

# Philip the Fair and the towns of France

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## I. Introduction

In France there was a persistent increase in royal power throughout the thirteenth century. Some of king's servants who were well versed in Roman law thought of the royal power as similar to that of the Roman emperor, and developed the concept that the kingdom of France was a body politic that must be preserved and defended at all cost.(1) This concept was widely accepted. During the thirteenth century there was a gradual transfer of royalty to the king at the expense of feudal lords and of Church.

The reign of Philip the Fair(1285-1314) marks the point when the balance of loyalty definitely swung toward the secular state, and is regarded a period of triumph for the French monarchy.(2) Therefore, historians agree on the importance of his reign in the history of French monarchy, though they vary on Philip himself. In his reign the royal government reached a peak of power which it was not to again for generations. But in asserting his right to be supreme judge over all parts of France(3) and defining the boundaries of France, he had to fight expensive wars and acquire people's support for his policy. The successive wars-- against England and Flanders-- put the French monarchy to huge expense. Regular expenses also were increasing with the increasing bureaucracy. It is clear, therefore, that a most complex finance problem confronted him.

Though Philip's new power of taxation and economic regulation, and his ability to choose the devoted ministers contributed to settle the problems with which he was confronted, his achievements were partly to his treatment of towns. In fact, the towns could be very profitable to the monarchy, and the later Capetians--especially Philip Augustus and St. Louis--clearly recognized the importance of their towns. Like his

predecessors Philip the Fair seemed to know the value of towns and tried to use them to his own advantage.

Despite the importance of towns for Philip's (reign)achievements, Historians have not given their special attention to the towns in his reign. In this paper I will try to look at the position of towns during his reign and some aspects of his policy towards towns. This subject seems to deserve to be examined, for it can help to understand Philip's reign.

## II. Royal power over towns and urban autonomy

The development of towns could increase the power of the king. By utilizing the rights that he possessed in the towns he could enjoy a revenue in money with which he could hire officials devoted to his interests and soldiers ready to obey his commands.(4) Moreover the monarchy was centralist, and the town function of communication served centralization.

Therefore the later Capetians clearly recognized the value of their towns, (and tried to use the resources of the towns on a massive scale from the reign of Philip Augustus onwards.) The fact that they knew the importance to their authority is well shown in the advice of St. Louis to his son. He wrote as follows: "Maintain the *bonnes villes* and customs of your kingdom in the condition and the privilege in which your predecessors maintained them, and if there is anything to improve, then apply yourself to the task and improve it. Hold them in favour and love, because while you have the power and wealth of large towns, Frenchmen and foreigners alike, especially your peers and barons, will fear to do devil toward you."(5)

Meanwhile, the thirteenth century witnessed the decline of urban autonomy. The deficit of finance, the hostility of the church, the internal dissention and mutual hatred of the townsmen(6) might be the causes of the atrophy of self-government. But the intension of kings to reduce towns' independence was in my view the most important cause.(7) The development of town's privileges or self-government was in some way a potential danger to the royal unification of the kingdom. It involved the

creation of new lordship(so-called 'seigneurie collective'), and there was always the danger that leagues of towns might appear. Therefore kings could not allow urban autonomy to mature into full independence after the manner of Italy or even Germany.

But in France, as part of the rapid growth of monarchical power that took place during the thirteenth century, this danger hardly arose. In other words royal power over towns increased in the course of the thirteenth century. Using their rights that they had in the towns, and under the pretext of remedying past abuses(financial mismanagements, internal dissention, etc.), they intervened the affairs of towns and appropriated for themselves many of the judicial, financial, and administrative powers that the town governments had been given.

It seems that even St. Louis, who advised keeping towns in the same state as one's predecessors had done, did not follow very well his own advice and did not respect the privileges of the towns. Take some examples. During his reign, he issued ordinances containing general administrative measures to apply to towns. The first was issued to Norman communes in 1256 and the second between 1256 and 1261 to the rest of his towns. These ordinances placed limitations upon town governments, ordered financial reforms, and required town officials to turn in their receipts and expenses annually to the king's agent in Paris.(8) It seems to me that the last requirement, which was strictly observed, was instituted less to remedy past financial mismanagements than to make royal officials intervene in town affairs easily and to give them information about towns' resources in order to exact more revenue from them.(9) We can see another case in which he intervene the election of mayor. Saint-Riquier was acknowledged to be a commune but in 1269 St. Louis forbade its men to elect one particular burgess as mayor because he was thought to be a trouble-maker(*de turbacione ville esset suspectus*).(10)

As we have seen above, the opportunity for French towns to claim real independence was now past. This phenomenon was linked with the rapid progress of the monarchy. The later capetians succeeded in weakening urban autonomy and in adjusting the relationship between the state and the

towns. Moreover, feeling that it was no longer advisable to have a group of towns legally set apart from other towns, as communes were, they tried to lessen the difference in privilege among towns. So the idea of *bonne ville* was born.(11) St. Louis and his descendents began to refer to their 'wealthy and fortified' towns collectively as *bone ville nostre*.(12) In St. Louis' ordinances which we examined above, communes seem to be very vaguely distinguished from other towns.(13) And when Philip the Fair summoned representative assemblies in 1302, 1303 and 1308, he called representatives not only from communes but also from other "towns with markets or fairs". At least in the first phase of its history, the premier duties of *bonne ville* were to furnish to king its resources of men, money and fortress.(14)

Under Philip the Fair the subordination of the towns to its official apparatus was considerably carried out. His action towards towns become more restrictive. Towns that did not have a great baron as their immediate lord were more vulnerable. He had little respect for French towns' privilege or customs. The royal capital of Paris was a model of what a town should be---ruled directly by royal officials, always ready to pay its taxes. Philip was very angry when other towns failed to follow this example. He imposed heavy amercements on towns that were guilty of disobedience or that showed contempt for established authorities. Rouen, for example, had to pay 30,000 l.t. to regain its rights of 'self-government', which had been forfeited for a riot against royal fiscal agents in 1292. Carcassonne, which in 1304 had carried its protests against the Inquisition to the edge of treason, was supposed to pay 60,000 l.t.; at least 20,000 l.t. was collected.(15) Even when he agreed to remit an amercement in return for a grant, he did not renouncing his right to inflict similar punishments in the future.

Philip tried to control even weights, measures, and crafts of towns. In Toulouse, for example, he excluded from the customs of 1286 two articles concerning the measures for wheat, pepper, wax and other products because he wanted to conserve the initiative in weights and measures.(16)

Owing to Philip's treatment of towns, the dangerous complaints came from the towns. The burghers developed strong corporate feelings; they

could resist king far more effectively than peasants living in scattered villages. Their grievance was that king and royal officials disregarded their privileges and customs. Such complaints could lead to urban riots, as in the case of Amiens,(17) but not to rebel. Philip was ready to use force when it was necessary, and forbade royal officials to take the very harsh measures to communes such as that of Toulouse whose loyalty was too uncertain to stand much rough treatment.(18) . Moreover, the leaders of the towns were well-to-do bourgeois who wanted peace and security. They could profit the king's favour, and a considerable number of them entered royal service.(19)

The fact that the subordination of towns to royal apparatus did not exclude the possibility of towns' keeping their self-government in certain fields, though even here intervention by king's officials on account of actual or alleged mismanagement was always possible. In other words, the fact that Philip steadily extended his authority over towns all through the kingdom does not mean that urban autonomy was crushed completely.(20) Take the example of justice. For Philip the basic sign of sovereignty was his right to act as the final and supreme judge in all cases(except those dealing with purely ecclesiastical matters). As a corollary, he insisted on his right to protect anyone who had invoked his intervention in order to remedy an act of injustice. But once these principles were admitted, Philip was satisfied; he had no desire to have his official judge every case in first instance. Moreover he lacked the resources for undertaking such a vast responsibility.

Just as I hinted above, to some extent the desire of towns to run their own affairs could be helpful to the king. He did not have to recruit additional officials to handle the details of municipal affairs. Like this he needed self-governments to ease the burden. Therefore Even the towns, where some of the worst riots took place, usually lost their rights of 'self-government' only for limited periods. They would have to pay a price to redeem their rights, but they usually regained them; Rouen, for example, lost its commune in 1292 but bought back many of its rights in 1294 and regained almost all of them in 1309.(21) This was done partly because the king could demand large sum of money for reviving the rights, partly

because town government did save time and expense in carrying some of burden of administration. He did not, however, trust town governments completely. King's officials kept a close watch on the towns and intervened whenever they thought that a town was disobeying royal orders or following policies that the king could not approve.

## II. Royal Finance, Representative Assemblies, and Town.

### (1) Philip's Finance and Town

The financial machinery that Philip the Fair inherited from his predecessors was reasonably effective in handling the ordinary revenues and expenses of the crown.(22) The nucleus of king's income down to 1285 was that derived from his domain and feudal rights. This revenues was sufficient to maintenance of his court and administrative organs.(23) But the young Philip was taking a very high line in the 1290s, asserting his right to be final and supreme judge over all parts of France and defining the boundaries of France. In the process of attaining his aims he had to increase the number of his officials and wage successive wars against England and Flanders.(24) Constant diplomatic activity also involved lavish outlay. Regular expenses of many other kinds were increasing with the increasing obligations of the Crown.

The war with England('the war of Aquitaine') put the French monarchy to huge expense, because this was the new type of warfare with larger armies, well-paid soldiers, and longer campaigns.(25) According to J. R. Strayer, the war of Aquitaine cost well over a million l.t. And the war with Flanders was at least as expensive as the war of Aquitaine.(26)

It was apparent during the 1290s that the ordinary revenues of the crown were not sufficient even in the times of peace and that they were utterly inadequate to meet the costs of wars. Philip could no longer expect the domain to produce enough revenue to meet his needs. He was prepared to raise money by almost any means. To supplement his income he expelled the Jews, arrested the Templors, sought to generalize the aids for marrying

his daughter or knighting his son, assessed forced loan that often were not repaid, despoiled his Lombard bankers. It was financial need, also, which led him into the alteration of the currency.

One-shot operation, such as the expulsion of the Jews seems to have been fairly profitable. But the money came slowly, because their goods were sold piece by piece.(27) There was little immediate profit from administering the goods of the Temple, and the final settlement went to Philip's son, not to Philip. The attempt to generalize the customary aids for the marriage of his daughter and the knighting of his son were not very successful; It was not at all clear that the marriage aid was a general obligation, and many towns refused to pay---with varying success.(28) There was also opposition to the aid for knighting king's son,(29) and again many towns escaped paying.(30) These examples show that income could be increased much and certainly only by tax.

One of the first steps of Philip who was making a great effort to increase his income was to impose a sales-tax. This tax could be collected only in the towns. Many towns were already paying such tax, and most of those that had not paid before bought off the tax for annual lump-sum contributions.(31) The sales-tax, or lump sum payments in lieu of a sales tax, yielded about 150,000 lt.(32) The towns also paid property tax. They paid at least 100,000 lt.(33) We can see from these facts that the towns were heavily burdened.(34)

Meanwhile, all subjects within the realm owed military service to king, because defense of the realm was the highest obligation of all people.(35) Therefore the king's right of exacting military service, or payment of money in its place, was incontestable. Using this principle of commutation of military service, Philip could collect general taxes as the general subsidies for war: he was the first French king to impose general taxes. These general taxes were taken in seven of the ten years from 1295 to 1304. The last and most productive of these taxes, the general tax of 1304, produced more income than any royal tax down to the crisis of 1356(about 735,000 lt.).(36) But the general taxes could not be made a regular source of income, because these taxes were substitutes for the military service and

as a result the doctrine emerged actually that they could be collected only in time of warfare. After 1305, peace with Flanders and the election of a friendly pope gradually lessened financial pressures. Moreover, there had been strong and sometimes violent opposition to taxation. Philip might realize that it was unwise to impose new general taxes. Thus during the period from 1305 to 1314, Philip's financial policy was to raise money in ways that were not too offensive to the propertied classes including townsmen.

## **(2) Representative Assemblies and Town**

The endless quest for revenue brought Philip the Fair into conflict with the papacy. He felt the need of the support of his subjects as a whole. Hence, in 1302 he summoned a kingdomwide representative assembly which has long been regarded as the first Estates General. This national assembly vigorously supported the king's policy toward the papacy.

Philip continued to summon these representative assemblies: to arrest the Templars (in Tours) and to collect the aids for marrying his daughter (in Paris) in 1308, to request a tax for the renewed war with Flanders in 1314.(37). They were found particularly useful when the king needed money or when he desired legislation that went against established customs, because Philip as a feudal monarch could change or transgress customs without strong resistance only when supported by his people through their representatives. At the least, an assembly gave the king a chance to explain his point of view to leading men; at the best, an assembly could give consent that bound all the influential men. For example, a tax agreed to by those whom it involved was easier to collect than one forced.(38)

The good will or consent of townsmen was extremely important to the king because the towns supplied an important part of the financial resources of the realm. The alteration of the currency in particular which especially annoyed the bourgeois had to be decided by the king after the consultation with the representatives of leading towns, otherwise there could be strong oppositions; one serious riot in Paris was caused by the revaluation of the currency in 1306. Thus, there were smaller assemblies of only town



representatives in 1308, 1313, 1314 to discuss the coinage, a subject that was of great concern to the bourgeoisie.(39)

Meanwhile, the towns were useful in summoning the national assemblies. These assemblies were supposed to include representatives of ordinary inhabitants of the kingdom, as well as nobles and clergymen.(40) The baillis and seneschals were told to summon men from the "communities" and "locis insignibus". Nevertheless, most of the delegates came from towns. It is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise. There was no regular machinery or summoning procurators from the rural areas. Moreover, the assemblies were primarily exercises in propaganda, and it was more important to influence the bourgeoisie than the peasants; the towns had more money; they could make more trouble; they were better informed and could understand the explanations given by the king's officials. The towns were one of the principal targets in Philip's attempt to influence the opinion of the possessing classes, and the fact that towns had regular procedures for choosing representatives made it easy for them to choose representatives for the national assemblies. The delegates might be chosen by a royal official or the local agent of the immediate lord; they might also be named in a town meeting attended, at least in theory, by all adult males.(41) By and large, however, the pattern of the representation was set by the towns. If they had not existed, it would have been impossible to have convoked the great assemblies.

#### IV. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to explained the position of the French towns in Philip the Fair's reign. And I have also examined some aspects of his treatment of towns. In conclusion I would like to make some additional remarks.

At least in respect to Philip's policy towards the town, it seems to me that he was not a great innovator. In other words his treatment of towns essentially resembled in many ways that of his predecessors(St. Louis and

Philip III). This is natural because he shared many of their same needs and objectives. It was rather the mounting of his levies that characterized his reign, even though the financial pressure was exerted with some caution: he exploited more fully than previous kings in order to get the money that he constantly needed. Meanwhile, historians have generally regarded Philip's reign as the culmination of the medieval French monarchy. As one result of the great growth of monarchical power, he and his officials took more harsh measures, and appropriated for himself many of the privileges that their predecessors have given or confirmed. In this sense Philip's reign was typically "a period of subjection and exploitation" for French towns.

**Notes**

(1) J. R. Strayer, "Defense of the realm, and Royal Power in France" in *Medieval Statecraft and the perspective of History: Essays by Joseph R. Strayer*, ed. J. F. Benton and Th. N. Bisson (Princeton, 1970), pp. 296-99.)

(2) But Philip the Fair was not an 'absolute' king--- no king could be absolute whose right to rule was largely based on his position as feudal suzerain and hence was bound by feudal custom. In this context Strayer portrays Philip as a 'constitutional' king acting.: J.R. Strayer, "Philip the Fair---a 'constitutional' king?", *American Historical Review*, vol. LXII(1956-7), pp.18-32.

(3) G. Digard, *Philippe le Bel et le Saint Siège de 1285 à 1304* (Paris, 1936), II, 249, "nullum et nullis iudicis territorium...intra fines regni nostri exemptum a nostra jurisdictione recognoscimus." (c.1289)

(4) Even at the beginning, when large numbers of soldiers were well paid, a few number of towns still sent combatants without the king having to pay their wages, at least during the first 40 days of a campaign; P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans by M. Jones (New York, 1984), pp.55 ff.

(5) Natalis de Wailly (ed.), *Histoire de Saint Louis, par Jean sire de Joinville* (Paris, 1868), pp. 264-5.

(6) In chapter fifty of his book Beaumanoir writes as follows: "We have seen many disputes in the bonnes villes, for example the poor against the rich, or even the rich against each other.": A. Salmon (ed.), *Philippe de Remi, sire de Beaumanoir: Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, vol. II, 1516 and 1520.

(7) As for the commune, for example Luchaire and Schneider both stated that the later Capetians were making definite efforts to curb communal power: J. Schneider, "Les villes du royaume de France au temps de Saint Louis," *Académie des inscriptions belles lettres: comptes rendus* (1971), pp.45-9; A. Luchaire, *Les communes françaises à l'époque des Capétiens directs* (Paris, 1911), pp. 283-86. Petit-Dutaillis did not agree. He believed that the commune's decline was due more to factors within the towns, and thought that royal officials generally treated communes impartially: *Les communes françaises*, pp. 153-4.

(8) E. J. de Laurière and others (ed.), *Les Ordonnances des roys de France de la troisième race* (Paris, 1733-1847), I, pp. 82-4. Ch. Langlois, *Saint*

Louis-- *Philippe le Bel: les derniers Capétiens directs(1226-1328)*, vol. III, part 2 of E. Lavissee, *Histoire de France depuis les origines jusqu'à la Revolution*(Paris, 1901), pp. 78-9. M. Bloch, *La France sous les derniers Capétiens: 1223-1328*(Paris, 1958), p. 80.

(9)The parlement held that, according to the custom of the kingdom, all royal towns were obliged to pay certain aids.

(10)A. A. Beugnot(ed.), *Les Olim, ou registres des arrêts rendus par le Cour du Roi*(Paris, 1839-48), I, pp. 82-4.

(11)According to B. Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France du XIVe au XIVE siècle*(Paris, 1982), pp. 7-9, the expression de bonnes villes appeared in 1222 for the first time.

(12)Historians have usually said that the term *bonne ville* referred to a both wealthy and fortified town. see J. Le Goff, "Ordres mendiants et urbanisation dans la France médiévale," *Annales E.S.C.*, XXV(1970), p. 939; G. Mauduech, "La 'bonne ville': l'origine et sens de l'expression," *Annales E.S.C.*, XXVII(1972), p. 1441; B. Chevalier, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-17.

(13)E. J. de Laurière and others(ed.), *Ibid.*

(14)J. Le Goff, "L'apogée de la France urbaine médiévale," in G. Duby(dir.), *Histoire de la France urbaine*(Paris, 1980), t. II, p. 309.

(15)To give a few other examples, Beauvais was amerced 10,000 l.p. and Amiens 20,000 l.p. in 1306, Cahors 3,000 l.t., Castelnaudary 4,000 l.t., and Montbrison 5,000 l.t. in 1309, and Laon 10,000 l.t. in 1311. (\*Olim, III, 163(Beauvais, 1306), 197(Amiens, 1306), 299(Cahors, 1309), 324(Castelnaudary, 1309), 362(Montbrison, 1309), 366(former officials of Périgueux, 1309), 610(Laon, 1311) ).

(16)H. Gilles, *Les Coutumes de Toulouse(1286) et leur premier commentaire*(1296)(Toulouse, 1069), pp. 38-42.

(17)A. A. Beugnot(ed.), *op. cit.*, III, 197.

(18)A. Baudouin, *Lettres inédites de Philippe le Bel*(Paris, 1887), nos.157, 158, 165, 168.

(19)A notable example was Jean de Saint-Liènard, who served as mayor of Rouen, 1269-1270 and 1284-1285, as bailli of Caen, 1293-1295, and as prévôt of Paris; see L. Carolus-Barré, "Les Baillis de Philippe III le Hardi",

- Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*(1966-1967),p.231.
- (20)According to J.R. Strayer, the government of Philip preferred to hold at least to the letters of the law; it would rather restrict than abolish privileges of towns; J.R. Strayer, "Philip the Fair---a 'constitutiona' king?", *American Historical Review*, vol. LXII(1956-7), pp.18-32.
- (21)Ch. Petit-Dutaillis, *Les communes françaises*(Paris, 1947), pp. 163-65.
- (22) J. R. Strayer, *The reign of Philip the Fair*(Princeton, 1980), p. 142.
- (23)F. Lot et R. Fawtier, *Histoire des Institutions françaises au Moyen Age*, t.II, pp. 551-7.
- (24)From 1214 to 1294, France had not engaged in a major European War. Crusades were a serious matter for the French government, but the Church bore much of the expense, and volunteers, who made up a large part of the army, paid their own way as far as they could; P. Contamine, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- (25)J. R. Strayer, "The Cost and Profits of War: Anglo-French Conflict of 1294-1303 ", in H.A. Miskimin, D. Herlihy, A.L. Udovitch, *The Medieval City*, pp.269-291.
- (26)*Ibid*
- (27)G. Saige, *Les juifs de Languedoc*(Paris, 1881), pp. 244 ff.
- (28)The league of towns of Quercy managed to delay and on the whole to block collection, while in Saintonge-Poitou a forceful seneschal raised a considerable amount of money
- (29)For his son's knighting, E.A.R. Brown and N. F. Regalado, "La grant feste: Philipp the Fair's Celebration of the knighting of his sons in Paris at Pentecost of 1313" in B.A. Hanawalt and K. Reyerson(ed.), *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*(London, 1994), pp,56 ff.
- (30)E. A. R. Brown, *Customary Aids and Royal Finance*(1981), chap. 6.
- (31)Paris, for example, agreed to pay 10,000 l.t. a year for ten years; Strayer and Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp.12-13.
- (32)J.R. Strayer and C.H. Taylor, *Studies on Early French Taxation*(Cambridge, Mass., 1939), pp.12-13.
- (32)F. Funck-Brentano(ed.), "Document pour servir à l'histoire des relations de la France et l'Allemagne," *Revue historique*, XXXIX(1889), pp.326-48.

(33)*Ibid*

(34)Strayer maintains that French towns paid about half of the cost of the war of Aquitaine; J. R. Strayer, "The Cost and Profits of War: Anglo-French Conflict of 1294-1303 ", pp.269-291.

(35)This theory was based on the Code, lib. VII, tit.87:"omnia sunt principis quantum ad defensionem et tuitionem".

(36)J. B. Henneman, *Royal Taxation in Fourteenth Century France: The Development of War Financing 1322-1356*(Princeton, 1971), p. 309.

(37)For the assembly of 1302 see G. Picot(ed.), *Documents relatifs aux Etats généraux et assemblées réunis sous Philippe le Bel*(1901) nos.5,7; for that of 1308, Picot, *op. cit.*, nos.657-1076.

(38)When Philip began to raise general taxes, their subjects showed themselves fully capable of collective opposition. Philip IV's ordinance of 1303 suggests that he was aware of potentially dangerous discontents; R. Cazelles, "Une Exigence de l'opinion depuis Saint Louis: la réformation du royaume", *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France*, 1962-3, Paris, 1964, pp.91-9.

(39)E. J. de Laurière and others(ed.), *op. cit.*, I, 449, 519, 548.

(40)Picot, *op. cit.*, pp.1, 6, 22, 26(1303), pp.490, 491(1308).

(41)Picot, *op. cit.*, pp.liv-lv.