The foundation, planning and building of new towns in the 13th and 14th centuries in Europe: an architectural-historical research into urban form and its creation

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4 COMPARISON OF THE THREE GROUPS OF NEW TOWNS

We conclude the first part of this study with a short comparison of the groups of newly planned towns that have been dealt with in the first three chapters. The three groups of towns will be compared here with regard to the aspects of the founders and their motives, the settlers, the locations and the original spatial layouts.

In this comparison it must, however, be kept in mind that the three groups are each of a different character. In the chapter on the new towns in Wales we focused on the 11 boroughs founded by King Edward I in the period 1277-1302; in the chapter on the new towns of southwest France, however, we chose to focus on the so-called bastides from the period of c.1220 to c.1370, and not to focus attention solely on one specific group of towns created by one founder; while with the so-called terre nuove fiorentine we have taken just six towns founded by the city-state of Florence between 1299 and 1350, leaving aside earlier foundations by Florence and other regional powers in Tuscany. These choices have been inspired by the availability of useful material and by the desire to show different aspects that we believe are interesting and relevant for a general overview of European new town foundations in the 13th and 14th centuries.1

With this, there is not only a considerable difference in the number of towns within the groups, but also in the number of founders. The groups of the Edwardian towns and the terre nuove fiorentine were both founded under one founding lordship, while the much larger group of the bastides had many different founding lords. Consequently, the group of the bastides is more diverse than are the two other groups.

4.1 Founders

Comparing the terre nuove to the bastides and the Edwardian new towns of Wales, one can mark some considerable differences, even though they were all planned and built roughly in the same period of about the second half of the 13th and the first half of the 14th century. Most remarkable among the differences is the variety in the sorts of founders. The Welsh towns studied in the first chapter were founded by the English king, Edward I.2 The bastides in southwest France were founded by a greater variety of lords, each with their own territories. Most important among these were: the counts of Toulouse, the English kings (foremost among whom was Edward I) in their capacity as dukes of Aquitaine (or Gascony), and their great adversaries, the kings of France, mainly as successors to the counts of Toulouse. Their officers (sénéchaux) also founded new towns more or less independently. Princes of smaller lordships that were more or less independent, such as the counts of Foix and the viscounts of Béarn, also founded new towns on their lands. Lords of lower status, such as knights and abbots, engaged in the venture of bastide foundation as well. Most of the bastides however, were founded by two or more different lords acting in partnership, most often a greater and a lesser lord, in a so-called paréage. At times, one may also find such co-operative town foundations by the lord of the local area in partnership with a more powerful lord of higher status in other regions in Europe3, but nevertheless these paréages are rather characteristic of the new town foundations of the 12th to 14th centuries in southwest France.4

The six terre nuove treated in chapter 3 were founded by the administration of the city-state of Florence. Such town foundations by city-states were not uncommon in northern and central Italy in the 12th to 14th centuries. Only in this part of Europe had many city administrations gained so much independence and so much authority over the surrounding countryside that they could found colonies there. Like these other foundations by city-states, the terre nuove were a sort of satellite towns with limited autonomy, subordinate to the Florentine government.

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1 See par.0.2.2.
2 That is not to say that there were no town foundations in Wales by other lords. These lords generally were of lower status, however, be they of Norman, English or Welsh origin. (see par.1.2)
3 See par.2.4.2, n.71.
4 It is most likely that, even if the principle of paréage had been common in Wales or Tuscany, King Edward or the Florentine administration would not have wanted to partner up with any local lords, since the whole idea was to plant their authority firmly and to displace the local lords.
4.2 Motives

The town foundations of all three groups were motivated by political and military, as well as economic, objectives. In general, the towns were created in order to enlarge the power of the founding authorities and to increase their financial returns through the stimulation of more intensive exploitation of the land and more intensive trade. The balance between these objectives, however, was probably different for almost every individual case, but there clearly are general differences between the three groups. While the Edwardian boroughs of Wales were mainly founded to pacify and colonise a newly conquered country, the bastides in southwest France were primarily founded with economic motives, to re-organise the economy and to exploit the land more intensively. Regarding the terre nuove, it is clear that military and economic motives went hand in hand: the administration of the city-state meant to create satellite towns in order to enlarge its political, military and economic power over the countryside and its inhabitants, partly also in defence of the city itself.

The Edwardian towns of Wales are most clearly recognisable as colonial towns, in the sense that they were largely settled with Englishmen, as centres serving the subjection of northern Wales by the English crown. But the other two groups of towns were colonial as well, although in somewhat different ways. The terre nuove were colonies of Florence within its own province, although they were not populated with inhabitants of the mother city. And most of the bastides can be regarded as colonial towns in another sense, since they ‘opened up’ the areas of which they formed the principal nodes to reclamation, more intensive cultivation and interregional trade, and thereby to more intensive exploitation.

4.3 Settlers

For every town foundation settlers had to be attracted in order to actually create a living community. Like anywhere else in Europe, settlers of the new towns would be lured by the promise of freedom and privileges, several years of exemption of rents and taxes and often also an abundance of land to be had at low rents. For the Edwardian towns in Wales the settlers appear to have been mainly drawn from England and, to a lesser extent, from Gascony and Ireland. In most of the towns there only lived a few Welshmen, if there were any at all. Particularly in the tumultuous times of Welsh rebellions the natives were explicitly excluded. Caerwys and Newborough, however, were exceptions, where the majority of the population was indeed Welsh, probably mainly consisting of freemen. In the case of Newborough they were forcibly settled in the new town, being deported from the area where the new town of Beaumaris was built, principally for English settlers.

The new inhabitants of the bastides and the terre nuove generally appear to have come from the surrounding areas, where they had lived in villages and hamlets. They largely came from the territories of the founders which, in the case of the terre nuove, was largely recently won from the nobility of the countryside. For the terre, the government of the city-state determined which communities from the countryside were to be re-settled, and simply ordered the people to move to the new towns with their houses and possessions. It appears that in some cases they actually had to be forced to move. Some bastides also seem to have been settled by coercion. Complaints of neighbouring lords suggest that bastides also attracted people from adjacent territories, in search of more freedom and better prospects. Apart from the territory of the founding lord and neighbouring lordships, a small percentage of the settlers in the bastides and the terre nuove may have come from further away. It seems, however, that this was rather exceptional.

For all three groups of new towns, the founders would certainly have welcomed merchants and craftsmen, but the greatest part of the settlers appear to have been farmers initially. Noblemen – except for the founders themselves - and clerics generally were not allowed to own houses in the new towns. The settlers usually were obliged to build a house within a limited period of time from taking up a house lot. In most instances, the term was one year, but for the terre nuove it was shorter.

In the Welsh towns and the bastides the settlers had to pay rent for their house lots, often a shilling (or sol) per year. In the terre nuove the settlers do not seem to have paid rent. Only for Giglio Fiorentino it is known that every household was obligated to pay a recognition rent of one chicken.
4.4 Locations

It is possible to discern a difference between the three groups in the types of locations for the new towns. The towns were not just laid out on whatever piece of land the founder disposed of, but the sites were selected in accordance with the main function the founder had in mind for them.\(^5\) Thus, the terre nuove were all laid out on flat sites in fertile valleys on the main access routes in the periphery of the Florentine territory, in order to serve the production of the countryside, to control the trade routes and to defend the main entrances to the territory. Bastides were founded in a variety of locations. Some of them were clearly sited strategically on locations that were easy to defend, which was mostly on a hilltop or the end of a hillcrest, largely surrounded by steep slopes. But most of them were laid out where economic goals would be served best: on trade routes or in areas where new agricultural ground could be reclaimed. This commonly was in valleys, preferably where roads and waterways crossed, or on the slopes of hills. The Edwardian towns of Wales were mostly sited on locations of militarily strategic importance, largely following the choices for the sites of castles. These were mainly built at coastal locations with harbours, so that they could be supplied by ship, on rocky outcrops or sheltered by rivers and ditches. Three of the eleven towns lie further inland: the ill-fated town of Bere next to an older castle, and Newborough and Caerwys on gentle sloping grounds among the fields. The different character of these last two locations is due to the fact that these towns were meant as market towns, without motives of military strategy.

4.5 Urban form

Considering the form of the newly founded towns, it is clear that there is a great variation. Only the terre nuove fiorentine are distinguishable by the same basic morphological traits. However, it must be kept in mind here that, taken together, the terre form a comparatively small group, following one and the same consistent policy, and being located on similar flat valley sites, all of which helps in realising forms that follow a more or less consistent model. However, the terre must not be taken as representative, in this respect, of all new towns in Tuscany in the period under consideration.\(^6\)

4.5.1 Differences in regularity

In general, some relevant differences can be noted between the three groups of new towns. The terre nuove, limited as this group is, clearly are the most regular in layout, with a basic set of features as noted in paragraph 3.9. (figs. 3.6-3.27) Amongst the bastides there is a great variety of forms, regular as well as irregular.\(^7\) (figs.2.11-2.54) Plans as regular as the terre nuove or some of the bastides, cannot be found in the Edwardian towns of northern Wales. (figs.1.11-1.41) In part, this may be the result of a greater amount of changes made to the original structures in the course of the centuries; but foremost it is the result of the original forms having been less regular right from the outset. Apart from Flint the outlines of the Welsh towns are irregular, which means that their internal structures of streets and plots are at least partly irregular as well. Often this was due to a greater influence of the topography of the land at the specific sites. As described above, the terrain was generally more rugged at the sites of the Edwardian towns than at the locations of the bastides or the terre nuove, and this was directly related to the motives for plantation.

Another possible reason for the general difference in regularity is a diversity in the stability of the urban structures through time. In general, it appears that the actual substance and structure of the towns in Wales have changed more than in the bastides and the terre nuove. This has to do with the durability of building materials and, more importantly, with the historical circumstances, which have been relatively unfriendly to the towns in Wales. The wars and rebellions that the Welsh waged on their conquerors were particularly aimed, for the most part at the towns the Anglo-Normans had founded, and did much damage to them. This factor,

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\(^5\) In chapter 5 the choice for certain sites or types of sites for new towns will be considered more closely, not only regarding the groups of towns treated in chapters 1 to 3, but also other cases elsewhere in Europe.

\(^6\) New towns in Tuscany with rather different forms are, for instance, Albiano and Monteriggioni, both founded in the 13\(^{th}\) century on hilltops, at least partly for reasons of military tactics. In both cases the natural form of the hilltop largely determined the plan structure. (see Cortese 2004)

\(^7\) As described in par.2.10.3.2, different scholars have tried to draw up typological schemes to classify these different forms of the plans of the bastides, seeking to find a morphological logic in ascribing the similarities to founders, planners, regions or periods of conception. In my opinion, however, there has been far too much generalisation in these typologies, and they are not really helpful in our understanding of the true historical relationships or developments.
combined with the economic and demographic depressions after the prosperous period of the 13th and early 14th centuries, led to a relatively strong depopulation in many of the towns in Wales, doing severe damage to the continuity of their urban form. Consequently, there is relatively very little architecture from before the 15th, or even the 18th, century preserved in the old towns of Wales, apart from parts of castles and town walls. This is not the case with the new towns of the other two groups which, in general, have preserved considerably more of their old structure and material.

Possibly, there was also a difference in the regulation of the maintenance of boundaries of urban property, for which there might have been more change in one region than in another. It is known, for instance, that in Florence and the terre nuove street lines were carefully maintained. How this was done in Wales or southwest France is less clear.

There is one more aspect that seems to have influenced the difference in regularity in the urban structure in the three groups of towns. It is likely that one of the main causes for the difference in regularity in the urban layout was the effort that was taken to make a structure regular. Apparently, with the terre nuove and many of the bastides (such as Monpazier and Grenade-sur-Garonne) a much greater effort was taken to give the towns a regular layout than with other bastides and the new towns in Wales. It seems that in the one case it was found much more important to realise a highly regular urban form than in the other. As the great variation in the form of the bastides shows, this cannot be ascribed, for the most part, to the specificity of the region or the founder, as many scholars would have it. For the case of the terre nuove fiorentine, however, it is most likely that their relatively great regularity has to do with aesthetic preferences concerning urban form that were current in Florence at the time. As will be discussed in paragraph 8.6, many people who took a share in the Florentine administration must have had a clear preference for straight streets and the orderly arrangement of buildings. This even led to projects in which existing streets in Florence were straightened and façades were regularised. These preferences were not exclusive to Florence but could also be found in many of the cities of central and northern Italy. Therefore, it is probably no coincidence that the new extensions of the cities in central and northern Italy, as well as the new towns that were founded by the city-states there, were generally relatively regular in their layout as well.

4.5.2 Defences

A clear difference in urban form between the three groups is that the terre nuove were all meant to be walled right from the outset of the projects, whereas only six of the eleven Edwardian towns in northern Wales were planned to be walled and few bastides seem to have been intended to be walled in the first instance.

At least some of the terre nuove were temporarily provided with ditches and palisades before the stone walls were completed, some decades later. The rectangular and regular layout of their defensive circuits was determined by the regular overall structure of the towns, rather than the other way around.

As mentioned above, nine out of the eleven Edwardian towns in Wales were built below the walls of royal castles. These towns all played some role in the military organisation of the royal territory, even if, in some cases it was just a question of the provisioning of the castle. Six of these towns most probably were originally meant to be walled; the other three (Harlech, Criccieth and Bere) were probably not deemed important enough, largely because of their small size, to spend much money and effort on the construction of defences. The first two of the defended towns, Flint and Rhuddlan, were provided with large ditches and earthen walls; and the other four with ditches and stone walls. At Beaumaris, however, it took a long time before a town wall was actually built. The defensive circuit of Flint, and thereby the outline of the town, had a more or less regular rectangular form, but the other towns were provided with more irregular wall circuits, largely following the form of the existing landscape.

The bastides appear to have rarely been walled initially. Sometimes provisions were made for the construc-

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8 Soulsby 1983, pp.24-27.
9 See pars.8.2, 8.6.3.
10 Taking Flint, Caerwys and Newborough (pars.1.4.1, 1.4.9, 1.4.11), which are built on gently sloping sites, as a basis for comparison, it is clear that these new towns in Wales must have been less regular than the terre nuove right from the outset. This implies that they were planned with less accuracy; most probably because the planners attached less value to regularity of urban form than did the planners of many of the bastides or the terre nuove.
11 See pars.2.4, 2.10.3.1, 2.10.4.1.
13 See for instance figs.3.4, 6.31, 8.8; and the plans of many other newly created towns in Italy in: Morini 1963; Lavedan & Hugueney 1974; Guidoni 1992 (II).
14 See pars.3.5.1 and 3.9.3.1.
15 See pars.1.7 and 1.8.3.1.
tion of defences at the time of their foundation, but unlike what is almost generally thought, bastides were only very rarely meant to be real fort towns. Most bastides that were eventually walled only received their defences in the 14th century, in the years preceding or during the Hundred Years War. As was the case with other aspects of the bastide plans, the form of the wall circuits that were built varies from very regular (figs. 2.23, 2.33) to quite irregular (figs. 2.11, 2.31).

4.5.3 House lots

In general the house lots in all three groups of towns had a (more or less) rectangular elongated form. The houses stood at the front of the lots and at the back there usually was open space for a yard or a garden. A rather important difference among the three groups, however, regards the size of the house lots.

Of the Edwardian towns of northern Wales, three are documented to have had house lots of standard sizes. The official standard originally was 60 x 80 ft. (18.29 x 24.38 m.) at Caernarfon and Criccieth and 40 x 80 ft. (12.19 x 24.38 m.) at Beaumaris. It is unlikely that the lots were actually all set out with these dimensions, but it seems that the size, or at least the area, corresponded quite well to many burgages that were actually laid out in these and the other Edwardian towns. In Newborough, the allotment was irregular right from the outset, as it was based on the pre-urban agricultural field structure.

In the bastides there often were standard house lots, according to the earliest documents, measuring about 6 to 10 m. in width and 18 to 30 m. in length, with proportions of width and length varying from 2:3 to 1:4. From bastide to bastide there could be quite a difference in the standard lot size, and in towns where no such standard was set or maintained there also could be a considerable difference between the individual lots. It is clear, however, that the initial lots generally were smaller than those in the Welsh new towns, particularly in their being less wide.

A characteristic feature of the terre nuove is that the house lots all had the same width per town, either 10 or 12 braccia (5.84 or 7.00 m.), but that there was a systematic variation in length: the house lots grew shorter as they were sited further away from the central main streets. (from a longest length of 39 b. (22.76 m.) at San Giovanni, to a minimum of 10 b. (5.84 m.) at Giglio. With these dimensions most of the house lots of the terre nuove were considerably smaller than the lots in the bastides and the new towns of Wales.

It seems that the original house lots in Wales were so wide that the house frontages along the streets were not intended to be continuous. The burgages were wide enough to leave space at the side of the house for access to the backyard. In many bastides and the terre nuove there would not be such open spaces along the streets.

4.5.4 Market places

A clear and important difference in town layout between the Edwardian new towns of Wales and the other two groups is the role of the market place. In many a bastide in southwest France one may find large market places, often square or rectangular and of relatively large dimensions, which are important elements in the urban plans. (figs. 2.39-2.41) In the terre nuove the importance of the piazzas, in the very centre of the urban layouts, is also evident. (figs. 3.10-3.11) In Wales, on the other hand, it seems that the market places were of lesser significance as an element within the urban layout. Most commonly, the markets were held in the main street; and even in the Welsh towns with real market places it is clear that they did not take on an important or central role within the preconceived urban layout. (figs. 1.12, 1.26)

Despite this obvious difference, some authors tend to disregard the morphological dissimilarities between King Edward I’s new towns in Wales and his in Gascony. Metternich, for instance, stated “The Edwardian bastides in south-west France at least in their plan-forms are very much like the new boroughs in Wales.”

16 See pars.2.5.1, 2.10.4.2 and 2.10.5.1.
17 See pars.1.7.5, 1.7.7, 1.7.10, 1.7.11 and 1.8.2.2.
18 See pars.2.10.4.4 and appendix C.
19 See pars.2.10.4.4 and appendix C.
20 See also par.9.11.
21 Lavedan and Hugueney (1974, p.114) believe that this proves the superiority of French planners over English planners in that period. In my opinion, however, this conclusion is much too bold because, among other reasons, it is quite possible that some of the Welsh towns may have been planned by the Savoyard James of St. George. (see pars.1.6, 7.4) In fact, it is anachronistic to make this issue a question of nationality.
22 Metternich 1984, p.47. See also Walker 1990, p.134.
This is not correct, however. The Edwardian new towns of Wales are not significantly more similar to the Edwardian new towns in southwest France, than to new towns in, say, Flanders, Switzerland or Bohemia. In fact, Edward’s bastides in southwest France are more similar to other bastides in that region than to his new towns in England or Wales.23

4.6 Similarities

In the preceding paragraphs various differences between the three groups of towns are highlighted. There are, however, also many relevant similarities that deserve attention.

In all three countries - as in most other regions of contemporary Europe - towns were newly founded by the ruling authorities, be they lords from the high or low nobility, abbots, bishops or the government of a city republic. People were attracted to these places and made living settlements of them. Both founders and settlers had to invest capital and goodwill in these towns, and mostly they would gain by their investments, in an economic as well as in a social sense.

The basic legal principle of town plantation was always more or less the same: the people who take up residence in the specific area of the town and who agree to the conditions specified in the contract of settlement, are exempted by the landlord from the normal legal situation. The lord rents out plots of land in a specific area for which he gives up part of his rights in favour of the settlers of the new town. He allows the settlement a market and gives the ‘burgesses’ personal freedom and the right to freely dispose of their possessions and their rented plots of land. The ‘burgesses’ are bound by their common rights, which set them off against the surrounding area and other towns, and by these means they become a community.

The rights bestowed on the new towns were in many aspects quite similar, as they were in most regions of Europe. But the specific formulations and the form of the charters were of different types in the three regions, since they were based on types that were already more or less current in the regions or on specific examples of other towns in the same dominion. The terre nuove were different, however, in the sense that they did not receive separate charters: the inhabitants became subjects of Florence and the towns had only limited autonomy.

Regarding the spatial form, it is clear that there are considerable differences. Nonetheless, there are important common elements as well. The house lots commonly have an elongated, more or less rectangular form and are set out side by side, with their short sides along more or less straight streets. The market space is located centrally, often together with the town hall (if there was one initially) and a church or chapel on it or next to it. Defences, to the extent the towns were provided with them, generally consisted of ditches and earthen banks that could be topped by thorny hedges and timber palisades. Only the more ambitious town foundations were initially provided with stone walls with dry or water-filled ditches in front of them. For the most part these defences were laid out along straight stretches, with towers at the corners and over the gates that opened up to the main streets.

The boundary lines between plots of ground that were destined for different functions or possessions could be set out along existing lines in the landscape, whether of natural or human origin, or they could be planned from scratch, following an abstract idea rather than the topographical situation as it existed. In those cases where such an abstract idea was followed, the structure was most often meant to be orthogonal, and would eventually look much more regular than in instances where the urban form was determined by existing features.

In any case, the complete plan commonly was not entirely regular in the newly planned towns in their eventual form. But there always was a certain amount of regularity, be it in the straightness of the streets, the general form of the house lots or just their coordination.

These are the general similarities between the new Edwardian towns of northern Wales, the bastides of southwest France and the Florentine terre nuove. These similarities show that there were common principles in new town creation in the different regions. There even seems to have been some sort of basic ‘concept’ for town creation, which was known in these three regions as well as elsewhere in Europe. Unfortunately, nothing is

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23 It is quite clear, though, that Metternich is not very interested in town planning, but rather in castle building. And it is in order to emphasise the importance of Master James for Edward’s castle building campaigns that he stresses this supposed similarity in town plans, stating that Master James surely designed the new towns, and that he also designed a number of towns in Gascony when he was there in Edward’s entourage in 1287–89. There is, however, no evidence to support this view.
known directly of such a ‘concept’, and it can only be inferred from the towns that were created and from the efforts at urban creation.\footnote{24}{See par.12.2.6.}

However, these aspects are not limited to these groups, nor even these regions and period. In fact, from the time of the ancient Greeks up to the present day, many of these aspects were more or less common to urban creation throughout the ‘western world’. Although the nature of the administration and the legal aspects of land holding have changed, the basic principles of the foundation and planning of new towns - or, for that matter, new large-scale additions to existing towns - have remained much the same.\footnote{25}{See ch.10. Concerning the urban form, though, there have been revolutionary new impulses of radial planning from the 15th century on and irregular ‘organic’ planning from the 18th century on. But these have never succeeded in completely casting out the two contrasting principles of the orthogonal ideal and the practice of adaptation to the existing situation in the landscape. It should also be noted, that even outside the confines of the ‘western world’ one can sometimes recognise more or less similar principles in the planning of new settlements. (see Boerefijn 1997; Boerefijn 1999 (2))}