

Medieval topographical urban models: development and morphological evolution of the villages in Barcelona's county between the 10th and 13th centuries

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Feudalism; territory; habitat; urban topography; GIS

Presentation

One of the most controversial lines of research about the process of transition between the Ancient World and the Medieval one is centred on the process of change in the systems of territorial settlement between one and the other period of time. From the 5th and 6th centuries, the model of settlement of the *villa* declines and it seems to appear a new model of habitat with a dispersed settlement. This is what the oldest documentation let us feel with some signs of habitat in very dispersed places within the same area. However, although the archaeology registers the continuity with the ancient world with regard to the human evidence, it is aware of a break in the model of territorial settlement. The burials located in *villae*, such as Sant Joan Despí, Santa Maria de Castelldefels or Mataró, cutting their functional structures, show the existence of population in these places in the early Middle Ages, but with a clear change in the use and meaning of the space. The apparent difficulty to record people's habitat, who during the first medieval centuries were buried in the ancient Roman *forum* of *Baetulo* (Badalona), or those who attended the religious services in the Paleochristian churches of Santa Margarida (Martorell) or from Cornellà de Llobregat, let us glimpse the existence of a model of settlement basically dispersed, from which we hardly have some remains.

By the end of the 10th, and mainly along the 11th and 12th centuries, the tendency to the dispersion will be modified, when the feudal power will put pressure on the population so

as to fit it in stable settlements. In order to achieve it, it will use different strategies intended to modify the dominant systems of economical exploitation, as well as to encourage the tendency to the concentration by carrying out active and passive strategies. With these strategies, the feudal power will try to get a more efficient control, not only over people under its jurisdiction, but also, and above all, over the farming surplus, which he wanted to appropriate. The concentration of the population confirmed the lords' power over people. It increased the control over people's production and enabled the use of the community for defensive actions (Sabaté 1997, 128). According to this theoretical proposal, this study wants to analyse not only the factors that in Medieval Ages determined the phenomenon of a progressive concentration of population in the county of Barcelona, but also the elements that were involved in the development of this concentrated habitats between the 10th–13th centuries. Our research, supported by the Departament d'Universitats, Recerca i Societat de la Informació of the Generalitat de Catalunya, has analysed the evolutionary morphogenesis of a total of 150 settlements in the county of Barcelona (see fig. 1). It has been carried out from the study of historical sources (documental and archaeological) and the direct analysis of the current urban plots. The application of the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to the integrated management of data has allowed us to draw up an interpretative model on the topography features, the urban morphology and the rate of development of these settlements.

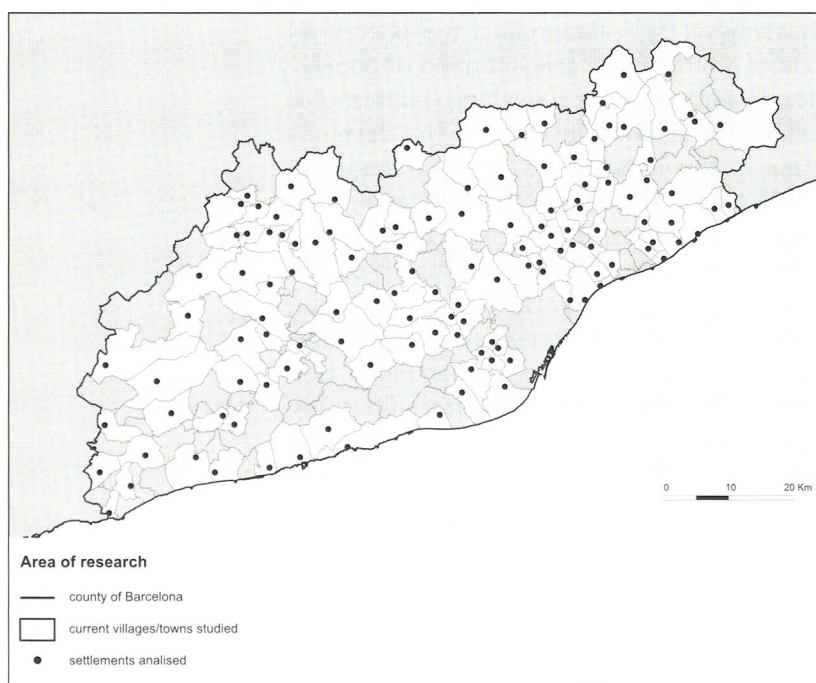
This work is an explanatory proposal about the formation and evolution of the spaces of concentrated habitat in the North-East of the Iberian Peninsula.

Process of urban concentration

The interest of feudal power in keeping the population concentrated in settlements so as to be easily controlled, was put in practice when using some pressure strategies over the areas of disperse habitat. Some of them were active, such as the *encastellamento*, the *ensagriment*, the charters or the use of violence. In other cases, there was a passive attitude. The tolerance in front of the spontaneous initiatives of concentration of population around a market, a road crossing or a main road, allow us to see its complicity.

The active initiatives of concentration go further back in time. The first recorded ones in the county of Barcelona are archaeological and come from castles, such as those of Subirats, Gelida, Vilademàger or Cervelló, which have a settlement inside the *castral* area. The chronology of this kind of habitat seems to show that before the 1000, the lords of the castles bet on a clear program of settlement and territorial exploitation, based on the concentrated habitat around the *castral* area, which originated towering settlements. The territorial distribution of these settlements, as

Figure 1.



well as the similarity of their population's organisation, seems to be much more the result of an increasing pressure over people, so as to have them under control, than a protective strategy, because the Muslim border was not dangerous at that time (Mauri/Soler 1999, 214). In spite of it, this attempt of concentration could not have been very successful, since these *castral* settlements declined and new settlements appear in the flat land with some better edaphologic conditions and good communications. The parish church keeps being located next to the castle, but people preferred to leave the high settlements and to establish in the lower ones.

As the lords fail the attempt to concentrate the population inside the *castral* areas, the Church takes the initiative and bets on a model of concentrated population around it. Thus, the Church, in collusion with the noble lay families – with whom it shared nobility and objectives –, attract a lot of people to an area called *sacraría*, a space of thirty steps around the church. To attract them, the Church will only use a canon of Visigoth tradition, already known in the Council of Toledo from 681 (Vives 1963, 398). The reinterpretation of this rule in the *Peace and Truce of God* movements will give a supposed immunity to that space around the church, which will become a sacred territory out of the lord's violence, and specially good for the concentration of the peasants' habitat.

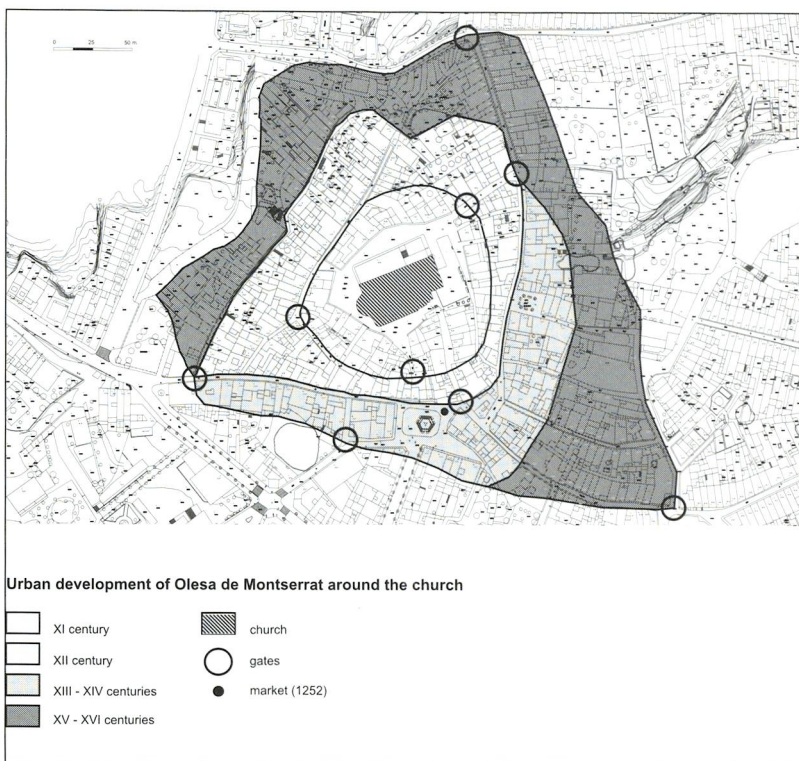
According to the data from our study, we think that the phenomenon of the *sacraría*, already well studied by the Catalan medieval historiography (Kenelly 1968; Bonnassie 1993; Fariás 1993), should be reconsidered again as for its quantitative importance. From a total of 150 settlements analysed in the county of Barcelona, a 40,5% are set up around a church. Taking into account the differences among these settlements as for the existing written documentation or for the archaeological research carried out, we think that the above mentioned percentage could be also even lower, since the tendency of the historiography is to consider the church as the only element that generates habitat. Among the settlements established around a church, in a 48,2% of cases, the documentary records of the *sacraría* are carried out from written or archaeological contemporary sources. In the rest of cases, the records regarding the *sacraría* are made from the topo-

graphical signs that we find in the current urban plots, whose chronology is not easy to decide. In other cases, we find it from the mention of the existence of *sacrarias* in *caput brevis* or topographical descriptions from the Modern period, when the word *sacraria* had lost its original meaning and then designated any kind of concentration of houses around a singular building, an ecclesiastic or a lay one. This is the reason that in the 13th century the settlement of houses around the Hospital of the parish of Provençana was called *Sagrera de l'Hospital*.

In spite of these considerations, which try to put the extension of the *ensagrerament* into perspective in the county of Barcelona, it is obvious that the *sacraria* will be an important factor to attract people. Such is the case of the *sacrarias* settled in Montornès del Vallès, Palau Solità or Lliçà d'Amunt, which remain in the urban network and also in the current place-names of their streets and places (Vilaginés 1998, 132). In any case, it does not seem that the flow of population to the *sacraria* area was immediate, because it should have some attractive conditions in order to be successful. This is the reason that not all churches had an inhabited *sacraria*, and that not in all cases the attempt of concentration around them was successful.

The main requirements for the *sacraria* to have a concentrated habitat were: enough water and a good position in the communications network. From all the settlements of concentrated population that we have studied, we do not know any one without a road, or even better, a crossing road – often from past times –, which connects directly with economic centres and closer markets.

In the Middle Ages, the roads were an important economical space, since they were the axis of product distribution, which circulated among the local and regional markets or fairs that articulated the territory economically. Through the roads arrived the rural manufactures from blacksmiths or potters, the grounded wheat from the mills, the stone from the quarry or the products made by people from disperse areas (Soler 2001). This explains that in spite of the fact that the foundational document of the church of Viladecavalls details the existence of a space of *sacraria*, its marginal location with respect to the communication network system can-



not establish a settlement of concentrated population.

Figure 2.

Therefore, the road represents an element of economical attraction, which will determine the success of the *sacraria*, will characterize its topography and will make it attractive, not only for the supposed protection offered to its inhabitants, but also for being a well communicated territory and a possible natural market, to where not only people from the concentrated settlements went, but also those from the disperse habitat. This economical aim will be seen soon in the social status of some owners of parts of the *sacraria*, as well in the craft activity of its streets. The importance of the roads in the structure of the medieval population is so big that even they will be able to generate themselves some processes of concentration of population attracted by its economical dynamics. In 22% of the studied settlements, the original focal point and main articulation is a road. The feudal power will tolerate this kind of nucleation of population – provided that they are not a problem for the management of the territory – and it will just limit itself to control that development through a church or with the introduction of a monopoly of services, such as the blacksmith's or the mill, which will be a lucrative income from now on. In this way, the village of Esparreguera is a good example of vil-

lage-road, where the house concentration will be previous to the church building. The L'Arboç is also settled on the *Via Augusta*, later *Strata Francisca*, and the Royal Road afterwards, which will articulate its long shaped form since the medieval times. It also will have a long shaped form the village of Font-rubí from the called *Via Mercadera*. All of them are settled at the foot of the road and are developed following its direction. They are villages built from an only dorsal spine, which will be extending as long as the concentration of houses increases in a place.

The close relationship between the concentration of population and the medieval communications network do not consist of just the roads, but the bridges, the fords, or the boat services for crossing a river. This is the case of La Pobla de Claramunt, close to the two fords to cross the Anoia River, or the settlement of Santa Margarida i els Monjos, located just next to a ford over the Foix River, recorded since the X century. It also seems to be that a boat to cross the Llobregat River helped the development of the village of Sant Andreu de la Barca. If besides an only road, we have a crossing road, the establishment of a concentrated habitat has a clear economical reason. In many of the ancient crossing roads, there were the most important market settlements of the Middle Ages, which articulated the circulation of products through the territory. Such is the case of Igualada, whose original church and market were built, just on the crossing of the road from Manresa to Tarragona and the ancient roman road, which went from Barcelona into the interior of the Iberian Peninsula. Something similar happened with the market of Granollers, placed just in the crossing of the roads from Cardedeu to Caldes de Montbui and from Vic to Barcelona.

In 14,3% of the studied cases, the market will become the centre of attraction. The permission for having a market will be a way of attracting people to those settlements, where there was no population or it was very small, as well as a sort of urban promotion for the villages that wanted to consolidate their number of inhabitants. Such is the case of the Calella market, which will become an important centre of attraction for people that little by little will leave the high settlement of Capaspre and will go down to the mouth of the stream. In this case, the church will be built much later

than having the permission for the market. The markets of Sabadell or Martorell are located just in the middle of its topography and become generating nucleus of population. The exchange activities could have been also another fact that generated the settlement of la Bisbal del Penedès, with the *parada que dicunt Episcopalem*, possibly located at the foot of the road. In other occasions, the establishment of a manufacturing production centre determined the process of concentration of habitat, where, at the beginning, workers, who participated in the production tasks, settled there; but very soon, many peasants did the same because of the economical dynamics. The progressive flow of peasants guaranteed the supplying of people exclusively dedicated to the craft production. In the county of Barcelona we have some examples available, such as the pottery complex of Cabrera d'Anoia, which will generate a dwelling-cave around of the pottery workrooms. Another example is the settlement of Castellar del Vallès, originated around the settlement of the *Les Fabregues*, an area devoted to the ironwork, which is related to an ore of iron recorded since the 945. In this case, the construction of the church will be also made later than the activities of the iron exploitation. On the one hand, the original nucleus of Piera, known as the *Ferreria*, because of a forge recorded since 1031, exists because of the settlement of a centre of production related to the iron. On the other hand, the village of Molins de Rei will appear around the Royal mills, built next to the Llobregat River. At the beginning, the inhabitants would be people related to the jobs of milling flour, to the draper manufacture or to the mills maintenance. However, the settlement will attract step by step some people not related directly to these kind of activities. In the case of Molins de Rei, the church will be built later than the settlement of the concentrated nucleus. Finally, the place of the Monjos (Santa Maria i els Monjos) will be born from a mill recorded since the 10th century at the foot of the *Strata Francisca*, just next to the ford that crossed the Foix River.

In some other cases, the elements that generated nucleated settlements were geologic, as it is a spring of thermal water. Such is the case of the Garriga, Caldes de Montbui or Caldes d'Estrac, where the urban topography shows us how the spring of hot water is located just in

the middle of the village. And from there, a radial urban network will be articulated due to the existence of a hot spring from Roman times. These spaces have a clear continuity in population in the Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval periods. The exploitation of this kind of water resource was kept with no interruptions since the Antiquity period and during the whole Middle Ages.

Finally, it is necessary to talk about the attraction made by the hospitals. The economical dynamics produced by the construction of a hospital at the foot of a road often determined the inhabitants' flow from the concentrated settlements around. Such is the case of Hospital de Llobregat, appeared at the foot of the road that led to Cornellà de Llobregat, within the parish of Provençana. Another one will be the Pobra de l'Hospital, around the Hospital, which was built in the 13th century, at the foot of the Royal Road when passing by Olesa de Bonesvalls.

In spite of the previously explained tendency, saying that many settlements with a *castral* origin were abandoned in order to go to lower lands – some examples are people's movements from Vildemàger to La Llacuna, from Olèrdola to Vilafranca or from Subirats to Sant Sadurní –, in the case of *castral* settlements located in a medium-high level with good communications, we know that they were integrated into the new villages. Such is the example of Igualada, built around the hillock with the church of Santa Maria or Sant Celoni, established around an old *Força*. In this case, the fortified settlement will not be abandoned, but it will be included within the same walled place. It also could generate population the watchtowers of roads, as it happens in Sant Cugat Sesgarrigues, built around the Torre de Ventallols; or the counts' palaces, such as that of Sant Pere de Vilamajor, which will become the main factor that will invigorate the productive village-market generated around it.

In order to have a better control of the territory and to assure the flow of products for exchange among the various markets, not only the counts but also the feudal lords granted the charters so as to help the inhabitants' flow to certain areas (Font i Rius 1969). In these villages, the corresponding lords favoured the inhabitants with a privileged law. We will name them as villages of new creation, although in many cases we will see the existence

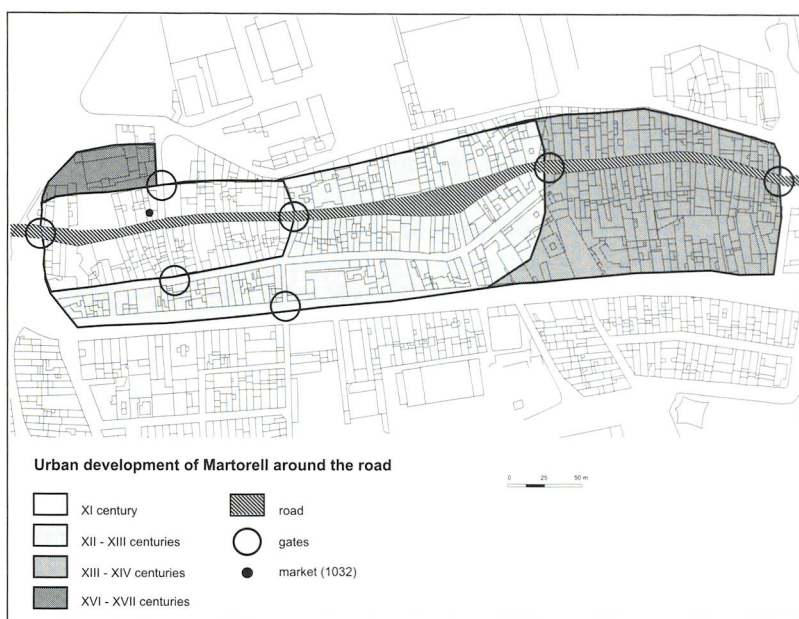


Figure 3.

of a previous habitat, such is the case of Vilafranca, about an original fortress around the church of Santa Maria. This kind of towns show a more steady urban structure, with a road network distributed according to an orthogonal tendency of the streets (Bolós 1998, 97). We find some examples in the county of Barcelona, in the villages of Vilafranca del Penedès, founded in the 12th century, Cardedeu and Vilanova de Cubelles, both with a charter in the 13th century. The three of them share a market in the centre, a more structured street network than in the rest of studied places, as well as the existence of walls since their foundation.

Morphology and process of urban transformation

The economical vicissitudes that the studied settlements experienced since their foundation determined the topographic transformations that characterized their urban development. The evolutionary dynamics of their morphology will depend on the rates of growth, stagnation or decadence. Therefore, the villages with a more dynamic economy will increase their urban network, will spread outside the walls and will extend several times the walled enclosure.

The growth of the village will be related to the territorial space that it occupied with respect to the contemporary flows of circulation. Again, the roads will determine the develop-

ment of these villages. Any change in the hierarchies of circulation will produce a decline in the depending urban settlements. This is the reason that the village-market of La Granada declined when the one of Vilafranca grew up; or that the village of Granollers complained to Jaume I because he wanted that the Royal Road from Barcelona to Vic passed by Caldes de Montbui and Castellterçol, excluding it from the current flows of circulation. The inhabitants of this village knew that such kind of modification in the road network could be fateful for its development.

The importance of the roads in the process of development of villages and settlements of concentrated population is also seen inside the urban network. The settlements established at the foot of a road will develop with a long shape, according to each direction, which will become soon the main street of the village. The increase of population will generate the existence of cross streets, always of second class with respect to the original. In the same way, in the villages set on a crossing road, the growth of the urban space will be determined according to the importance of each of the two roads in the hierarchy of the medieval circulation. Therefore, if the development of Igualada follows the North-South road from Òdena to Montbui until the 12th century, the growth axis will change into the East-West road from Barcelona to Lleida in the 13th century. This will mean an important change in the urban morphology of the village, going from a rounded shape into a complete long one.

Also the villages from the *sacraria* grew outside the original thirty steps and they spreaded their buildings in concentric circles with a rounded tendency – as long as the orography of the place did not determine the opposite. A clear example is the village of Olesa de Montserrat (fig. 2), born from a *sacraria*, which had several walled areas during the medieval period due to its economical dynamics. In this case, the birth of a commercial burg outside the walls determined the construction of a new wall so as to protect the exchanging activities. Something similar would happen in the village of Martorell (fig. 3), born around a market recorded in the 1032, which also generated an external burg with a wider market space, which was added to the village when building the walls in the 13th century. This is the reason

that if Martorell started as a settlement with an oval oro-graphy, it soon adopted a longer one, following the road direction.

In the county of Barcelona, we observe some interesting topographical evolutions, such as the one of Vilanova i la Geltrú, as a result of walling two settlements together, an ancient one with a *castral* origin (the Geltrú), with winding streets, and another one of new construction (Vilanova de Cubelles) founded from a charter with an obvious orthogonal tendency. Both of them will remain inside the same walled circle from the 15th century on.

In spite of the fact that it is dangerous to generalize, we can affirm that along the studied period, a high number of the analysed settlements had an expansion. The appearance of commercial districts around the market, the concentration of craftsmen in certain streets, as well as the increased number of census and *fogatges* that we have, show a progressive spreading of the urban area that culminated with the walling process in the 14th century. At that time, many walls were built – in most of the cases as a result of the proliferation of burgs, which exceeded the previous walls – for example in Granollers, Igualada, La Llacuna, Mataró, Molins de Rei, Sabadell, Terrassa, Vilafranca del Penedès o Sant Celoni. This obsession for fortifying will not have an only defensive meaning from external danger, or a controlling one of the inside activities, but it also will have a symbolic one of collective protection, a symptom of the urban solidarity, which start consolidating at that time.

Conclusions

According to what this article says, we observe that from the year 1000, the phenomenon of the population's concentration exists and it is encouraged when carrying out active or passive strategies by the feudal power (lay or ecclesiastic). The attempts of *encastellamento* or *ensagrerament* pretended to offer an attractive habitat to the potential inhabitants, so as to establish their houses. The lords' permissiveness in front of the spontaneous process of concentration around roads or productive centres will be only a passive answer to their objectives for controlling people. The population, gathered in concentrated settlements, lost some freedom, but in exchange for that, could

have the economic profits generated by urban areas available. Whether it was a market or a crossing road, or a productive centre, or even a hospital, people who lived there could benefit from the economic dynamics generated there. Even the *sacraria* seems to attract population, more for the economic profits than for the supposed protection that it was trying to offer.

In spite of all these attractiveness, we cannot forget the importance that the disperse habitat will keep during the whole Middle Ages as well

in the Modern period. Comparatively it will decrease its hegemony over the concentrated habitat during the early medieval centuries, although it will keep being very important, especially in the areas of the Vallès and the Penedès, where the *mas* characterizes the landscape up to these days. The phenomenon of concentration will be important because of its novelty in front of the previous centuries, but the parishes will keep a voluntary balanced duality between the dispersed population and the concentrated one.

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