

Making Identities in the Hundred Years War: Aquitaine, Gascony and Béarn

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Introduction

In June 1415, Bertrand VII, count of Armagnac, sent a letter to Gaillard de Durfort, seneschal of Aquitaine for the king of England:

It seems strange to us and a hard thing that our own relatives and friends, and even those of our same nation give aid to the men of foreign nation in this matter, ... with the help of God and our lords and friends, no man of foreign nation shall be seen in Gascony who will dare to say and do such things against the count of Armagnac¹.

In this letter the count of Armagnac complained that many Gascon families had helped against him "the men of foreign nation" whom he designated elsewhere the count of Foix². This accusation reflected a long dynastic conflict between the house of Armagnac and of Foix. The idea of "nation" here might be close to the idea of an ethno-linguistic people: the Gascons. As Guilhem Pépin recently demonstrates, medieval Gascons had a very clear idea of their identity and of the borders of Gascony³. In order to prevent from attacking him, the count of Armagnac, using this idea, claimed that the county of Foix had been historically and linguistically situated outside Gascony. However it is a curious statement because the count of Foix was also lord of Gascon lands such as Béarn, Marsan and Gabardan. Despite of a strong ethnic and linguistic unity, Gascons fought each other on both sides during the Hundred Years War⁴. To complicate matters, Bertrand VII of Armagnac was a chief of the Pro-French party in Gascony and also, by marriage, nephew of Gaillard de Durfort who was one of Jean I of Foix's ally.

So, in the formation of loyalties and the feelings of fidelity of the medieval Gascons, we are required to find other elements besides the ethnicity and the language. To clarify some aspects, this paper focuses on three phases in which political issues played crucial roles to make Gascon identities in the time of the Hundred Years War.

¹ *'E nos sembla estranga et dura causa que, a gens d'estranga nacion, nostres propis parentz et amies, et de nostra nacion medissa, donen ajuda en aquesta causa, ... am l'ajuda de Diu et de nostres senhors et amies, que non benra home d'estranga nacion en Guasconha que non dopte far et dire taus causas a l'encontra deu comte d'Armanhac.'* Archives municipales de Bordeaux, éd., *Registres de la Jurade. Délibérations de 1414 à 1416 et de 1420 à 1422*, Bordeaux, 1883, p. 183.

² Vale, Malcolm G. A., *English Gascony, 1399-1453: A Study of War, Government and Politics During the Later Stages of the Hundred Years' War*, London, 1970, p. 177-178.

³ Pépin, Guilhem, "Genèse et évolution de l'identité gasconne, du haut Moyen-âge au XVIIIe siècle," *Modèles linguistiques* 33 (2012), pp. 47-82.

⁴ Pépin, Guilhem, "Does a Common Language Mean a Shared Language, Identity, Geography and their Links with Politics: The Cases of Gascony and Brittany," In *Contact and exchange in later medieval Europe: essays in honour of Malcolm Vale*, edited by Hannah Skoda, Woodbridge, 2012, pp. 79-102.

I. Elaboration of "allodial Gascony" theory

Through descent from Eleanor, Henry II's queen, the kings of England were dukes of Aquitaine. The duchy of Aquitaine covered the vast territories from Poitou to the Pyrenees, which included Gascony, the region south of the Garonne. It is generally agreed that the treaty concluded between Henry III and Louis IX at Paris in 1259 had many problems, above all on the question of the homage for Gascony owed to the king of France by the king of England as duke of Aquitaine. This situation caused the conflicting claims of suzerainty and justice and the serious warfare over the sovereignty of the province came between 1294 and 1298 in Gascony.

In negotiations with the French representatives for the Gascon war, the king-duke Edward I had to find an alternative to the homage to the king of France and to much discordance that could cause legal superiority of the king of France and the Parliament of Paris. P. Chaplais revealed the first memorandum stating that Gascony had the status of an *allodium* (free land) opposite to the kingdom of France⁵.

In the first place, it is certain that before the peace between the Saint-Louis on the one hand, and the King Henry on the other, the land of Gascony had not been nor been recognized to be as the fief from the King of France, ...⁶

According to this memorandum, Gascony was made before 1259 an *allodium* or a free land that is not dependent on the king of France, unlike the other parts of the duchy of Aquitaine. Obviously, this thesis was designed to settle many problems that the King of England was a vassal of the King of France for his duchy of Aquitaine since 1259. This argument was also based primarily on the idea that the original status of Gascony was that of a free and sovereign land facing the kingdom of France and that this status should be restored.

This theory of allodality of Gascony was presented to king-duke Edward I by Master Raymond de la Ferrière between 1294 and 1298. Raymond was a canon, and later, a dean of Saint-Seurin of Bordeaux and a cleric of Edward I, for whom he became the most famous representative to the Parliament of Paris since his first appointment in 1277. At the Parliament of Paris, he acted as a lawyer to defend against the Gascon appeals made against

⁵ Chaplais, Pierre, "English Arguments concerning the Feudal Status of Aquitaine in the Fourteenth Century," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* XXI (1948), pp. 203-213; idem, "Le traité de Paris de 1259 et l'inféodation de la Gascogne allodiale," *Le Moyen Âge* 61 (1955), pp. 121-137; idem, "Le duché-pairie de Guyenne : l'hommage et les services féodaux de 1259 à 1303," *Annales du Midi* 69 (1957), pp. 5-38.

⁶ "In primis certum est quod ante pacem que facta fuit inter Sanctum Ludouicum ex una parte, et Regem Henricum ex altera, Terra Vasconie non erat nec esse recognoscebatur de feodo Regis Francie, set de allodio Regis Anglie, ...". Rothwell, H., "Edward I's Case against Philip the Fair over Gascony," *English Historical Review* xlii (1927), p. 578.

Edward I⁷. Here, we have a good example that the Gascon cleric was strongly committed to elaborate the ideology for the king of England against the king of France.

II. Gaston Phoebus and "allodial Béarn"

When Gaston III (called "Phoebus") succeeded his father in 1343, he was a vassal of both the king of France for the county of Foix, and the king of England (as duke of Aquitaine) for the viscounty of Béarn. When the war resumed in 1346 between the French and English crowns, he found himself in the position of having to choose sides⁸.

Claiming that Béarn was an *allodium*, Gaston III stated the independence of the viscounty and its position of neutrality in the dynastic conflict. The oldest of the documents dates back to 1347. When, after the French disaster at Crécy, Gaston III refused the invitation of Philip VI of Valois to attend discussions with the King of Castile against the King of England. He notified that he recognized no superior in Béarn, land that he held from God.

The count of Foix responds to the request by Acharias of Brunheys [ie. a seneschal of Rouergue for the king of France] on letters sent by the King of France that, as the count is in the land of Béarn, land that he holds from God and from no man in the world, so it does not result in any obligation except to do what he likes, the motion about the agreements, alliances and agreements between the kings of France and Castile is a novelty...⁹

In a letter of 1354, dictated the castle of Orthez and addressed to the notables of Montpellier, Gaston, "count of Foix and viscount of Béarn by the grace of God," said that he had the viscounty of Béarn "with its dependencies, such as free land" where he had "the power of eminent jurisdiction and sovereign", "like any prince in the world with his land, and does not recognize for the viscounty itself, any superior than God¹⁰".

⁷ Kicklighter, J. A., "English Gascony and the Parlement of Paris : A Study of Anglo-Gascon Legal Representatives, 1259-1337," In *Documenting the Past: Essays in Medieval History presented to George Pedy Cuttino*, edited by J. S. Hamilton and P. J. Bradley, New Hampshire, 1989, p. 122.

⁸ Tucoo-Chala, P., *Gaston Fébus et la vicomté de Béarn (1343-1391)*, Bordeaux, 1959, pp. 39-112.

⁹ "*Mossen lo comte de Foys respon a la requeste feyte a luy per Acharie de Brunheys, sober augunes letres tremesses au diit senescauc per lo diit mossen lo rey que cum mossen lo comte sie en la terre soe de Bearn, laquoau tee de Diu e no de nulh homi deu mont, ne per aquere no es tengut de far sino so que a luy plagos, que quant a present que en lo negoci deu quoau es feite la requeste, so es assaber sober lo fait de las convenenses, liances e accortz feitz entre los senhors reys de France et de Castele es noel, ...*" Tucoo-Chala, P., *La vicomté de Béarn et le problème de sa souveraineté des origines à 1620*, Bordeaux, 1961, Pièce justificative 24, pp. 160-161.

¹⁰ "*Dei gratia comes Fluxi vicecomesque Bearnii, ...*" "*sicuti aliquis princeps mundi tenet*

This idea is not traditional one in Béarn, since Gaston VII, viscount of Béarn and ancestor of Gaston Phoebus had paid homage to Edward I¹¹. It is possible that the idea of “allodial Gascony” might have inspired Gaston Phoebus. Ironically, Gaston Phoebus, who shaped his self-consciousness as sovereign lord, could turn this idea against the English crown.

Gaston III also refused to pay homage to Edward of Woodstock (called later the Black Prince), the eldest son of Edward III, on behalf of his viscounty of Béarn at Agen on 12 January 1364. If he was still called "count of Foix and viscount of Béarn" in this document, after he started to use the title of "lord of Béarn" and no longer that of "viscount of Béarn"¹². By this simple change of title, Gaston Phoebus asserted firmly that he was the sole master of Béarn and he did not recognize superior. During the Hundred Years War, Gaston III of Foix-Béarn asserted his supremacy over the territories he ruled. He used the military force against the Duke of Armagnac, and the diplomacy with the crowns of France and England.

III. Three Estates in Béarn and Guyenne

(1) Three Estates of Béarn and the treaty of Toulouse

On 5 January 1390, Gaston Phoebus sold his rights to the king of France, Charles VI by the treaty of Toulouse, depriving his legitimate successor, his nephew Mathèu de Castelbon. Gaston Phoebus had no direct legitimate heir and wanted to avoid the problems that are sure to happen after his death. To prevent such disorders, one solution according to him was to make the king of France his universal heir. In return, Charles VI gave Bigorre him for life and 100,000 francs in gold¹³.

After the death of Gaston Phoebus, however, the Three Estates of Béarn, Marsan and Gabardan met at Orthez, in order to fight this treaty and to avoid annexation to France. On 8 August 1391, all the delegates present at the Orthez Estates swore an oath of “*Union*”¹⁴. Thereafter, by a bribe for members of the French government, representatives of the “*Union*”

terram suam ultimate pro ipso vicecomitatu aliquem praeterquam Deum recognoscimus superiorem, "Tucoo-Chala, P., “Gaston Fébus et Sauveterre-de-Béarn. Publication de documents,” *Revue de Pau et du Béarn*, XVIII (1991), pp. 378-380.

¹¹ Tucoo-Chala, *La vicomté de Béarn et le problème de sa souveraineté des origines à 1620*, Pièce justificative 15, p. 155.

¹² In the document of 1390, "Gaston, conte de Foix et seigneur de Béarn," Tucoo-Chala, *La vicomté de Béarn et le problème de sa souveraineté des origines à 1620*, Pièce justificative 30, pp. 167.

¹³ Tucoo-Chala, P., *Gaston Fébus et la vicomté de Béarn (1343-1391)*, Bordeaux, 1959, p. 333-336; idem, *La vicomté de Béarn et le problème de sa souveraineté des origines à 1620*, Bordeaux, 1961, p. 89, 167-171.

¹⁴ 'Item, que la present unio sie jurade per totes las gentz deus tres Estatz de totes las terres dessus diites, e a mayor fermesse, sayerade deus prelatz, baroos e genthius, bieles e bats qui han sayeg.' Cadier 1888, pp. 409-410.

succeeded in nullifying the treaty of Toulouse, and imposed their conditions on Mathèu de Castelbon as successor to Phoebus. On 5 July 1393, the Three Estates of Béarn received the oath of Mathèu de Castelbon and officially acknowledged him as their lord¹⁵. Thus, the Three Estates of Béarn imposed their terms on the new lord, and he and his successors as lords of Béarn had to govern Béarn in collaboration with them.

(2) Three Estates of Guyenne and the dukedom of John of Gaunt

John of Gaunt was third surviving son of Edward III and inherited the duchy of Lancaster by marriage. In 1390 Richard II, his nephew and king of England, decided to confer on him the duchy of Aquitaine as reward of his support against the Appellants. On 23 November 1390, Richard II addressed a letter to his subjects in Aquitaine, ordering them to recognize Gaunt's ducal title, under his sovereignty as king of France¹⁶. On 14 September 1390, the Three Estates of Guyenne (Guyenne was the popular form of the name Aquitaine) met at Bordeaux and negotiated with William le Scrope, the seneschal of Guyenne designated by John of Gaunt. They demanded guarantees, such as the traditional confirmation of privileges and grants awarded by Richard II and his predecessors and, most importantly, they asked the king for assurances that the duchy would not be separated from the crown of England¹⁷.

Their argument had a historical ground. In 1249, Henry III granted Gascony to his son Prince Edward, the future Edward I. From April 27, 1252, Henry III renewed the donation to Prince Edward of all the land of Gascony in the condition that the prince respect allegiance of the king during his life and he did not alienate to anyone this country, which should remain indissolubly united to the crown of England¹⁸. The Three Estates of Guyenne considered this letter as a precedent to prove the indissoluble union between England and Aquitaine.

Three Estates of Guyenne finally accepted Gaunt as their duke:

... the said lords of the three Estates offer to receive the said lord of Lancaster as duke of Aquitaine, and to do for him what we are bound or accustomed to do, saving our allegiance

¹⁵ Cadier 1888, pp. 147, 373.

¹⁶ "Richard, par la grâce de Dieu, roy d'Engleterre et de France et seigneur d'Irlande, ...," Archives Municipales de Bordeaux, *Livre des Bouillons*, Bordeaux, 1867, p. 230-232.

¹⁷ "en tielle maniere et condicion que ne soit prejudice aus privileges, franchises, libertez ... du pis daquitaine ... Et que pour ceste donnacion ne soit trait a consequence que nous peust metre en autre main hors de la couronne ...," Palmer, John Joseph Norman, "The Anglo-French Peace Negotiations, 1390-1396," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (1966), p. 90; Phillipotts, Christopher John, "John of Gaunt and English policy towards France, 1389-1395," *Journal of Medieval History* 16 (1990), pp. 378-379.

¹⁸ Trabut-Cussac, Jean-Paul, *L'administration anglaise en Gascogne sous Henry III et Edouard I de 1254 à 1307*, Paris et Genève, 1972, p. xxvii.

to our said lord the king, sovereign duke of Aquitaine¹⁹.

They used the title of "sovereign duke of Aquitaine", instead of "king of France" used by Richard II himself. For them, the duchy of Aquitaine was absolutely held by the king of England as 'sovereign duke of Aquitaine'. They did not accept the sovereignty of king of France, even in a theoretical claim.

In 1420 during the Dax assembly the king's officers referred to the king as "king of England and France", while the Three Estates called him "king of England and France, duke of Guyenne"²⁰. The Three Estates were obviously conscious of the specific status of the duchy of Guyenne and insisted on defending it. For them, the king of England ruled the duchy of Guyenne (or Aquitaine) within the kingdom of France that he claimed, while the Pro-England Gascons tried to emphasize the sovereignty of Aquitaine obtained at Brétigny-Calais in 1360 and the allodial status of Gascony prior to the treaty of Paris of 1259²¹.

Concluding remarks

From the above discussion, we have several remarks of making identities in Aquitaine. At first, the "allodial Gascony" theory had been used by the king of England against the king of France, but Gaston Phoebus, count of Foix and viscount of Béarn, was "appropriated" it in order to compete with king of France and even Edward, the prince of England. Secondly, three Estates of Guyenne insisted that Aquitaine was not to be separated from the Crown of England and their natural lord was the duke of Aquitaine, not the king of France. As a basis for these claims, the past examples were referenced. Thirdly, their representative assembly played significant roles. Each of the Three Estates of Guyenne and of Béarn became the center of the assertion of regional identity²².

¹⁹ Palmer, John Joseph Norman, *England, France and Christendom, 1377-1399*, London, 1972, p. 160.

²⁰ "lo rey d'Anglaterra et de Fransa ...," "lo rey d'Anglaterra et de Fransa, duc de Guiayna ...," Archives Municipales de Bordeaux, *Registres de la Jurade. Délibération de 1414 à 1422*, Bordeaux, 1883, p. 380-381.

²¹ Pépin, Guilhem. "The "Parlament" of Anglo-Gascon Aquitaine : the Three Estates of Aquitaine (Guyenne)," *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 52 (2008), p. 156.

²² We can suppose their mutual relationship. Pierre-Arnaud de Béarn, a bastard cousin of Gaston Fébus, count of Foix and viscount of Béarn, Marsan and Gabardan, was present at two assemblies and played a key role in the "*Union*" of 1394. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.