Cotet, etc.) and their families, servants, clerics, a blacksmith and, when they came to stay, the viscounts.

## *History*

The castle site is the setting for a very ancient line of viscounts, known as the Viscounts of Ségur, who can be traced back to the 10th century. Around the year 1000, a marriage brought their heritage into that of the Viscounts of Limoges, who made Ségur one of their favourite residences until the end of the 15th century. Although the viscounts enjoyed

frequent visits to the site in the 11th–13th centuries, the Dukes of Brittany took possession of the viscounty at the end of the 13th century, when their presence diminished: Ségur, like the other viscount fortresses, was entrusted to local officers who managed day-to-day affairs in the absence of their masters. The Hundred Years' War (from 1337) and the difficulties associated

with the succession of Brittany (1341–1365) led to the semi-abandonment of the castle, which was hardly maintained at all.

It was reinvested around 1420 by Jean de L'Aigle, younger brother of the reigning viscount and responsible for managing affairs in the Limousin: Jean settled there permanently and made it his home, with his wife Marguerite de Chauvigny, when he was not at war for the King of France. He succeeded his brother in 1432, bought the county of Périgord in 1438 and surrounded himself with advisors from the old knightly families of the forecourt. But with no descendants, he left his inheritance to his brother Guillaume, who passed on his rights to his eldest daughter, Françoise de Bretagne, married to Alain d'Albret. The couple made a few visits to Ségur, where Jean II, the future King of Navarre (father-in-law of Queen Margot), was born, but mainly resided in Nérac en Agenais and Pau en Béarn. Ségur thus entered a new period of lethargy.

In 1558, one of the knights of the forecourt, François de Pérusse, Seigneur des Cars, bought the manor of Ségur and became its new master. He abandoned the viscount's core but enlarged his hôtel in the forecourt, which became the present dwelling. In 1643, due to inheritance disputes between his descendants, the Marquis d'Hautefort took over the rights and became known as the 'Viscount of Ségur'. However, he did not live on the estate, leaving it in the hands of administrators, managers and farmers, who were responsible for maintaining the buildings to a minimum and ensuring that the courts functioned and taxes were collected. The Hauteforts remained masters of Ségur until the French Revolution.

After the abolition of the privileges, the property passed through several families until it was acquired by the current owners in 2021. Following urgent consolidation work carried out with the help of the French government, the château reopened to the public in 2025.

## Visit

### *The east front*

The viewpoint on the eastern front preserves many remains of the old fortress. The current access bridge <sup>1</sup> only dates from the late Middle Ages: it led to a drawbridge, the grooves of whose sliding beams <sup>2</sup> can still be seen. On the left, you can see the remains of medieval gabled windows and corbelled latrines: these were two knights' lodgings <sup>3</sup> organised in a similar way (ground floor for storage, first noble floor then second floor overlooking the patrol path). To the right, the remains of a voluminous tower with three counterforts <sup>4</sup> can be seen, which was another knight's residence. Further to the right, you can still distinguish the site of the former porch <sup>5</sup> used to access the castle from the forecourt via a side ramp.

### *The forecourt*

When you enter the courtyard, you can appreciate the calm and beauty of the setting. The old well <sup>6</sup> can be seen beneath the century-old plane trees. On the left, the seigneurial dwelling <sup>7</sup> is the result of an extension to the mansion of the Pérusse family, former knights who became lords of Ségur in the 16th century. This residential complex includes sections dating from the 12th to 16th centuries. The small aedicula at the entrance, with the remains of two lions supporting the upper floor, is in the flamboyant Gothic style <sup>8</sup>. More than half of the roof structure is in the form of an inverted ship's hull (15th century?). On the right, two separate but adjoining dwellings can be distinguished, the one on the right being the former access porch <sup>9</sup> to the courtyard from the side ramp seen from the east front, and the one on the left being a mansion <sup>10</sup> converted at the end of the 17th century. Finally, you can enter the large building <sup>11</sup> delimiting the courtyard to the east: converted into stables in the 16th century, this complex is the former home of two 13th-century knights <sup>3</sup>.

### *The north terrace*

The north front, which was originally defended by a line of knights' mansions, was enhanced by a large terrace overlooking the Auvézère valley in the 16th century <sup>12</sup>. No doubt designed to provide better defence for the surrounding area, with very high walls set into the slope and

a small north-east bastion <sup>13</sup>, it was also used as a pleasant space for walking: in the 17th century, this area was planted with fruit trees. The site of the former vaulted passageway leading to the courtyard can still be seen on the gatehouse <sup>9</sup>. The dwelling on the right, restored at the end of the 17th century, had a vaulted ground floor used as a prison <sup>10</sup>. Further on, you can see the curved corner of the large viscount's residence from the late Middle Ages (around 1430–1440) <sup>14</sup>. A postern <sup>15</sup> leads into the large vaulted cellar <sup>16</sup>, which was used to store barrels of wine. Inside, a staircase <sup>17</sup> led directly to the upper courtyard.

### *The separation between the two courtyards*

The entrance to the viscount's residence was via a drawbridge, traces of which can still be seen <sup>18</sup>. It was removed and replaced by a staircase with an angled banister in the 17th century. On the left, the rounded wall fitted with a gunboat is the religious centre of the castle, with its three chapels <sup>19</sup>. On the right are the remains of the large pavilion known as the Queen's pavilion <sup>20</sup>: this was the result of the restoration, during the 16th century, of a former noble residence to accommodate the Queen of Navarre during a possible visit. The building was five floors high, but by the 17th century it was in a poor state of repair and was mainly used as a granary.

### *The viscount's core*

The current landscape of this high courtyard is misleading because the organisation of this space was very different in the Middle Ages. The space was cluttered with a large number of buildings, leaving little free space. At the far end of the courtyard, the large viscount's tower (13th century) <sup>21</sup> retains its west front: two large window openings with colonnettes (no longer standing) can be seen; the roof was laid behind the front wall and the side drainage holes for rainwater can still be seen. A residence <sup>22</sup> adjoined it, of which a highly carved bay remains (right). However, archaeological excavations in recent years have uncovered an older tower (12th century) <sup>23</sup> in the heart of the courtyard (since reburied). To the left of the 13th-century tower, there is a direct access door <sup>24</sup> to the viscount's core: this postern

was surmounted by a large watchtower, which was destroyed by fire in 1681. The enclosure of this high courtyard <sup>25</sup> is the result of several periods, the most recent having added a crown of machicolations to allow the passage of the patrol path.

### *The unfinished viscount's residence*

This residence <sup>14</sup>, built by Jean de L'Aigle in the years 1430–1440, considerably enlarged the base of the viscount's core. Its foundations are set deep into the slope, allowing for the installation of a large vaulted cellar <sup>16</sup>. The ground floor, now partly buried under rubble, was very comfortable: it was divided into three successive rooms, all lit by Gothic bays with cushioned windows (stone benches). There is still a latrine overlooking the void, and fireplaces were used to heat these living spaces. However, modern texts tell us that the residence had not been completed and that a floor of carpentry rooms had been installed, which have now disappeared. The area further west housed the castle's former prisons <sup>26</sup>, which were used until the 17th century.

### *The religious centre*

The large Notre-Dame chapel <sup>27</sup>, sometimes called the church in old documents, corresponds to the polygonal chevet built into the slope <sup>28</sup>. It was separated from its former nave by the large limestone triumphal arch <sup>29</sup>. It was adorned with beautiful sculptures, vaulted over ribbed ceilings and lit by stained glass windows. Its western annex <sup>30</sup>, also vaulted, was a chapel dedicated to Saint Andrew, surmounted by a bell tower in the 17th century. Lastly, the former nave, either ruined or never really completed, had been replaced by the chapel of Sainte-Catherine <sup>31</sup>, founded by the Pérusse des Cars family. Marguerite de Chauvigny had asked to be buried in the choir of Notre-Dame and six vicars were to hold masses in the chapels of Notre-Dame and Sainte-Catherine. Recent excavations have uncovered a 15th/16th century tomb in front of the great triumphal arch.

