

## Landscapes as ancient heritage in Béziers area: from appreciation to enhancement, the role of the Cultural Park of Biterrois

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This abstract questions in a historical perspective the way the ancient heritage of the Béziers area called the "Biterrois" has been perceived, appreciated and classified since the Renaissance up to now so as to highlight how it has been enhanced. The awareness of local heritage in the Biterrois emerged in the 1640s. At that time, it was seen in architecture but throughout the 18th century, it has fallen into oblivion. What is perceived nowadays as Heritage in the Biterrois is more related to landscapes and agrarian structures than to ancient monuments. Since the early 2000s, heritage enhancement actions have taken place within the framework of the European Union and that of a Cultural Park in the Biterrois, the "Parc Culturel du Biterrois".

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### Introduction

The Regional Council of Languedoc-Roussillon (South of France) has recently launched a tourist promotion campaign focusing on the theme of water. A series of posters has been published, each presenting a toponym, a brief comment, and an aerial photograph. One of those posters called "the Ensérune Oppidum" is focused on the western Biterrois, the area situated around the town of Beziers in France (Figure 1). Our attention is immediately attracted to the mid-section of the poster where we can see a sun-shaped area below the following comment: "Oppidum d'Ensérune (Hérault) : l'irrigation façonne le paysage depuis l'époque gallo-romaine, comme à Ensérune.", meaning that the Ensérune Oppidum is a good illustration of the fact that irrigation has designed landscapes since the Gallo-Roman area.



Figure 1. Location of Béziers.

I think such a poster clearly highlights how the heritage of the Biterrois has been treated through many years, that is, very paradoxically, leading to a situation that questions its long term viability. Indeed, the natural and historical heritage of that region is extensive enough but it has been seldom or wrongly identified, seldom or wrongly recognized as such. As a matter of fact, the text refers to an *oppidum* but shows a land division. Likewise, it refers to irrigation but shows a drained pond. It mentions the Gallo-Roman area but shows a proto-historical site and another site that was developed in the middle ages, that is to say, as you may have identified it, the famous sun-shaped land division of the Montady pond that was drained during the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Abbé, 2006). Irrigation is actually used here as a cultural referent in the landscaping of the Mediterranean areas which enables to create a convenient focus on the role of man's work's influence on his environment.

Beyond that paradox, the choice that was officially made to promote the tourist development of the Languedoc-Roussillon Region significantly reveals that the heritage of the Biterrois is not properly appreciated and has been too often underrated. The discrepancy between what that heritage really is and how it is perceived has been constructing a snapshot of reality and a lack of visibility throughout many centuries.

Heritage in that area is indeed rich, varied and extensive, even when restricted to its most common definition, that is to say, what has been built according to an elaborate architecture or to archeology (Choay, 2007), in other words, what can be plainly labeled as "historic monuments". The Ensérune *oppidum*, for instance, or the remains of an amphitheater in Béziers, a Gallo-roman *villa* in Vendres called "the Temple of Venus" and the *Via Domitia* are just some of the many examples of those historic monuments dating from the proto-historic and the ancient periods. The religious heritage which had reached a great extent during the Counter Reformation under the influence of Italian Archbishops, was already noticeable through the Blue Penitents Chapel, the Magdelene Church, Saint Nazarus Cathedral, and St Aphrodise Abbey, among others (Sagnes, 2000). In the realm of Civil engineering, the Biterrois area has been profoundly molded by the works of Riquet who created the Royal Canal of Languedoc in 1666 -known as the "Canal du midi"-, and the tunnel of Malpas, or also the bridge of Colombiers, and the 9 successive sluices of Fonsérannes in Béziers (Clavel-Lévêque, 2009). Finally, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a prosperous winegrowing sector boosted the economic development of the Biterrois through the construction of the canal over the Orb river, of many "pinardiers" castles imitating the Bordeaux region style and Haussmann-like approach of urban planning through the theater, the fruit and vegetable market, known as "les Halles", the Poets' Garden for example (Sagues, 2000).

Some of those monuments have gained well-renowned and prestigious or international classifications. For instance, the Ensérune *Oppidum* has been classified as a Historic Monument since 1935, and the Canal du Midi has been part of Unesco World Heritage since 1996. What's more, the Biterrois not only includes architectural heritage but also abounds in natural heritage with many different landscapes ranging from dunes to garigues through waterlands with protected fauna and flora like "the petite Camargue" around the lake of Vendres managed by the French coastline conservation authority.

Consequently, the discrepancy between what that heritage really is and how it is perceived raises issues questioning the long-lasting process of construction of the very concept of Heritage in the Biterrois area. Far from being a self-assured reality, heritage depends indeed rather on the image constructed by who observes it (Chape, 2010). It is necessarily to be appreciated through a combination of past and present values in order to give authority to what some experts call "the future of its past".

For example, Ancient sites in the South of France had been re-discovered, appreciated and fully acknowledged at the Renaissance, constructing the imagined basis of common cultural references in Europe. The Biterrois corresponds to the territory of the Roman colony founded by Octavio in 36/35 AD for the veterans of the 7<sup>th</sup> Roman Legion. However, even though it had been the most vivid in language or in toponymy, its heritage was utterly acknowledged only many centuries later until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it stopped being fully appreciated. How come? How has the heritage of the Biterrois suffered from a lack of visibility for so long? To answer those questions, I shall focus first on the 17<sup>th</sup> century perspectives when heritage had been considered for the first time. Then I shall examine how it fell into oblivion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so as to assess the way the ancient Biterrois landscapes have been deemed so far. Finally, the way that heritage is being enhanced and promoted nowadays shall be pondered upon.

### Becoming aware of ancient heritage

From a historical perspective, I shall try now to put down clear markers about the progressive construction of the very concept of Heritage which enabled the awareness of the local heritage of the Biterrois to emerge.

Following the example of their peers from the 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy, many humanist scholars -artists, doctors, professors, students, ambassadors, and engineers from all the nationalities- traveled through Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and they made a quite thorough inventory of ancient ruins (Lemerle, 2005). In that context, the Biterrois -as a city and then as heritage itself- was re-discovered rather belatedly, given its localization in the ancient Provincia between Italy and Spain.

### A belated acknowledgment in the 1640s

Heritage of the Biterrois was not mentioned once in the first cosmographies identifying and listing ancient sites. The case of Béziers had only appeared for the first time in 1575 in the text published by the French André Thevet in which no information was given. Moreover, in his *Cosmographie*, François de Belleforest only alluded to the destroyed monuments of Béziers. In his *Description contenant les antiquités, fondations et singularités des plus célèbres villes* published in 1611, François Des Rues mentioned Béziers without describing it. In 1614 only, André Duschène published the first description of the city in his thorough inventory of the ancient monuments in the French Kingdom. He qualified Béziers as an "episcopal" and "ancient" city but he only used the Jesuit College as an example.

Louis Coulon was the first scholar to label and acknowledge Béziers as an ancient city in the 1640s. In *Ulysse françois*, he was the first to describe the city heritage that he developed in details in his two following publications *Les Rivières de France*, in 1644, and *Le Fidèle conducteur pour les voyages de France*, in 1654. In that text, Béziers was described for the first time as both a landscape and ancient heritage.

Indeed, for him, that heritage was to be associated with a bridge -not to be seen as such-, a church, the ruins of an amphitheater – the "*ruines d'un amphitheatre*", a citadel and the Jesuit College. In *Les Rivières de France*, he mentioned a new element in 1644 referring to another bridge made by the Romans ("*ouvrage des Romains*") on the Capestang lake. It was said to be in ruins and partially silted up. It was by implication the trace of the famous *Via Domitia* he was referring to, a trace which was materialized by the Capestang viaduct and the bridge of Béziers.

Likewise, we can infer that Louis Coulon had been able to make the first written description of the ancient ruins of Béziers because he most likely benefited from his reading of the *Mémoires de l'Histoire du Languedoc* published by Guillaume Catel in 1633, that is, 10 years earlier. Therefore, that successive multi-layered construction of what was heritage in the Biterrois seems to be quite essential for its very definition.

### "Biterrois" heritage perceived and conveyed by a local ancient historian

Guillaume Catel was a member of the Parliament of Toulouse (South West of France). In the 1620s, he wrote a major piece of work entitled the *Mémoires de l'Histoire du Languedoc* from a genuine historical perspective (Delprat, 2001). He referred to many monuments that he perceived as being part of heritage since he regarded them as traces of the Biterrois ancient past. Among them were an amphitheater -or its ruins-, a monument in Vendres called the "le temple de Vénus" or the temple of Venus, and a bridge in Capestang called "Pontserme". According to him, Béziers and the Biterrois clearly encompassed the characteristic monuments that defined a Roman city. In the following extract, the city of Béziers was even quoted next to that of Toulouse, and most especially along with Nîmes which appeared as the typical Roman city with its numerous remaining ancient monuments.

« (...) la Gaule Narbonnaise a été régie et gouvernée par des Prêteurs, quelques fois par des Proconsuls, et d'autres fois par des Présidents de Provinces(...). Le grand nombre d'inscriptions que nous trouvons tant en la ville de Narbonne, que de Nîmes, outre le témoignage que les anciens nous ont laissé, nous font assez voir combien les Romains ont aimé et fréquenté ce pays, n'y ayant nulle ville célèbre du Languedoc où ils n'aient laissé pour une éternelle mémoire plusieurs grands et magnifiques temples, édifices, capitoles, amphithéâtres, ponts, aqueducs et château : comme Nîmes le temple de Diane, à Toulouse le temple de Pallas, à Vendres le temple de Vénus, les Capitoles de Narbonne, Toulouse, Nîmes. L'amphithéâtre qui se voit encore quasi entier à Nîmes, celui de Béziers duquel on voit les caves dans le logis de la Croix blanche, celui de Toulouse qui est près du Château Saint Michel, le pont bâti par eux sur la Rivière Gardon, appelé communément le pont du Gard, le pont Septimius, appelé aujourd'hui Pontserme, entre Narbonne et Béziers ; L'aqueduc qui se rend à Nîmes et passe sur le pont du Gard, celui de Toulouse qui (...) passait au château de Peyrolade, et après venait dans Toulouse ; L'aqueduc qu'on voit à la porte Saint Etienne de la ville de Toulouse, et passait bien près de la ville, au lieu appelé à Terre Cavade, et allait non dans Toulouse, mais du côté de Guilleméri, duquel on voit encore les masures et canal fait de briques et pierres brisées ensembles avec un excellent ciment ; Le Château de Lates près de Montpellier, le Château Narbonnais de Toulouse, le canal tiré du Rhône par le commandement de Marius, et une infinité d'autres masures, reflets des bâtiments faits par les Romains, desquelles j'ai fait particulière mention en parlant des villes de Languedoc(...) »

It was quite an impressive list, indeed, focusing on very accurate landmarks, all the more so that many of those monuments were not to be re-discovered until the 20<sup>th</sup> century or even the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Lattes, Narbonne or Toulouse. Some are yet to be re-discovered, like the *Septimius* bridge.

### The issues of imparting knowledge at stake

The awareness of local heritage in the Biterrois only emerged in the 1640s. Actually, the method used by humanists and scholars and for locating monuments can be a key element in understanding that slow process.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, indeed, humanists gave more credit to what was written about the monuments

than to the monuments themselves. The reality perceived through ancient writings prevailed on the reality given by the ancient monuments which only asserted the prevalent value of the pre-existing reality of texts (Choay, 2010). As humanists could only locate the monuments that had been previously written about, they did not look for ruins in the Biterrois which was sometimes mentioned in Ancient literature. For example, the case of Narbonne is quite revealing. Humanists most probably used the texts by Cicero, like *Pro Fonteio*, to look for Roman ruins. So they went to Narbonne but they did not go to Béziers, which is only distant from 20 kilometers.

### Anne de Rulman's manuscript: a missed opportunity

The Biterrois was however mentioned in a manuscript by Anne de Rulman studying the ancient monuments of Béziers while Guillaume Catel was writing his *Mémoires de l'Histoire du Languedoc*.

Anne de Rulman was a notorious lawyer who came from, and worked in Nîmes, a city full of ancient monuments which are still famous worldwide today, such as "la maison carrée" -a temple- or "le Pont du Gard", a few kilometers away. In addition to his profession, and his passion for grammar and archeology, he was also locally known as being an "antiquarian", a man who was passionate about Antiquity and its ancient monuments (Sauzet, 1993). In *Récit des anciens monuments qui paroissent encore dans le département de la 1<sup>e</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Gaule Narbonnaise*, he published a thorough and well-researched report not only on the ancient monuments of Nîmes but also on what he found in Béziers where he must have stayed for a while in 1628.

Then, he wrote a short report on Béziers with many drawings attached under the title *La représentation des plans et perspectives des anciens édifices publics que les Romains ont laissés dans Béziers, et le profil des statues, colosses, figures, trophées d'armes, pièces de triomphe, mausolées, colonne, sacrifices, épitaphes et inscriptions*. He must have planned to get his manuscript published as he wrote a preface to his King Louis XIIIth but, unfortunately, he failed to do so. Today, you can find a copy of his manuscripts in the National Library of France.

### From in situ heritage to displaced and relocated heritage

In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Anne de Rulman, Guillaume Catel and Louis Coulon studied and referred to ancient monuments which had already been deteriorated through time. However, those scholars could identify without a doubt the monuments as ancient because they relied on the writings by ancient authors. The monuments could be defined so, at that time, because they were made with columns. The column was the vertical element that symbolized what was, in essence, antique. In his manuscript, Folio 147, for example, Rulman included drawings that made visible how the monuments used to look like with columns (Figure 2). With that sort of ahead of time *anastylosis*, he made the symbolic importance of the landscape stand out quite significantly for in situ heritage. In his drawing of the *temple of Venus*, the monument was taken as a part of the landscape situated between the lake of Vendres and the Mediterranean Sea. At that time, Béziers colony was indeed not far from the sea which was in contact with the lake. Therefore, through his drawing, Rulman did manage to enhance the close link between the sea and the Biterrois that ancient authors had established much earlier (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Ruins of the Temple of Venus (Vendres) and the lake of Vendres.

What stands out from Rulman's work is the fact that many of the ancient objects he could see were already more or less displaced from the countryside around Béziers -the villages of Maureilhan, Vendres, Montady, or the road to Pézenas- and relocated to Béziers. The Roman statues Rulman may have come across were the properties of rich inhabitants of Béziers like Mr. Marion, Mr. Portes or Dr Dortouls... Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, heritage of the Biterrois had been displaced from in situ and relocated in town, in the antique collections of a happy few. What's more, in 1844, ten statues of the heads of the Imperial family were discovered in the center of Béziers, under the ancient Forum. These Augustan sculptures, major pieces of art of that period in Béziers are still being part of the collection of the Museum of Toulouse, despite the conservation policies set up by Prosper Mérimée in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Balty and Cazes, 1995).

In that sense, the innovative and visionary approach that Anne de Rulman adopted in *La représentation des plans et perspectives des anciens édifices publics que les Romains ont laissés dans Béziers* gave a very graphic dimension to his representations of ancient monuments. In -what is called today- his "reconstructions" of what ancient monuments used to be, he induced the representation of landscapes a core issue in the way heritage was perceived. Such a work could have been a watershed in the way the Biterrois heritage was acknowledged. Actually, in the Renaissance period, drawings, sketches or any visual representation gave credit to the very existence of ancient monuments as such. With the publication of Rulman's manuscript, the Biterrois heritage could have been fully acknowledged. As it had never been published, that heritage tended to remain unknown and it seemed to have fallen into oblivion during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### Significantly absent from ancient heritage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

It is quite telling, indeed, that the Biterrois heritage was not mentioned even once in the journey diaries of the numerous European aristocrats who traveled around Europe and especially in the South of France. What was called "the Grand Tour" was the opportunity for them to get in touch with the monuments and landscapes and to deliver their perception of them in their writings.

In that literature, Béziers ancient monuments got to be all the more noticeable that they repeatedly seemed to be unnoticed by travelers. For instance, in 1740, in *Nouveau Voyage de France*, Piganol de la Force described the bridge, the church, Saint Nazarus Cathedral and the citadel ancient site and the Jesuit College. Furthermore, he did mention the ruins of the two temples that were destroyed in the Gothic period, but he never alluded to the presence of the Roman amphitheater. In 1777, in *Voyage de Londres à Gênes*, Guiseppe Baretti reported that nothing was worth seeing in Béziers just like Gauthier de Simpre did, in 1778 in *Voyage en France de M. Le Comte de Falckenstein*. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in *Voyages en France pendant les années 1787, 88, 89 et 90*, what was nonetheless worth seeing for Arthur Young was the Canal built by Ricquet.

The sort of invisibility characterizing the Biterrois heritage perception -except for the Canal- seemed to be part of a larger global phenomenon connected to the discovery of ancient sites in Italy such as Herculaneum in 1713, Paestum in 1746 and Pompeii in 1748. In that context, French antiquarians rather turned their attention to another kind of heritage, the Christian monuments built between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century labeled as "Antiquités nationales".

However and paradoxically, as Rulman might have sensed, most of the ancient heritage in the Biterrois was not to be found in monuments but in landscapes. That specific heritage can be appreciated and acknowledged directly in and on the soil.

### Ancient landscapes as heritage and the new challenge of preservation

What is perceived nowadays as Heritage in the Biterrois is more related to landscapes than to ancient monuments or architectural remains. That change of perspective in the very definition of that Heritage has been enabled by the progressive displacement of focus from the Roman column in the 16<sup>th</sup> to the landscape a few decades ago. And the Biterrois landscapes have been recently acknowledged as many traces of the way the Romans used to cultivate the land through agricultural landmarks, agrarian structures or farm localizations... Just like those landscapes which have evolved over time as human activity has changed, heritage has acquired many layers of meaning. It can be plainly seen -and it is widely accepted as such- as a historical and cultural construct (Leveau, 2000).

Those historical landscapes are now as legitimate and ancient as architecture, which used to be the only valid evidence of Roman power in the colonies. They are yet to be plainly identified and appreciated in the scientific community as well as in the policies implemented by the local authorities to be properly promoted as Heritage and protected as such. Indeed, from their very essence, they are likely to undergo quick degradation and to face to the risk of disappearing. That sort of new past Heritage raises many issues related to its preservation and its enhancement. How can these landscapes and agrarian structures leave a legacy and continue to be "passeurs de mémoire" (Lévêque et al, 2009)? How can this heritage be safely preserved over time?

### Identification and appreciation of these historical heritage landscapes

Historical landscapes as Heritage have been identified as the combined works of nature and man over time

and as archeological documents since the 1970s.

They have been the subject of research at the University of Besançon (France) through the works led by Monique Clavel-Lévêque about ancient agrarian structures in the Biterrois (Clavel, 1970, Clavel-Lévêque, 1995a, Clavel-Lévêque, 1995b, Clavel-Lévêque, 1998, Mauné, 1998, Evelpidou, 2003) which have been also developed by two European scientific Actions called COST (European cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research).

They both highlighted the fossilization of Roman cadastral surveys and they put forward the keys to understand the evolution of the present-day landscape through diachronic readings showing how ancient roads, lands or fields left their marks until today. The ancient agrarian structures in the Biterrois characterized by vineyards have imprinted the landscapes as well as the people's memories. In that sense, those historical landscapes are also cultural landscapes, and Roman country planning is still reflected in nowadays rural areas (Figure 3). Vineyards have constructed and structured the Biterrois landscapes for nearly more than two thousand centuries. With the other ancient lanes like the famous *Via Domitia*, they are considered as essential parts of ancient heritage (Clavel-Lévêque, 2008).



Figure 3. Ancient cadastration surveys and villas in Vendres.

### The issue of preservation at stake

However, despite the development of conservation policies in the 1990s and despite the European Convention on Landscapes signed in 2000 and enacted on March, 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, protecting those rural cultural landscapes revealed to be difficult (Negri and Odiot, 1990, Chiva, 1994, Chiva 1995, Molinas, 2008).

The growing number of housing schemes around villages and the current techniques used in agriculture are as many obstacles to the protection of landscapes which fail to be preserved like the castle, the abbey or the "masets" that are small wine growers huts in the Biterrois (Vitaux, 2009). Even waterlands can be hardly preserved. For example, the Montady pond, which has been classified by the French Ministry of Ecology as "site pittoresque" since 1974 for its picturesque circular shape, has been yet at the heart of many conflicts between farmers and cultural institutions trying to protect that part of heritage being deteriorated.

### A lack of classification?

I think that the preservation of those fragile historical landscapes and more generally, that of rural heritage needs to be achieved through official awareness and enhancement campaigns in France and in Europe.

For example, the Biterrois heritage has been partially but nationally acknowledged with the classification as Historic Monument of the Ensérune *Oppidum* and of the underpass drainage gallery of the Montady pond. Nevertheless, and contrary to many other cities in the Languedoc-Roussillon Region such as Mende, Uzès, Villeneuve-les-Avignon, Nîmes, Pézenas or Narbonne<sup>1</sup>, Béziers has not been recognized as a City of Art and History ("Ville d'Art et d'Histoire"). Likewise, as long as the Biterrois as a whole is not classified by the French Ministry of Culture as Country of Art and History ("Pays d'Art et d'Histoire"), how can territorial policies be implemented? How can that specific heritage be enhanced and rendered visible to public opinion without a national framework?

### The role of Cultural Parks

Indeed, since the early 2000s, heritage enhancement actions have taken place within the framework of the European Union through the two COST Actions called G2 *Paysages anciens et structures rurales* and A27 *Understanding pre-industrial structures in rural and mining landscapes*, LANDMARKS, which were aimed at improving the understanding, the appreciation and the enhancement of rural and historical landscapes throughout the 1990s-2000s (Clavel-Lévêque et al, 2002). This first action, G2 *Paysages anciens et structures rurales*, has dealt with ancient landscapes and rural structures from 1995 to 2001. Its main purpose was to contribute to "a better understanding of the relationship between the natural environment and human activities in ancient geosystem". The objectives of the second action COST A 27 were the identification and evaluation of pre-industrial elements and structures in the European landscape that were threatened by the abandonment of traditional agricultural and mining activities, and its enhancement.

The COST Actions aim to support the creation of an international network for the interpretation and enhancement of cultural European landscapes (Orejas et al, 2002). Today, 18 parks belong to this network<sup>2</sup> including 3 that are especially dedicated to Cultural Landscapes: the Archeological and Natural Park of Las Medulas in Spain, World Cultural Heritage Park of Wachau in Austria, and the Biterrois Cultural Park in France.

### Creation of a cultural park in 2000

These COST actions led to the creation of a Cultural Park in the Biterrois<sup>3</sup> ("Parc Culturel du Biterrois") thanks to the financial support of the General Council of Hérault and "La Domitienne", which is the name of the local "Communauté de Communes" authority, an association of municipalities (Figure. 4).

The Biterrois Cultural Park is a non – profit organization founded in 2000 by researchers, economic and cultural leaders and members of municipalities. Its reason to be is to contribute to a better understanding of the Bietrois landscapes ("Le parc culturel du Biterrois a pour objectif principal de contribuer à la connaissance des paysages, authentique patrimoine culturel, et de sensibiliser chacun à la nécessité de protéger cette ressource, non renouvelable et essentielle au développement du territoire"). In that matter, it is sought :

- to develop research projects about that territory, via a scientific council,
- to enhance that local heritage,
- to produce some brochures, map discovery and guide-lines for the visits,
- to contribute to a qualitative cultural development of the area.

The scientific council of the Park would like to state quite clearly that a scientific and diachronic approach is necessary to make decisions regarding landscapes protection.

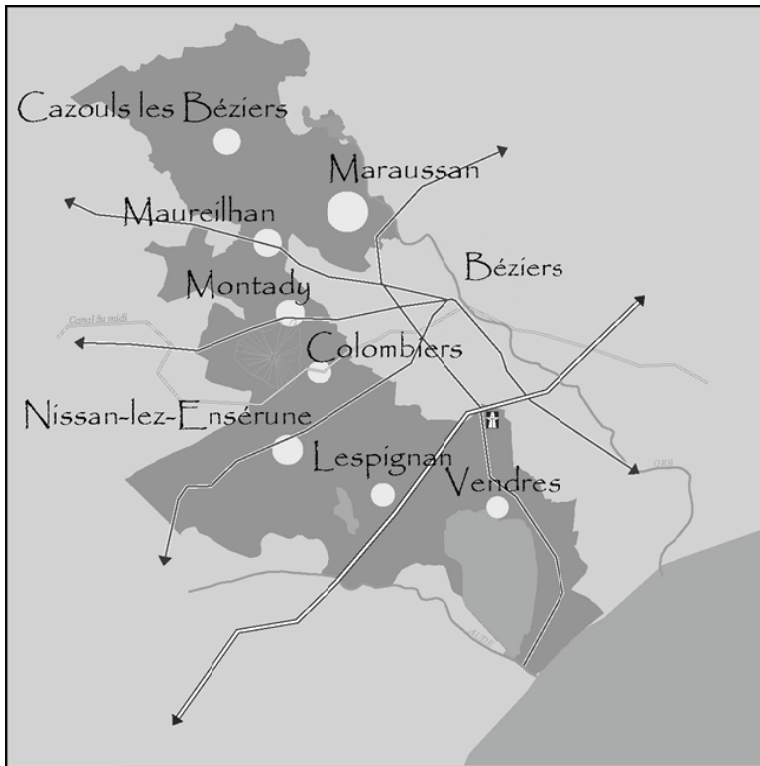


Figure 4. Location of the Cultural Park, the "Parc Culturel du Biterrois".

### A cultural tourism of quality

The Park contributes to publish some scientific papers and books. The publications of the members of the scientific council focus on the first goal of the Cultural Park, that is to say to contribute to a better understanding of the cultural landscapes. They show an increasing interest in understanding the evolution of the present-day landscapes through diachronic readings and in recovering landscapes as an essential part of Cultural Heritage. Indeed, ancient rural landmarks are now considered as both a historical and a cultural heritage.

So as to contribute to a better acknowledgement of that local heritage, the Park has been editing some brochures and discovery maps, like the discovery map entitled "*from dunes to garrigues*", which reviews different ecosystems from the coastline to the hinterland, or the discovery map called "*From villages to vineyards, a journey to the heart of a terroir*" (Figure 5). That discovery map invites people to explore the rich heritage in the Biterrois area, discovering interest castles, wine estates, wine cellars, traditional small wine growers huts called the *masets*, winemaker homes and villages. History of vine-growing in the area is actually over 2,000 years old, even though there have been many ups and downs over the centuries with shifting balances in the Mediterranean trilogy of wheat, vineyards and olive groves. The vine-growing and wine-making tradition has fashioned the landscape and the architecture, shaping the cultural identity of the area. The journey includes archaeology, elaborate or vernacular architecture, from Antiquity to nowadays, from Roman villas to the 19<sup>th</sup> century "pinardiers" castles imitating the Bordeaux region style, and the today wine cellars. So the scientific activities of the Park efficiently provide with proficient documentation so as to offer a cultural tourism of quality.



Figure 5. Discovery map "From villages to vineyards, a journey to the heart of a terroir" ("Parc culturel du Biterrois")

### Enhancement of the results of research on landscapes around the "Temple of Venus" in Vendres

For instance, the Cultural Park has led some scientific actions for many years around the lake of Vendres and the site called "le Temple de Vénus", the Temple of Venus, which is a Gallo-roman villa.

I explained that that archeological site has been identified and acknowledged quite early: the villa was mentioned for the first time in 1628 by Anne de Rulman when he was writing a report on Béziers, and he even included a drawing (At that time, Anne de Rulman thought that monument was a temple). The temple of Venus was also identified in 1633 by Guillaume Catel, a member of the Parliament of Toulouse in his *Mémoires de l'Histoire du Languedoc*. But the site seemed to have fallen into oblivion until nowadays...

however in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other archeological sites very similar to the Temple of Venus, and discovered by excavations, were classified as historic monuments : a Gallo-roman villa in Vendres, the Primuliac Villa, has been classified in 1935, and another Gallo-roman villa in Lespignan in 1971! The Temple of Venus, which is an archeological site but also a clear landmark, has never been classified as an historic monument.

To contribute to a better understanding of this archeological site, the Park conducted some excavations, and the array of archeology remains revealed that the site was a rich and extensive villa from the second century BC to the fifth century AC. Actually the site contains some thermal baths.

Furthermore, and in seeking better acknowledgement of this archeological site, and in collaboration with the French coastline conservation authority, the scientific team fit up a memory path ("un chemin de mémoire") around the villa and the lake. They also published a brochure with guidelines for the visit including archeological information and explanations (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Brochure from the Biterrois Cultural Park with guidelines for the visit of the Temple of Venus (Vendres)

In that matter, the Biterrois Cultural Park was state-approved and declared of public utility in 2011. Actually, by definition, like any Cultural Park, it has been designed to make public opinion and authorities realize that landscapes are cultural Heritage which needs to be protected as a non-renewable resource as it is nonetheless essential to local economic development (Orejas et al, 2002). The Biterrois Cultural Park can therefore constitute strong foundations for the strategy of sustainable development implemented locally. It shall also serve to ensure that the Biterrois landscapes are identified and acknowledged as Heritage so as to be better preserved.

## Conclusion

So, the choices made in favor of the enhancement of the local heritage in the Biterrois are in the process of being clearly identified and promoted today. They are an integral part of the European network under construction which shall ensure that the European historical landscapes are enhanced in a proficient way.

The issues of cultural development which need to be considered in a sustainable perspective are huge and they represent challenges we shall face in the future, keeping in mind the opportunity Béziers and its antique heritage had already missed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in the hope it will not happen again.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>www.vpah.culture.fr

<sup>2</sup> Associated Research Groups Cultural Parks and Cultural landscapes in Europe are : Archeological Park of Cruachan AI and Archeological Park of Hill of Tara in Ireland, Archeological Park of Gisacum and the Cultural Park of the Biterrois in France, Archeological and Natural Park of Las Medulas in Spain, Agricultural museum of Riachos and Environmental and Archeological Park of Medio Tejo in Portugal, Consortium Museum of Liri Valley, Archeological Park of Fregellae and Archeological, mineralogical and natural Park of Val di Cornia in Italy, Archeological Park of Lindholm Hoj in Denmark, World Cultural Heritage Wachau and Archeological Park of Carnuntum in Austria, Open Air Mining Museum of Banska Stiavnica in Slovakia, Mining Museum of Roznava in Slovakia, Rebala Heritage Reserve in Estonia, Mgarr ix-Xini Valley Regional Par in Malta, Geocultural Park of Esatern Aegean in Greece (Samos).

<sup>3</sup> www.parc-culturel-biterrois.fr

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