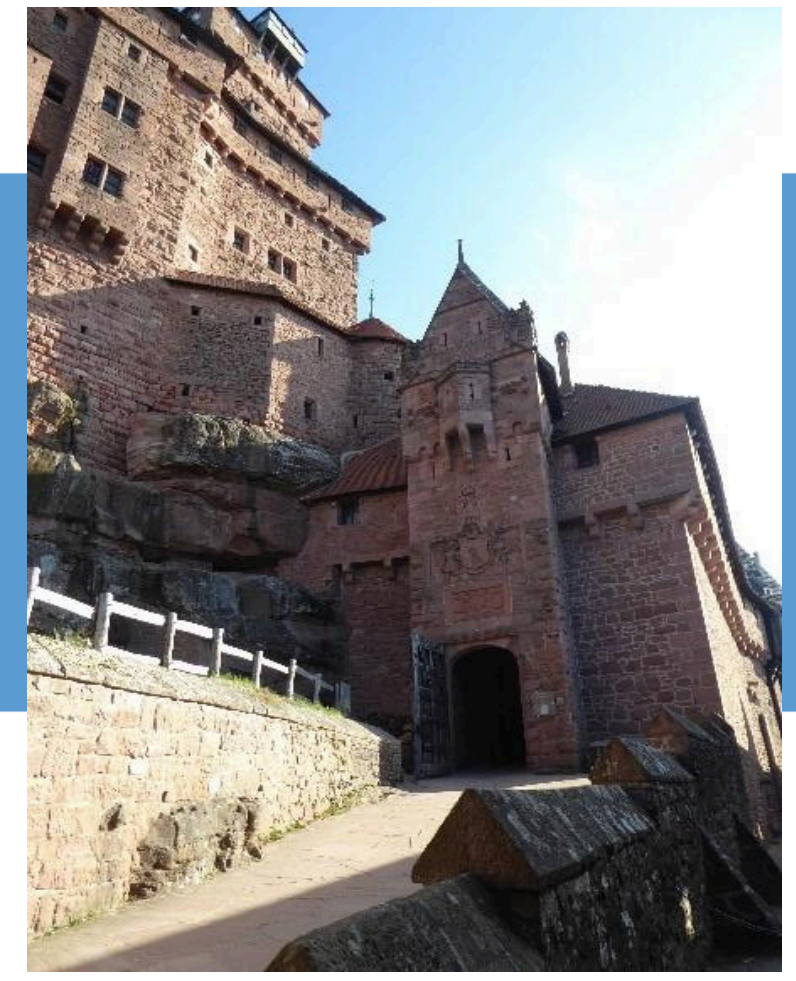


The Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle

Standing 757 meters above sea level, the Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle overlooks the Alsatian plain. Built in the 12th century, it was burned down in 1633 during the Thirty Years' War and later restored in 1908 by the German Empire. More than just a historical monument, it became an ideological tool at the heart of Franco-German tensions.

Today, it is one of the rare fully reconstructed medieval fortresses in Europe. It was used as a setting for *La Grande Illusion* by Renoir (1937) and inspired John Howe, artistic director of *The Lord of the Rings*, with its unique atmosphere.



Its story began in 1147, when the Hohenstaufen dynasty of the Holy Roman Empire chose this strategic hilltop to build a fortress. The name Königsburg ("King's Castle") appears as early as 1157. Burned down by the Swedes in 1633 during the Thirty Years' War, the castle then lay in ruins for over two centuries. In 1899, the town of Sélestat, unable to restore it, gave the castle to the German Emperor Guillaume II (a member of the Hohenzollern family). Passionate about history, the emperor aimed to revive a medieval fortress in the purest tradition while asserting the power of the German Empire. He entrusted the reconstruction to architect Bodo Ebhardt. Inaugurated in 1908, the castle became a showcase of German medieval culture. In the Middle Ages, the Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle controlled two major trade routes: one for grain and wine between Italy and the Netherlands, and another for salt and silver linking Lorraine to Germanic regions. Built from the pink sandstone of the Vosges mountains, the Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle seems to rise from the mountain itself, as if it were part of it. Its stone, both solid and aesthetic, gives the castle its charm. Most of the walls are original. One notices the richness of the decorations. The German double-headed eagle appears frequently in the décor on stained glass windows, tapestries, and painted walls.



This old gate bears the imperial coats of arms of Charles V and Guillaume II. We can read the inscription: "This castle was restored by Guillaume II, King of Prussia and Emperor of the Germans." This double designation is not meaningless. By proclaiming himself both King of Prussia and Emperor of the Germans, Wilhelm II affirms his role as a unifier of the Germanic peoples under a single authority, in the continuity of German unification, officially proclaimed on January 18, 1871, in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles. Charles V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in the 16th century, was the most powerful European monarch of the first half of the century. He embodied the ideal of a unifying power over vast territories.

In the inner courtyard of the Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle, one can observe typical Alsatian architecture. The pink sandstone ramparts stand alongside timber-framed structures. These wooden constructions were rebuilt in the early 20th century at the request of the emperor. They do not date back to the Middle Ages but rather reflect Guillaume II's idealized vision of that period.



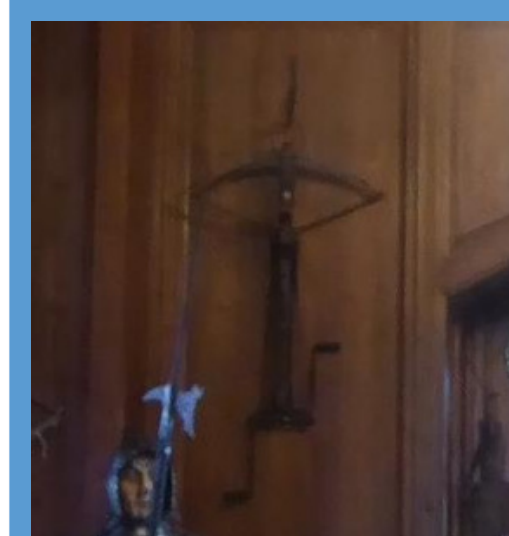
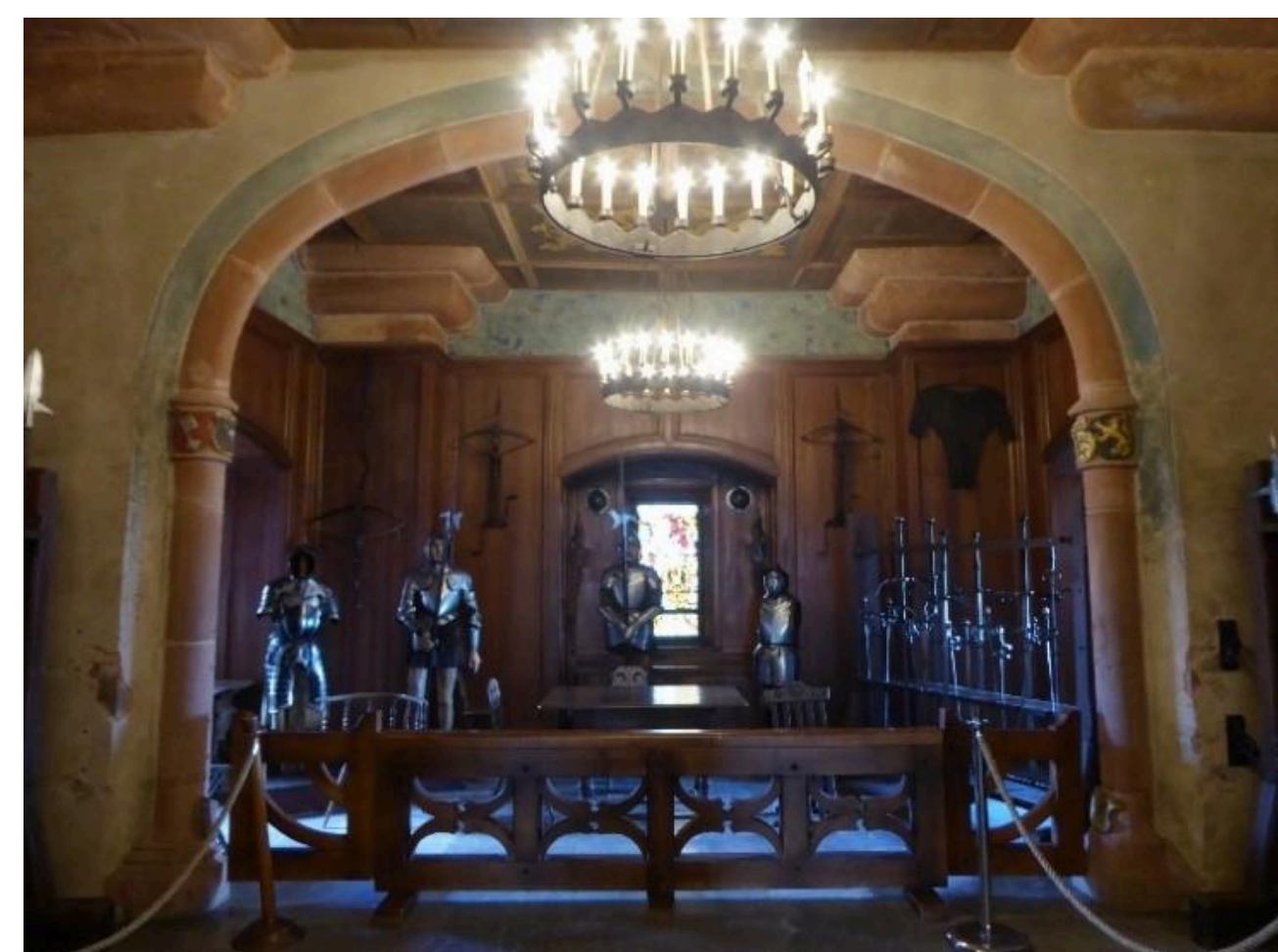
One can also see a well, 62 meters deep. Though it may seem unremarkable at first glance, it is a powerful reminder of how vital access to water was during a siege. Indeed, the castle was besieged several times throughout its history.

In 1333, for example, it is recorded that the besieged defenders hurled barrels filled with toilet waste at their attackers!



At the top of the stairs, we have access to the living room. This room is narrow and was built between big walls, which illustrates the constraints of the Middle Ages's defensive architecture.

The furniture, in solid wood and stately, strengthens the castle's austere ambience. This furniture, like this cradle, is not of this period, but logical from a historical perspective. Acquired between 1905 and 1918 they contribute to making the Haut-Koenigsbourg, a living museum of the Middle Ages.



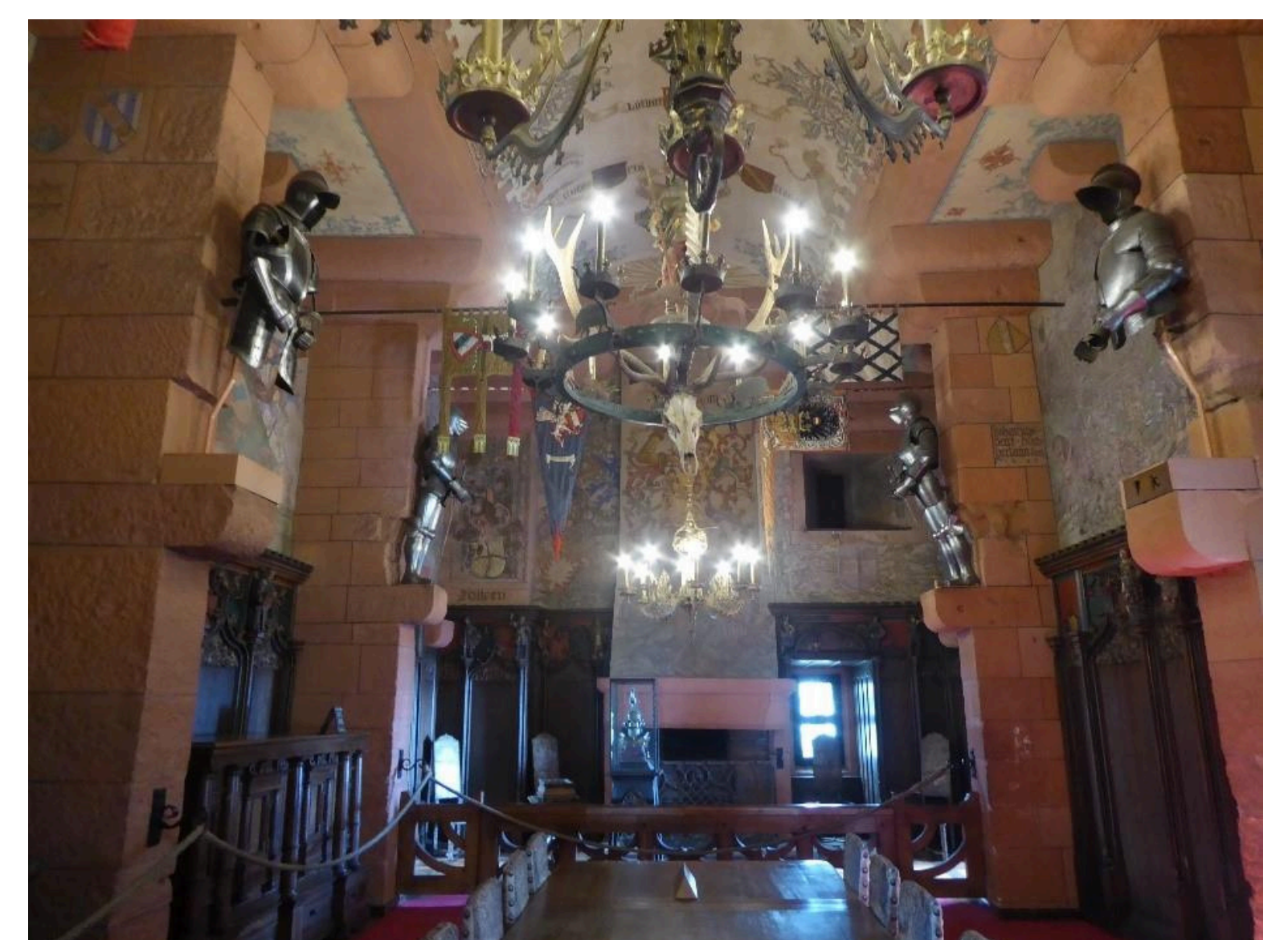
L'arbalète pouvait être utilisée comme un moyen de paiement au Moyen Âge. On pouvait payer une nuit dans le château en échange de l'arme. Interdite par le pape Innocent II en 1139, elle restait cependant très largement utilisée.



The arms room is one of the most sumptuous and impressive rooms of the castle. We can discover a huge variety of weapons like halberds, long swords, spears and crossbows. Armors exposed, often delicately crafted, symbolize prestige and wealth. However, with the appearance of artillery and firearms like muskets, most of these traditional weapons have gradually become obsolete. The very first cannons, by the way, fired arrows instead of cannonballs.



The Kaiser's room (Emperor Guillaume II) or the festival hall have been arranged during the restoration. It doesn't correspond to an authentic medieval hall, but the ambience, the decor, armors, everything is done to plunge us in an idealized vision of the Middle Ages with these chandeliers and armors.



On the patio of the great bastion, we can admire a collection of cannons, some part of the XVIth century.

