

# 1 FROM MONS LUCII TO MONTLUÇON BIRTH OF A TOWN

## A prime location

The Château of the Dukes of Bourbon is located on a steep spur 25 metres above the alluvial plain of the Richer Cher, at the exit of the Combrailles gorges and the Creuse plateaux.

This viewpoint, oriented North-South, opens up towards the North to the hills of Berry, then to the plains of the Parisian basin.

## The first humans

During prehistory, 15,000 years ago, a group of Magdalenian hunter-gatherers set up camp on this headland, which overlooked the steppes and herds of game (Fig. 1). They made their flint tools at this camp (Fig.2).

The motto of the town, "Mons lucens inter montes" can be translated as "shining hill amid the hills" (Fig. 3).

## 2 THE FIRST TRACES OF BUILDINGS

An 8th century structure was discovered by archaeologists to the south of the esplanade; it seems to be related to metalworking activities.

Excavations in 2010 near the church of Notre-Dame revealed what is probably a first monumental Carolingian wall from the 9th and 10th centuries (Fig. 4). In Montluçon, an early fort may have existed, with a primitive village that must have gradually supplanted that of Nérises-Bains, a Gallo-Roman town very close to Montluçon.

On the esplanade, pits, silos and alignments of post holes were discovered (Fig. 5). One of these remains – a silo pit – is dated to between 1005 and 1021. Not far away, the first building of the church of Notre-Dame was built between 970 and 1016. It is likely that the developments of the 10th and 11th centuries are linked to the presence on the site of a powerful lordly family.

### 3 BIRTH OF A STRONGHOLD

According to some historians, the Lords of Bourbon were present in Montluçon since the 11th century. The first lord of the place cited in ancient texts is Archambaud III "the Younger". Montluçon may have been acquired by the Bourbons or by one of their kin at the end of the 10th century through marriage, inheritance or even by force.

The first brick-built wall, erected in the 11th century  
This first fortress (Fig. 6) is thought to date from the period 1025-1049, as part of building campaigns probably carried out under the auspices of the Bourbons or their entourage.

In 1031, Archambaud II was the first of the Bourbons to take the title of count. He died around 1032-1034. Around 1049, Archambaud III "the Younger" succeeded his parents and developed his strongholds in the region.

It was also in 1049 that the "castrum de Montis Lucii" was mentioned in a text written by the monks of Souvigny, which confirms the presence of a fortress in Montluçon, the seat of a power exercised for quite some time.

At the end of the 11th century, new buildings were erected against the southern curtain wall. Around 1079, Archambaud IV "the Strong", son of Archambaud III, passed an act in Montluçon, which confirmed the donations that his father had granted to one of his vassals. The predominance of the Sires of Bourbon, already well established in the region, now extended to Berry and the Limousin boundaries.

## 4 THE “ARCHAMBAUDS” AND THE “GUILLAUMES”

### **A hotly contested fortress**

Archambaud IV and his son Archambaud V «the Pious» both died in 1095. Aimon II, Archambaud V's brother, then became regent until his nephew Archambaud VI, «the Pupil”, came of age and took the title from him.

The fortress passed into the hands of Aimon's son and then his nephew, Guillaume II, then Guillaume III. As such, Montluçon was under Bourbon control for 50 years.

As of November 1170, the town came under English rule (Duchy of Aquitaine) for 17 years. It was reconquered in 1188 by Guy II de Dampierre, a loyalist of the King of France. When Guillaume III died, his brother Archambaud de Montluçon became the rightful owner. He signed a treaty in April 1202 to protect his property before leaving for the crusades (Fig. 8).

### **The cards are reshuffled**

In 1203, King Philippe-Auguste took advantage of the departure of Archambaud «the Crusader» to seize the town for Guy II de Dampierre, who had become Sire of Bourbon through his marriage in 1196 to Mathilde of Bourbon. From then on, the historical trajectory of the town of Montluçon returned to the original Bourbon family, which took the name “Bourbon-Dampierre”, the second house of Bourbon.

Archambaud “the Crusader” died in 1203-1204. He left behind a daughter without inheritance, Béatrix de Montluçon (Fig. 9). She was married to the son of the Bourbon-Dampierre couple, Archambaud VIII (Fig. 9), in order to put an end to the disputes that had arisen against the dispossession of her father who had died at sea.

# 5 THE CASTELLANY OF MONTLUÇON: THE BOURBON-DAMPIERRES

## A flourishing town

During the 13th century, Mathilde and Guy were at the head of a prosperous town which coined money from 1202 to 1213 (Fig. 10). At this time, the church of Notre-Dame was well endowed; the priory with a cloister was built between 1190 and 1250.

In 1242, Archambaud VIII, son of Matilda and Guy, granted a charter of franchises to the town's citizens. At the time, Jewish and Lombard merchants were present in Montluçon, testament to the town's economic and commercial development. The defences of the Château were strengthened. Several towers were added to the wall; 10 of the 12 built still remain today (Fig. 13).

## A strategy of alliances

Through their marriages in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Bourbons forged strategic alliances and became closer to the royal family. When Robert of France, son of King Louis IX, joined the family, the coat of arms changed with the appearance of the fleur-de-lis. His grandson Pierre I of Bourbon, married to Isabelle de Valois, was the first to enjoy the title of Duke; he was the father of Louis II, Duke of Bourbon, known as "the Good Duke", born in 1337.

## 6 “THE GOOD DUKE” OF BOURBON, LOUIS II, HIS SONS AND GRANDSONS

Louis II of Bourbon (Fig. 14) launched a major reconstruction project for the Château between 1375 and 1410. He was responsible for the main body of the building and the square tower, of which he would not see the completion, as well as the wall protecting the town with its 40 towers and four gates equipped with portcullises and drawbridges. Aquitaine was at that time under English rule, and Montluçon was twice threatened with occupation during the Hundred Years' War. After this period of fear, the first fountain was installed in the town around 1406 (Fig. 15), on the Place de la Fontaine.

### **Between chivalry and modernism**

Around 1400, Louis II established the reconstruction of the church of Notre-Dame, and created the chivalric Order of the Golden Shield or Hope. After his death in Montluçon in 1410, he was buried in Souvigny. His grandson Charles I of Bourbon and then his son Jean II continued the reconstruction of the church of Notre-Dame, which was completed around 1511.

The covered gallery (Fig. 16) which adorns the main building was built during the 15th century, and the first clock was installed on top of a tower in 1506. The town was modernised – the streets were paved, and the movement of animals was regulated.

# 7 THE CONSTABLE OF BOURBON AND THE DISINHERITANCE

## The slow agony of the Château

Upon the death of the Constable Charles III of Bourbon, who had opposed François I by joining the army of the Emperor Charles Quint, all his possessions were confiscated, and then in 1531, the estate was reunited with the French crown. The Château de Montluçon then entered a period of neglect; in 1535, private individuals took up residence.

After 1545, the Château passed from hand to hand, without undergoing any significant repair work.

In 1569, Nicolas de Nicolay gave the following description: "All along the Château, on the western side, there is a long high gallery, in the middle of which is the chapel of the Dukes of Bourbon, which is quite beautiful. (...) The cellars, storerooms and granaries contain the wheat and wine that come from the castellany; and at the entrance to the Château, in a maison basse\*, are held the assemblies of the justice. All the rest of the old building has fallen into ruin." (Fig. 19)

The arms of Montluçon are engraved on old artillery pieces: "of azure, with the silver Château, perching on a golden mountain, all atop of a golden sun" (Fig. 20).

\*single-story house adjacent to the Château

## 8 THE REVOLUTION IS COMING

In 1661, the Princes of Condé acquired the right of possession of Bourbonnais up until the French Revolution. In 1730, an inventory of fixtures painted an unflattering picture of what remained of the Château, shared between a tenant who occupied many of the rooms, half of the gallery and the entire granary, a caretaker on the ground floor, and a farmer. The chapel was moved to the ground floor; the Château, in an advanced state of collapse, required repairs.

In 1749, the municipality created a public promenade in the courtyard of the Château and a viewpoint over the town from the top of the ramparts (Fig. 21); almost all the towers were razed to the ground. The Bernard Room and the chapel were demolished around 1766.

Then came the Revolution: in Montluçon, it was less severe than elsewhere in France. The police court was set up in the Château, and the general assemblies of the inhabitants were held there. In the year IV (1795-1796), the Château escaped the sale of national property in order to accommodate the offices of the public services.

## 9 AT THE DAWN OF THE INDUSTRIAL ERA

In 1804, the prefect of Allier granted the Château to the municipality, which carried out repairs and then rented out the ground floor to the court until 1859, and the rest to private individuals, with the first floor being used as a theatre.

In 1814, Louis XVIII returned all the property belonging to his cousin the Prince of Condé, including the Château de Montluçon. Then in 1815, his property was sequestered again. The municipality used the Château in 1816 in return for an annuity of 200 francs, which was bought back in 1821 – the Château belonged definitively to the town. The municipal government occupied the premises until 1835 before renting out part of them to private individuals.

The town entered the industrial era in 1842, helped by the completion of the Berry canal in 1835; glassmaking and metalworking factories became established.

A café owner set up shop in the building behind the main building (Fig.22), much to the delight of walkers.

In 1864, Emperor Napoleon III, on a visit to Montluçon, passed under the triumphal arch installed at the foot of the Château; he then inaugurated the new railway station located at the end of this large 400 metre-long avenue.

# 10 THE TIME OF THE BARRACKS

In 1859, the Château was made available to the Ministry of War. In 1861, two brick barracks were built (Fig. 23) and the army moved in. The new Richemont barracks were inaugurated in 1909, far from the Château, in the middle of the fields.

The town then recovered the Château and wanted to set up a museum there with the help of the “Friends of Montluçon” association. However, the First World War broke out in 1914 and as such the project was put on hold.

## Modern times P10 (2) 20th century

After 1918, the project got back under way. The barracks wall that hid and disfigured the main building of the Château was demolished, as were all the old barracks except for the one located to the north, which would later be known as “la Mutualité” (Fig. 24 and 25).

In 1925, the municipality set up a room dedicated to the presentation of Jean-Michel Clément’s collection of antique earthenware. In order to facilitate public access to the ground floor, the esplanade was lowered by around 50 centimetres, revealing the bases of the 15th century columns (Fig. 26) that were used to support the gallery. On 15 May 1926, the Château was listed in the Supplementary Inventory of Historical Monuments.

# 11 THE ERA OF RESTORATION

The municipality wanted to restore the Château and enlisted the skills of a local man, Pierre Pradel. He guided the municipality in the restoration of the 15th century gallery (Fig. 27), carried out from 1930 to 1932 (Figs. 28 and 29). Then, in 1936, the interior restoration of the building was undertaken; once again, the Second World War put the project on hold until the 1950s.

In 1957, the curator Jean Favière proposed a programme based on the identity of the region, which involved the creation of a future museum dedicated to local history.

The museum opened its doors in February 1959 (Fig. 30), presenting pieces from prehistory, the mineralogical and mining resources that would make this region a land of industry, and natural history, ethnographic and music collections, local fine arts, and Clément earthenware.

At the same time, some of the Château's rooms were used to rehearse theatre scenes. Another building outside, "la Mutualité" – the last remaining building of the former barracks – was used as a social welfare office and fitness centre; it was not destroyed until 1986.

# 12 TODAY, THE “BEHIND-THE-SCENES CHÂTEAU”

In the 2000s, the museum’s music collections were expanded. They were the focus of a scientific and cultural project, to be exhibited in a new museum facility, the MuPop (Fig. 31), which opened in 2013 on rue Notre-Dame.

Today, the museum continues to enrich its collections, which must be preserved in the best possible conditions. The Château of the Dukes of Bourbon is therefore currently a place for the conservation and study of the collections (Fig. 32). The reserves and the associated documentation centre are used for inventory work, digitisation, scenography projects, hosting researchers and restorers, the preparation of objects on loan for exhibitions, etc.

Following the Bourbon dynasty, and subsequently several centuries of a range of uses, the Château’s heritage vocation was affirmed during the 20th century, while the “old Château” simultaneously played the role of “icon” of the town, featuring on stamps, posters (Fig. 33), promotional paraphernalia, etc. There are still many mysteries to be unravelled about its long history, which is inextricably linked to that of the town.

De "Mons Lucii" à Montluçon, naissance d'une ville - 2021  
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