



Fortifications

THE ANCIENT KINGDOM OF CATALONIA, THE AREA OF NORTHERN SPAIN AND SOUTHERN FRANCE, BORDERED TODAY BY THE PYRENEES MOUNTAINS, IS FAMOUS FOR ITS CASTLES, FORTIFICATIONS, MONASTERIES AND ABBEYS, SET HIGH IN SOME OF THE MOST DRAMATIC AND INACCESSIBLE PLACES.

This was a hotly contested area, where regions from both sides were taken and re-taken over the centuries. For protection, it was essential to somehow have a clear view of an approaching enemy, a good way to achieve this is to be higher than them. If a fortress observation post could see the distant glow of camp-fires, clouds of dust or other signs of an approaching army, then they might have a few days to prepare for the attack. And if the fortress was one of many stretching along a frontier, then communication between neighbours was crucial for mutual support and ultimately the nation's survival. Now hundreds of years later, these once formidable fortresses like stationary battleships, most in a decaying state, have a distinct aura and visual beauty. Adorned as they are with a mantle of ivy and tree roots that camouflages their gaping holes and crumbling walls. It is in this disguised form, that we seek to make sense of the story they can still tell.

If left, an abandoned castle or fortification may take a millennia or more to return to the earth. But other actions play their hand that speed up the decaying process: natural disasters undermine the actual structure causing it to collapse, local governments sometimes issued builders with permits to remove materials as if the structures were a ready-made quarry, and local inhabitants often looted carved stones from the sites to incorporate into their homes.



Chateau Puilaurens (one of the five sons of Carcassonne), near Lapradelle, Occitanie, France.

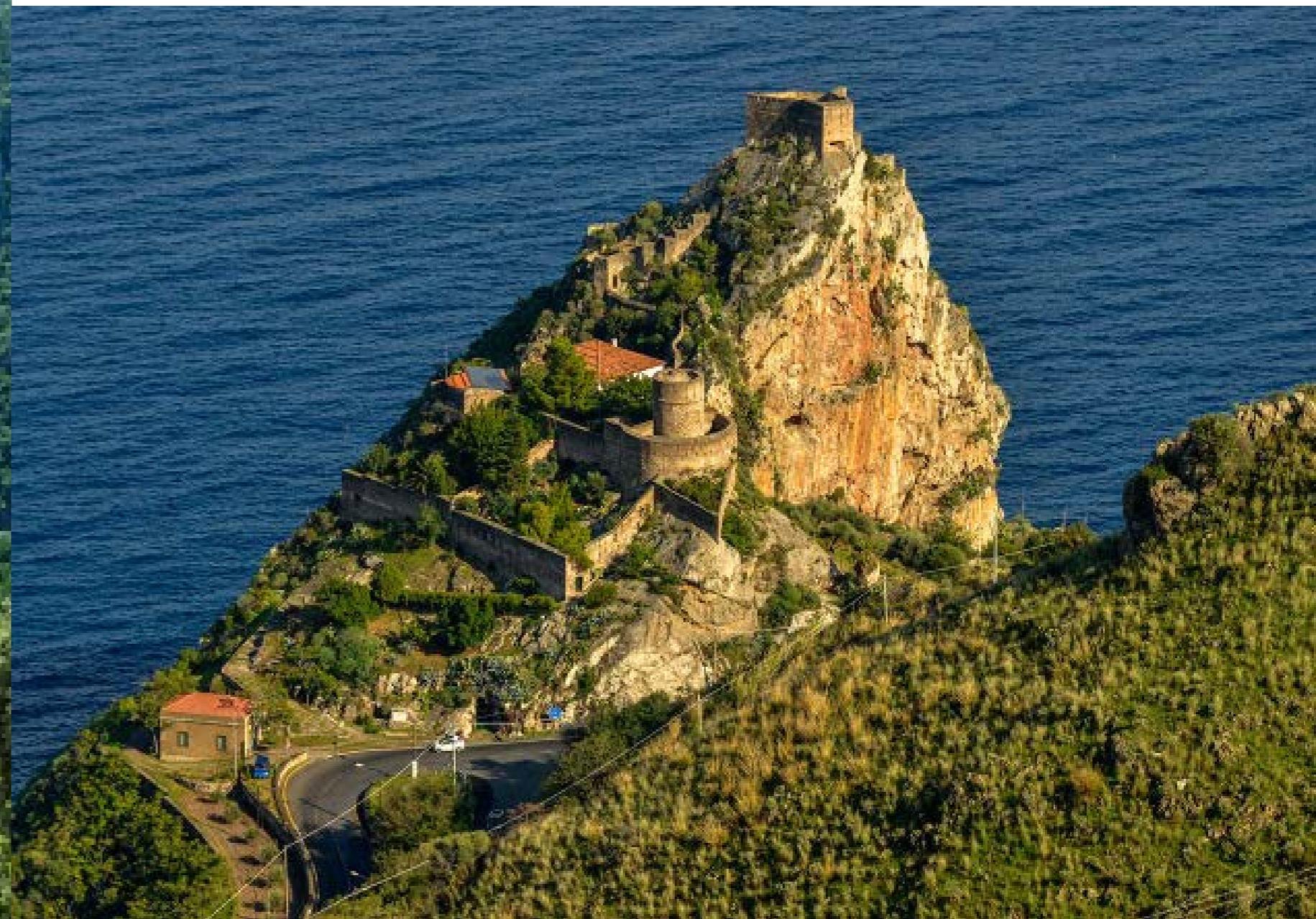


OPPOSITE: The abandoned, overgrown ruins of Castle Combefa, near Monesties, in the Tarn region of Occitanie, France. **ABOVE:** The brooding and very raw ruins of Auriac Castle, in the Aude Department, Occitanie, France.

To me, overgrown sites like Auriac or Combefa that are left to the elements without any kind of restoration, always evoke a sense of haunting mystery. Without facts or other information about the site at your fingertips, you only have your imagination.



RIGHT: The 12th century Castle Doria overlooks the Ligurian coast at Porto Venere, Italy. The Castle was constructed by the Genoese in 1161. **ABOVE:** The partly excavated complex of Housesteads Roman Fort in Northumberland, UK. This is the most extensive of the many Roman forts that dot the 75 mile (120.7 km) long Hadrian's Wall.



LEFT: The 13th century remains of Château Peyrelade in the Gorges du Tarn, Occitanie, France.
ABOVE: The spectacular ruins of Castello Alessio, on the coast near Taormina, Sicily, Italy.



OPPOSITE: The 13th century, medieval Caerphilly Castle, Wales, UK. It is the second largest castle in Britain, and is memorable for having introduced concentric castle defence design to Britain.
ABOVE: The ruins of the 10th century Tour Barberousse (Redbeard Tower) of Gruissan castle, Occitanie, France. The castle was designed to observe the approaches to the harbour at Narbonne and to guard against seaborne invasions of the city.



OPPOSITE: The crumbling ruins of Chateau Carol, in Occitanie, was originally a Spanish Royal castle. It sits high up in the Pyrenees near the border with Spain. **ABOVE:** Les Baux is a ruined medieval fortified village in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region of southern France. It has a spectacular position in the Alpilles mountains, set atop a rocky outcrop, crowned by a ruined castle overlooking the plains to the south. The name bauxite (aluminium ore) is derived from Les Baux, where it was first discovered by geologist Pierre Berthier in 1821.



OPPOSITE: The Diamond Head Fire Control Station (foreground) at Oahu in Hawaii, was built at the top of Diamond Head Crater between 1908 and 1910. The emerging threat of air power was a major consideration, so the exterior was camouflaged with volcanic rubble embedded in concrete.

LEFT: The rusting remains of the shore based, outer torpedo tubes in Jervis Bay, NSW, Australia, built during the Second World War to protect the bay from possible enemy attack.

LOWER: This abandoned structure is part of the old Fort Nepean coastal battery, at Point Nepean, Victoria, Australia. Built between 1873 and 1886, to protecting the narrow entrance to Port Phillip. The first British Empire shots of both the First and the Second World Wars were fired from Fort Nepean.

The decaying remains of perceived threats to our on-going security litter the landscape.

The four castles - the Cabaret, Tour Régine, Surdespine and Querthineux castles - that make up the stunning site of Lastours are in the Aude departement in Occitane, France. During the 1200s, Lastours was at the prime locations involved in the Albigensian crusade, against the Cathar heretics, headed by the crusader Simon de Montfort. The castles held out against these attacks for nearly twenty years. In the background is Mt Canigou and the Pyrenees mountains.



OPPOSITE: The ruined medieval fortress of Dunnottar Castle (Scottish Gaelic: Dùn Fhoithear, 'fort on the shelving slope') on the north-east coast of Scotland.

THIS PAGE: Château de Najac (the royal fortress of Najac) is in the Aveyron département of southern France. The castle has been involved with many major historical events including: the first English occupation, the Albigensian Crusade, the Hundred Years' War, the imprisonment of the Knights Templar, the peasants' revolts, and the French Revolution.



*Restored period canon
on the ramparts of Fort
Lovrijenac or St. Lawrence
Fortress, Dubrovnik,
Croatia.
In recent times the fort has
been used as a prominent
feature of the HBO TV
series 'Game of Thrones'.*



The Bourtzi water castle, Nafplio, Greece. It was built by the Venetians in 1473 to prevent pirates and invaders approaching from the sea.



Chateau de Queribus, sits high on a rocky spur in Occitanie, France and like its neighbours Peyrepertuse, (just visible on the crest of the range at top right) Aguilar, Puilaurens and Termes it was one of the 'five sons of Carcassonne'. These fortified outposts guarded the volatile border between Spain and France. With the signing of the Treaty of the Pyrenees between the two countries in 1642, the border was moved south, following the peaks of the Pyrenees. This effectively made these fortifications obsolescent overnight.

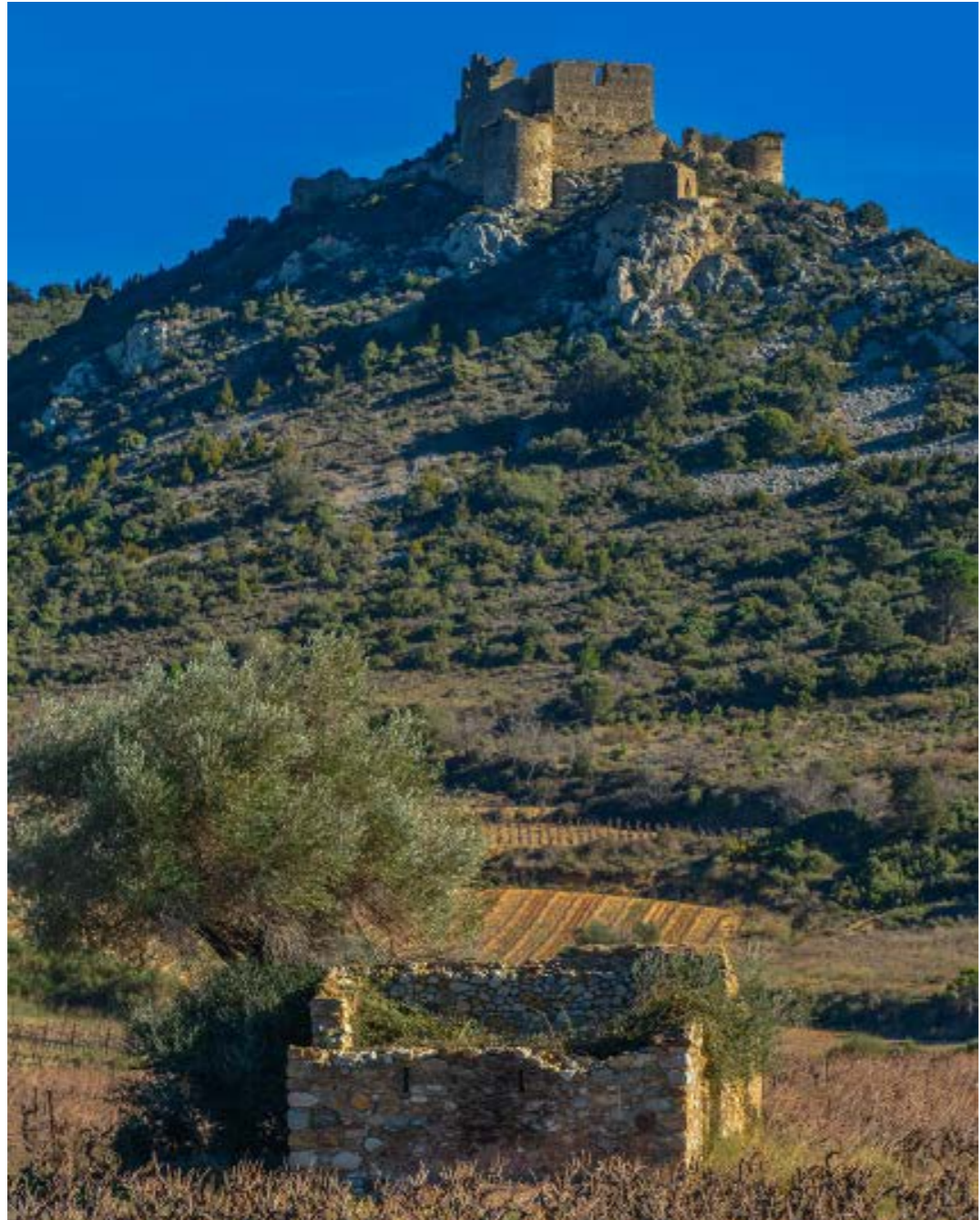




LEFT: The ruins of Chateau Peyrepertuse built by the kings of Aragon in the 11th century, overlook approaches from the Mediterranean coast and south to the border with Spain. Its sister Chateau Queribus (following pages), is just visible at top right of this image. The castle is also considered one of the main castles of the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathar 'heretics' (1209–1229). This was a 20-year military campaign initiated by Pope Innocent III to eliminate Catharism in Languedoc, in the south of France.



ABOVE: Chateau Peyrepertuse viewed from Chateau Queribus, with the village of Cucugnan in the foreground.



LEFT: The ruins of the 12th century Château Aguilar (another of the five sons of Carcassonne), Occitanie, France. **RIGHT:** The old town of Dubrovnik, Dalmatian coast, Croatia.



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OPPOSITE: *The ruins of the 11th - 12th century Castle at Penne, Occitanie, France.*

ABOVE: *Thirteenth century walls with fourteen defensive towers completely surround the Italian hilltop town of Monteriggioni. The fortified castle was built by the Sienese in 1214–19 as a defense during their wars against Florence.*



Chateau-de-Salses, near Perpignan, Occitanie, was built between 1497 and 1502 by the Spanish to guard their northern frontier from France. After many battles for supremacy by both sides at different times, it was finally conquered by the French in 1642. But for all its magnificent military architecture and geographic location, the 1659 signing of the Treaty of the Pyrenees stripped Salses of its strategic position.



Built in the late 17th century by the Omanis as a protection against Portuguese attack, the Old Fort, or the Arab Fort, is the oldest building in Stone Town, Zanzibar.



The 11th century ruins of Chateau Rodes, a Spanish royal fortification overlooks the Occitanie village of Rodes and Mt Canigou, France. When the Franco-Spanish border was moved 50 kilometers south to the Pyrenees mountains, fortifications like Rodes were subsequently abandoned and lost to time.



The ruins of the 15th century drowned Chateau Grandval, on the river Dadou near Teillet, Occitanie, France. In 1944 the chateau was attacked and burnt by the Germans in an effort to destroy the local Maquis resistant fighters who used the chateau as a base.



The ruins of an abandoned Berber village overlooking the Mides Gorge, Tozeur province, Tunisia.



The 11th century Spanish castle of Quermanco, Vilajuïga, Spain, overlooks the northern border with France and the Plain of Roussillon. The surrealist painter, Salvador Dalí, had a deep affection for the castle and tried to purchase the ruins as a residence for his wife, Gala.