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MORET-SUR-LOING – CULTURAL HERITAGE, ITS VALUE AND PROTECTION

This article concerns the historic town of Moret-Sur-Loing in the context of preservation and revalorisation, which are connected to its sustainable development. It is one of many examples, besides e.g. Heppenheim, Lorsch, Weinheim and Provins, of small European historic towns which can suitably use their cultural potential for their multidirectional development. The town of Moret-Sur-Loing is located to the south of Paris, in the Île-de-France region, in the department of Seine and Marne. The cultural landscape of Moret comprises mainly historic buildings with the magnificent Notre Dame church and numerous small-town houses, defensive walls with gates and a donjon, as well as the urban layout. Bridges are also important elements of the cultural landscape, particularly Le pont et l'Église which, together with the medieval defensive ramparts, creates a unique panorama. Although the historic heritage of the town is related to its past, it also has a great impact on the urban development. Protecting their culture, tradition, historic architecture and urban design, the inhabitants and the authorities in Moret-Sur-Loing spare no effort to maintain the former climate of a medieval town. They are aware that for the sustainable development of the town to progress properly, they ought to preserve their heritage, revalorise it and allow it to survive for next generations. The article contains the characteristics of the cultural landscape of the town of Moret in the context of its protection and preservation for future generations, which constitutes an important factor of sustainable development. The town will certainly set a valuable example for other, also Polish, small historic towns.

Keywords: France, town, history, cultural heritage, architecture, urban design

1. Introduction

The town of Moret-Sur-Loing is located to the south of Paris, in the Île-de-France region, in the department of Seine and Marne. The town with the current population of less than 7,000 inhabitants is a very interesting example of a small historic French town with a rich cultural heritage. Protecting their culture, tradition and historic architecture and urban design, the inhabitants and the authorities in Moret-Sur-Loing spare no effort to maintain the former climate of

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a medieval town. The cultural landscape of Moret encompasses mainly historic buildings with the magnificent Notre Dame church and numerous small-town houses, defensive walls with gates and a donjon, as well as the urban layout. Bridges are also important elements of the cultural landscape, particularly Le pont et l'Eglise which, together with the medieval defensive ramparts, creates a unique panorama of Moret (fig. 1).

The aim of this article is characterising the most valuable elements of the cultural landscape of the historic town of Moret in the context of proper protection of its cultural heritage, so that it would survive for the next generations. Protecting cultural heritage is one of the pillars of the idea of sustainable development. Therefore, it can be claimed that the described town will set a valuable example for other small historic towns, particularly the ones located in Poland where both cultural heritage protection and the idea of sustainable development are not always satisfactorily realised.

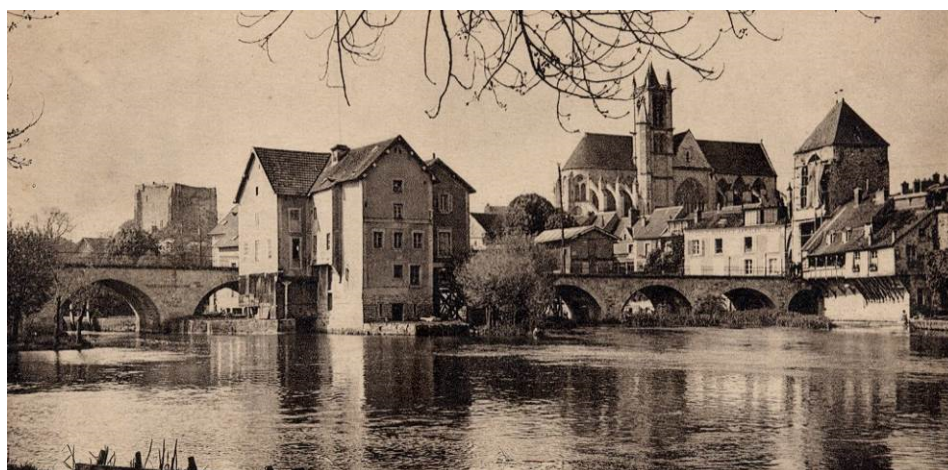


Fig. 1. View of Moret-Sur-Loing from the north-east on an archive postcard from the 1st half of the 20th century. Postcard [in:] Author's Archive

2. Cultural heritage

Moret-sur-Loing was founded during the medieval period, although some scientists researching the origins of the town suggest a hypothesis about its Gaul-Roman roots. The early presence of man in the area has been confirmed by numerous archaeological finds in the form of prehistoric stone tools, pottery, objects and weaponry from bronze and iron.

The town was located on the River Loing, which is a tributary of the Seine (fig. 2, 3). The existing terrain conditions, primarily the vicinity of the aforementioned river, supported the defensive character of the place so important in the Middle Ages [1–3].

For the first time Moret was mentioned in written sources in the 9th century. Around the year 850, a meeting of bishops and church dignitaries with the archbishop of Sens took place in Moret. It should also be mentioned, that Moret was located on the main route connecting Paris and Lyon. Here travellers crossed the River Loing thanks to its flattened banks and a slow current. The location along the important communications and possibly trade route, as well as on the border between the County of Champagne and the Duchy of Burgundy, influenced the development of the town.

The 12th century and the 1st half of the 13th century was the time when the majority of the most important objects in the town were built, which have been mostly preserved till our times. During the 1120s, Louis VI initiated the construction of the donjon which was a symbol of the royal power. Soon afterwards, Filip II August initiated building the defensive perimeter of the town. Also at the same time the construction of the new parish church was commenced, which was to meet the needs of the town then [1]. Therefore, it can be claimed that the medieval period was the time when the town was established, developed and when the most important historic landmarks were created, which will be discussed below.



Fig. 2. Town of Moret on a fragment of a map of France from 1744. Map [in:] www.mapire.eu, access: 24.03.2018

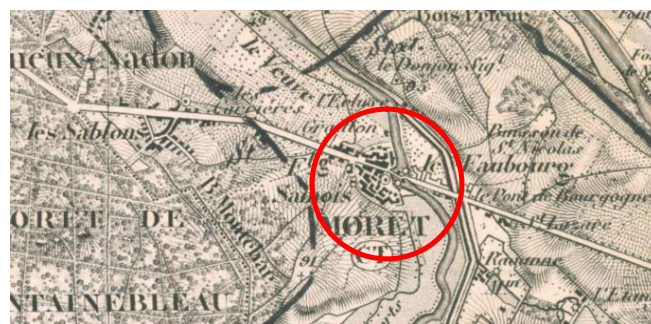


Fig. 3. Town of Moret on a fragment of a map of France from 1836. Map [in:] www.mapire.eu, access: 24.03.2018

The early medieval urban layout constitutes a considerable value of the town. It is characterised by aiming at a regularity of the plan. However, that regularity is not complete here and does not allow for recognising the town as a defined, orthogonal layout. However, it can be regarded as a typical French town from the early medieval period [4].

The main street rue Grande runs through the centre of the layout, from the west to the east, and from one town gate to the other. In the centre of Moret it runs along the southern frontage of the market square. The remaining streets can be divided into those of primary (rue de la Pecherie, rue de l-Eglise, rue de la Tannerie, rue du Donjon, rue de Grez, rue du Pave Neuf, rue des Fosses and rue Ch. Geoffroy) and secondary importance (fig. 4, 5).

The market square is situated in the centre of the urban layout, and has the shape resembling a rectangle. It is rather small and surrounded by historic buildings representing various epochs (fig. 6a, b).



Fig. 4. Moret on an archive print from the 16th century. Author: Claude Chastillon.
Photo of the plan [in:] Author's Archive

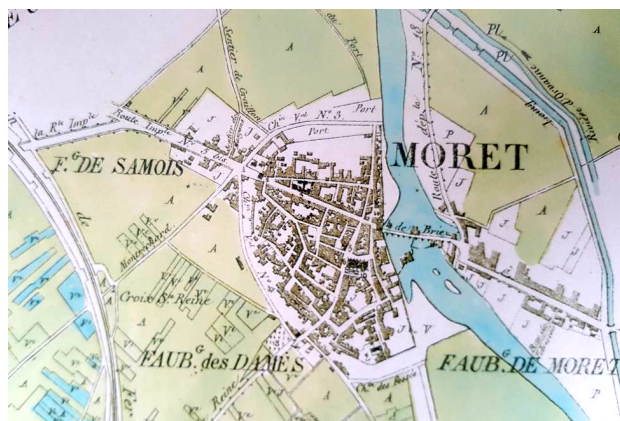


Fig. 5. Urban layout of Moret on the map from 1860. Copy of the map [in:] A. Didon: Moret-sur-Loing – Une cité au coeur de l'histoire..., Publ. Lys Editions Amatteis, 2008, p. 10



Fig. 6 a, b. The market square of Moret-sur-Loing, nowadays. Photo: D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2017

The medieval defensive perimeter is one of the most important cultural values of Moret. It was outlined in the 12th century and originally was 1,400 m long. It comprised the ramparts, the wall and 20 powerful towers some of which have survived till today. Three gates allowed access into the town. From the west it could be reached through the “Samois” gate (otherwise known as the “Paris” gate) where the road to Paris started. The gate was built soon after the walls had been erected, so still in the 12th century (fig. 7, 9). On the east side the “de Bourgogne” (Burgundy) gate was located, behind which there was the bridge on the River Loing and the road to Burgundy (fig. 8, 10). Both gates still exist today. It is worth noticing the fact that within the town both gates are



Fig. 7. “Samois” gate on an archive postcard from the 1st half of the 20th century. Copy of postcard [in:] Author’s Archive



Fig. 8. “De Bourgogne” gate on an archive postcard from the 1st half of the 20th century. Copy of postcard [in:] Author’s Archive



Fig. 9. “Samois” gate nowadays. View from the town. Photo: D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2017



Fig. 10. “De Bourgogne” gate nowadays. View from the river. Photo: D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2017

connected by one, straight communications route – rue Grande which runs as the main street through the entire town [3].

The third town gate in Moret was located on the south side of the town. It was called the “Grež” gate and it existed until the 19th century when it was demolished, possibly because of its poor state of preservation.

The Romanesque donjon, preserved till today, is an important element of the defensive layout of the town. Donjons were dwelling towers which were originally erected in the Romanesque style in France during the early medieval period (e.g. in Provins, Langeais, Fréteval, Loches, Bressuire and Beaugency [5].

The donjon in Moret was built in the south-east part of the town on the river, in the years 1128–1154 (during the same time as the Ganne tower in nearby Grez-Sur-Loing). Initially the donjon naturally fulfilled its residential function, serving as a royal seat. It was only during the reign of King Philip IV the Fair (1268–1314) that the tower was turned into a prison (fig. 11, 12).

During the following centuries the tower had various owners. It is worth mentioning, that towards the end of the 16th century it was renovated by Maximilien de Béthune de Sully (the Marshal of France and a minister to King Henry IV), who was its owner from 1594 to 1603, during the reign of Louis XIII. Then the donjon was restored to its former glory and once again became a residential object with an added garden complex.

Slightly later the building again began to serve as a jail. Nicolas Fouquet, the Superintendent of Finances in France during the reign of Louis XIV, accused of maladministration of the state funds in office, was kept in its dungeons.

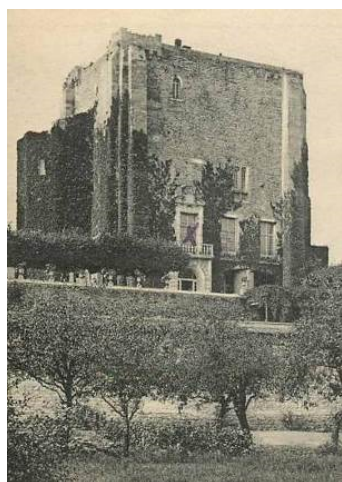


Fig. 11. Donjon from the south-east, on an archive postcard from the 1st half of the 20th century. Postcard [in:] Author's Archive



Fig. 12. Donjon from the north-west, nowadays. Photo: D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2017

The donjon was badly damaged during the French Revolution and remained in ruins until the 1870s. Then it was gradually revalorised by subsequent owners. However, a complete modernisation of that unique historic object was undertaken by Joanne Thirion who, with the help of an architect Pierre-Félix Julien and a team of artists and interior designers, converted a neglected donjon into a comfortable home [6]. Nowadays the overall ambience of the building is created by its Romanesque origins and the neo-Gothic elements introduced by the mentioned Pierre-Félix Julien.

An object of considerable cultural significance for the town is the Notre Dame church whose construction commenced around the year 1140. It might have been erected on the site of an earlier church. It is assumed that the church was consecrated by Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. The church was built in stages and completed only as late as the 16th century, after the Hundred Years' War.

Notre Dame is a Gothic church. Its interior shaped throughout centuries makes an unforgettable impression. The apse is 46 m tall, while the nave reaches 21 metres. The harmony of interior decoration and lighting enhance the impression of spaciousness inside the church. The pilasters in the main nave dated back to the 14th century are decorated with small frescoes depicting the figures of saints: Matthew, Paul, Peter, John etc. (fig. 13, 14).

On the north side of the choir the bulk of the church is adjoined by a lavishly decorated bell tower. Nowadays it leans slightly sideways in relation to the vertical buttresses of the side aisles.

Most church furnishings were plundered or destroyed during the revolution. Some historic items e.g. a 13th-century baptismal font, a large wooden figure of Christ, a 17th-century clock and a 15th-century door to the chancel have survived until today [7].



Fig. 13. Notre Dame church from the south-east on an archive postcard from the 1st half of the 20th century. Postcard [in:] Author's Archive



Fig. 14. Notre Dame church from the south-east, nowadays. Photo: D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2017

The buildings in Moret date back to the various periods of the town's prosperity, though naturally their origins are rooted in the Middle Ages. It is worth paying attention to unique examples of Renaissance architecture with their valuable decorations in e.g. the town hall or the house of King Francis I. Other historic buildings are houses from the 18th and 19th century, partially renovated but still maintaining their historic value which allows them to still constitute an important element of the cultural landscape of Moret.

To sum up, it should be emphasised that most elements of the cultural landscape of the town have already been revalorised. That remark refers to the town walls and gates, and the most important public utility objects. The remaining ones, such as e.g. historic houses are systematically renovated in accordance with the conservation guidelines and taking care of the colour scheme, materials and details. The greatest value of Moret is its authenticity, both real and created owing to proper revalorisation, the conservation policy of the town authorities and the attitude of its inhabitants.

3. Conclusion – Protection, revalorisation and sustainable development

The historic heritage of the town, despite being related to its past, has also a huge impact on its development. Scientific publications addressing the issue of sustainable development never belittle the importance of cultural heritage in this process so crucial for the future of mankind. It is worth remembering here that sustainable development denotes changing the reality in such a way that the development would optimally satisfy the needs of modern man, while not violating the needs of future generations [8, 9]. Therefore, in order for the sustainable development of a given town to progress properly, its local authorities and inhabitants should protect their heritage, restore it and allow it to survive until the next generation. It is a lengthy process, an example of which is the town of Moret-sur-Loing that consistently tries to preserve its historic heritage and tradition, and build its future on those values. It ought to be emphasised that for many years French towns have effectively combined the policy of sustainable development with multi-plane cultural context that is one of the five contexts in the process of spatial planning [10].

The presented example of Moret-sur-Loing as a small French historic town in the context of the state and revalorisation of its historic heritage should be regarded as appropriate and valuable. The building development structure within the historic perimeter of defensive walls has not been modified. Houses have preserved their size, form, and most importantly the character of a small French historic town. Modern buildings develop outside the historic defensive perimeter. The need to protect that heritage is understood both by the local authorities and the town inhabitants. A similar situation occurs in the case of the historic urban layout which has preserved its original medieval character within the historic town. The consequences of protecting that spatial structure should also be emphasised.

The town of Moret-sur-Loing is one of many examples, besides e.g. Heppenheim, Lorsch, Weinheim or Provins, of small European historic towns which can effectively use their cultural potential for a multidirectional development of their towns [11, 12]. Thanks to initiatives concerning revalorisation of monuments, their accessibility to the public, promotion and documentation, not only do they protect their heritage for future generations, which is one of the directions of sustainable development, but also create new infrastructure relating to tourism, new workplaces and thus very comfortable living conditions.

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