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The bastides & new towns of the southwest of France: recent research & new directions

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I hope to offer some insights into current research on medieval new towns in southwestern France. I will be focusing on the following points:
- First, past research on French new towns, especially the bastides, not just by historians but also archaeologists, architects, geographers and historians of art.
- Next, the medieval expression *villa nova*. Does it really describe a new foundation? Does it even describe a town?
- Third, some of the results of recent research, especially, the connection between medieval new towns and the phenomenon of regular town plans.
- Then, directions for new research, specifically, the application of a European research perspective to southwestern France.
- In conclusion, the bastides, Maurice Beresford and Winchelsea.

Research on French new towns and bastides

A bastide is generally assumed to be a medieval new *town*, but is in fact usually a village and rarely a town. It was founded by one or several lords (in the latter case, it would be called a *paréage*). In the southwest of France, the term refers to the new villages founded in their hundreds between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean during the 13th and 14th centuries. The scale of the phenomenon and the regularity of the town plans of bastides have long attracted the attention of researchers, architects and historians.

It was during the 18th century that the bastide was identified as a new settlement. In the early 19th century, bastides were part of the rediscovery of the Middle Ages. In particular, they were associated with the Communal Movement and were taken as a symbol of the freedom of the people against the lords, a symbol of democracy. This 19th century thinking was synthesized in 1880 by A. Curie-Séïmbres.

Subsequently, the art historian Pierre Lavedan, in his *History of Town Planning* (1926) and subsequently *Town Planning in the Middle Ages* (1974), proposed a morphological typology of new towns, including regular grid plans called checkerboards, which matched the plans of many bastides. Lavedan was the first person in France to study new towns as a whole, albeit as part of a general study of urban planning.

However, this late 19th century model has several flaws :
- It is a narrow "regionalist" history, unrelated to other regions and countries.
- Some characteristic structures found in bastides, such as town walls, covered markets and "cornières" (arches around the marketplace), were presented as

contemporaneous with the foundation of the bastides, but were in fact almost always much later (14th-16th century).
- The role of the surrounding countryside was ignored. The bastide was typically presented as a town, with the focus on its planning, its industry and trade, and on its liberties, which were presumed to be urban. This characterisation was reinforced by the use of the term "new town" and by names taken from major towns (eg Barcelona, Bruges, Cologne, Valencia, Granada). The vast majority are now villages and everything shows that it was the same in the High and Late Middle Ages.

An essential historiographical step was made by Charles Higounet and Maurice Beresford. From the late 1940s, Higounet (professor of medieval history at the University of Bordeaux) worked on the new towns of southwestern France, but also the Paris Basin, eastern Germany and Italy (Piedmont and Tuscany). He offered a more flexible, more nuanced vision, and broke with the rigidity of the earlier model. He highlighted several waves of town foundation:
- before the mid-12th century, the *sauvetés*;
- next, the *castelnaux*;
- finally, in second half of the 13th and early 14th century, the *bastides*.

Higounet was followed in the 1980s by Benoît Cursente at the University of Toulouse and Maurice Berthe, who have deepened and expanded Higounet's work.

In 1967, Maurice Beresford provided new light on foundations in Gascony, Wales and England. In particular, he sought to understand new towns on a European scale by looking across the possessions of the Kings of England. He also focused on the role of political authorities (kings, seneschals, etc) as the authors of foundation policies. And he looked at the role of bastides in trade, especially the wine trade. He integrated the model of a grid plan around a central marketplace into a broad chronology, a European geographical area and a typology of market towns. These contributions were essential and remain seminal, even if research has of course continued to evolve.

In the 1980s, the phenomenon of bastides became very popular in France for reasons of heritage and tourism. This popularity led to the creation of an association, the Centre d'Etudes des Bastides in 1983. Since 1990, research has been taking new directions:
- The trilogy of *sauveté-castelnau-bastide* has been developed further. F. Hautefeuille (maître de conférences in medieval archaeology at the University of Toulouse) has highlighted a new category of new town, similar to the market towns, which emerged in the 12th century, the *bourg mercadier*.
- The analysis of landscape has developed and been applied to the countryside around new towns. The foundation of bastides was sometimes accompanied by a reorganization of the surrounding land, especially in the case of the last bastides (late 13th and early 14th century). There are 20 such examples according to C. Lavigne. Thus, the new town is not only a built foundation, but can also be a redevelopment of agricultural land.
- In England and the Anglo-Saxon world, researchers work and debate, particularly on the pages of the journal *Urban Morphology*, about the geometry of the bastides.

Their studies focus both on survey techniques, measurement and the meaning of geometric shapes (K. Lilley, T. Slater, W. Boerefijn, A. Randolph and others).

Some thoughts on the medieval expression *villa nova*

While much has been said about the new towns, there was little interest in the medieval vocabulary, as the expression *villa nova* illustrates. Is it possible to make the link between this term and a regular urban morphology, between terminology and form? Since the 19th century, the expression "new town" has been adopted by all researchers, but two questions are generally neglected:

- is a *villa* really a town?
- to what medieval novelty was the word *nova* applied?

A survey has been conducted on the use and meaning of the term *villa nova* in the south of France, in Mediterranean Languedoc and Roussillon. During the Early Middle Ages, particularly during the 9th-10th centuries, the medieval sources use *villa nova* to describe a rural area undergoing agricultural development. The area described is a landscape, not a townscape. Later, the term is used to describe a process of concentration of settlement in the form of new areas around villages or towns. In other words, it was the creation of an agglomeration.

Villa nova therefore turns out to be the expression for a space controlled by those who organize it. The question is, does this organization correspond to:

- a new legal or fiscal entity?
- the growth of an area, rural or urban?
- a specific development characterised by clear morphological patterns (streets, blocks, plots)?

The term *villa nova* accompanied urban expansion in the first decades of the 12th century. Neighbourhoods mushroomed in the suburbs (eg Montpellier and Toulouse) and it is possible to speak of "villeneuve d'extension" (extended new towns). However, the most common sources use the term to describe a small rural suburb with gardens. There is usually no regularity of plan, although several *villae novae* did show the traces of rectangular or grid-like plots. In Barcelona, Philip Banks has identified not one but nine medieval *villae novae*! He highlights their morphological regularity and orthogonal design. They look at first like "garden cities".

These extended villeneuves can be defined as a planned operation to extend beyond an urban centre, often beyond the town walls. This deliberate action distinguished it from other suburbs, which were more spontaneous. It involved organizing suburban land in response to the growth of the town or of the village. But, the morphological regularity is only a possible but not a necessary consequence of the organization of the *villa nova*.

This is also true for foundations like the bastides of the 13th and 14th centuries. They are not necessarily agglomerations with geometric designs. Higounet and Beresford made that point. The regularity of the plots is just one means of recognising a bastide. It is not

always possible to link vocabulary and the standard forms of models. Vocabulary does not imply specific forms. But we can say that the *villa* is usually a village rather than a town. And the novelty (*nova*) must be understood as the new space being exploited and designed, either by the extension of land use or the agglomeration of settlement.

Some results of recent research : new towns, bastides and regularity

In southwestern France, new towns, especially the bastides, have been identified since the 19th century either because some of them are generically named "bastide", or because they have plots sufficiently geometric to be included among the places with a plan known as "regular".

But we know now that the bastides do not have a monopoly of regularity. Other types of settlement may also have regularity: ecclesiastical villages or *sauvetés* (villages founded and protected by the Church, with a church as the main pole), and castral villages or towns. Historians (Higounet, but also Beresford) often add other agglomerations to the family of the bastides that differ morphogenetically. This applies to castral agglomerations. The most striking example is that of Cordes (Tarn), long ranked as the first bastide but now identified as a castral village. Other examples are Montauban and Marmande (Beresford), founded during the 12th century, but originally considered to be early bastides.

Morphological analysis is mainly used to identify geometric similarities between plots. Planning can be distinguished from spontaneity when plan units or clear lines can be identified. The results are compared with archaeological and historical sources. The goal is to provide a chronology and a typology. This can be integrated into a corpus that distinguishes phases of urban history at the regional level in order to give it meaning.

However, we must not oversimplify. A foundation is not necessarily designed with a regular plan. The plan may have other causes (a monumental pole such as a castle, topographic or hydraulic management, etc.). Therefore, we must avoid identifying the "new town" with a geometric plan. In addition, deletion phenomena may mask the early stages of urbanization. On the other hand, the implementation of plans may have included an imperfect geometry for a number of reasons (topography, existing urban development, etc).

Let us consider some results of recent French research on new towns and bastides in the Southwest :
- First, the mapping of identified regular new towns, bastides or otherwise, by the Centre d'Etudes des Bastides. This shows they occur throughout the region, with the exception of the Landes (which were wetland in the Middle Ages). The density increases around Toulouse, especially in the valley of the Garonne.
- Then, a typology based on numerous cases. There are two major families of plans: linear plans and grid plans.
- Above all, a refined chronology. The development of regular plans took place over two centuries (mid-11th to mid-13th). There were three phases. The initial phase was

during the second half of the 11th century and the early decades of the 12th. It corresponds to the first linear or single-axis plans. An example is Morlaàs, in Beam, which was a viscountal foundation (c.1070) with four distinct parts. At the same time, the sauvetés were constructed. These settlements were founded by the Church to provide protection. They were also places of agricultural colonization. They were created for the most part between 1050 and 1150. They remained exclusively agricultural villages.

- The second stage was between 1130 and 1180, and produced market towns (*bourgs mercadiers*) that were the prototypes of the square central regular plan based on grids (eg Montauban). There is no question here of a strict checkerboard, as can be found in the bastides of the late 13th century, but a floating orthogonality, where the streets are nearly parallel or perpendicular. The trading function is reflected by the presence of a central marketplace, which is a major innovation. This period was also that of castelnaux (new castles), above all in Gascony. The major phase of their creation was between 1150 and 1270, with the peak in the early 13th century. In most cases, these settlements are perched on the hills above the valleys of Gascony. The most common type is the village street (90% of castelnaux). The village stretches along a street on the crest of a hill (a continuation of the linear plan of the first period).
- The final stage took place during the second half of the 13th century with the development of bastides, the most accomplished regular form. This is either a linear plan with several parallel streets, or a grid ordered around a large central marketplace for trade (eg Carcassonne).

New research: the contruction of a European research framework

Higounet and Beresford showed the way for comparative research at the European level. Their approach needs to be pursued. National research frameworks are just not adequate.

The example of the European Interreg programme is interesting. This EU-financed programme has operated with several partners over five years, bringing together researchers from neighbouring countries within the same geographical region. I participated in the Interreg IIIB SUDOE programme (2005-2007) on the medieval new towns of Southwest Europe, with universities and research centres in Spain (the University of Valladolid, the Council of Architecture of Cantabria and Arkeolan, the archeological association of the Basque country), Portugal (the University of Coimbra) and France (the Centre d'Etude des Bastides, the University of Toulouse).

Morphological regularity was selected as the criterion for the identification of new towns in southwest France. The objective was to identify a first group of settlements with regular plans and to compare the results. The geographical region covered included all Departments of Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrenees, and Aude (Languedoc-Roussillon), 14 Departments and 5,754 municipalities. This is the area of bastides and new towns enshrined in the historiography.

It was decided to use the maps of the National Geographic Institute (IGN) at a scale of 1:25,000 (1cm = 250m). Towns were selected if they showed signs of regularity, in whole or in part, that was attributable to the Medieval or Modern periods. The choice of the source meant that analysis was performed only on streets, not plots. A network of streets was considered to be regular where there was:

- a major axis setting out regular blocks;
- several axes in parallel, or crossing with a regular orientation and intervals to form an overall plan of sufficient scale.

In the second stage, the group was examined against information from other sources, especially survey maps and texts. There were 633 settlements with regular plans, some 11% of the selected agglomerations. We were not able to study all of the 663. So, 292 areas with regular plans with a very high certainty (5%) were selected.

The Interreg programme has allowed the comparison of research methods and results. Thus, in the Iberian Peninsula, new towns very often have a wall, because they were built during the Reconquista. In France, bastides are without ramparts, as the context is different. Another interesting comparison is the importance of the marketplace. In the Iberian Peninsula, the marketplace declined for a long time and was often an addition to a settlement. In France, on the other hand, the marketplace played an essential role from the mid-12th century and increased in area.

Further international research on new towns has begun to take shape. An international course on the new towns of Southern Europe (covering Italy, Spain, Portugal and France) took place in May 2010 at the University of Valladolid.

Conclusion: the bastides, M. Beresford and Winchelsea

To conclude, I would like to return to Maurice Beresford. His book *New Towns of the Middle Ages* begins with a very detailed study of the foundation of Winchelsea. The questions is: can Winchelsea, which was founded at the end of the 13th century, be compared to the bastides? As so many researchers have worked on Winchelsea, my thoughts are offered modestly.

Beresford called Winchelsea a "new town" and Keith Lilley called it a "market town". But can we also speak of a "bastide"? Edward I founded several bastides in Gascony and Winchelsea, all during the same period. The plans are similar and are grids in both cases. Regularity is very strong, indeed nearly perfect. But there are several marked differences:
- Winchelsea has fortifications
- there are doubts about whether there was a large marketplace at Winchelsea
- the fact that Winchelsea is not a completely new foundation, inasmuch as it moved from an old site because of coastal erosion. There are similar examples in France such as Carcassonne and Mirepoix. Carcassonne saw a shift to the suburbs due to the Albigensian Crusade. Mirepoix was reconstructed because of flooding. In both cases, the word "bastide" is absent, even though they both had a central market square. Winchelsea is a *constraint foundation*, ie a site that was shifted. It has a general shape

in common with the bastides, but not the structure. Winchelsea and the bastides are cousins more than sisters!

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