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Gascony under Edward II

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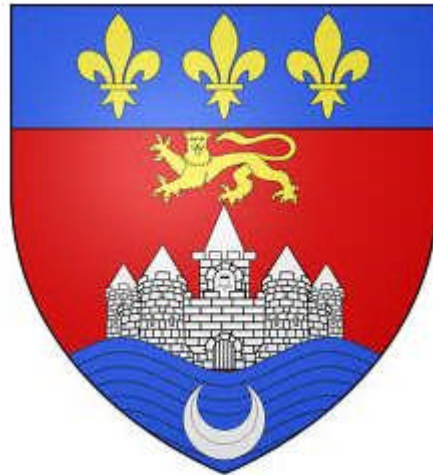
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Gascony under Edward II



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Abbreviations

CCR – *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London, 1900-).

CFR – *Calendar of the Fine Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office 1272-1509*, 22 vols. (London, 1911-1962).

CPR – *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office 1216-1509*, 54 vols. (London, 1891-1916).

TNA – London, The National Archives.

Syllabus – T. D. Hardy, *Syllabus (in English) of the Documents Relating to England and Other Kingdom's Contained in the Collection Known as Rymer's Foedera* (London, 1869).

Introduction

During the reign of Edward II, Gascony was at the very centre of Western European politics. It was a time of increasing bitterness between the Plantagenet kings of England and the Capetian kings of France in the run up to the Hundred Years War, and the complex questions of sovereignty between the two over the duchy of Aquitaine were a source of much of the strife. At the heart of these questions was the seemingly illogical nature of the relationship between the English king and the French king in respect to Aquitaine: the King of England was duke and lord with full executive rights, however the French monarch was the sovereign king who maintained ceremonial and judicial primacy. As duke, the English king was expected to pay homage to the French king as his vassal (a rather humiliating exercise,) and indeed, was meant to provide other services such as military resources (which never actually transpired.) The twenty year reign of Edward II was not an especially long one; however it corresponded with years of an exceptionally high death rate of French kings, exacerbating the homage problem as all new kings demanded it. As sovereigns, the French kings also ultimately held the power to confiscate the duchy; a power which it used (and arguably abused,) both during the Gascon War (1294-1303) in the reign of Edward I and the War of Saint-Sardos in 1324, only to give the territory back after prolonged negotiations. Furthermore, the Parlement de Paris (France's highest court) held ultimate appellate jurisdiction over Gascony, severely undermining Plantagenet king-dukes' judicial authority as their decisions on legal disputes could be overturned by the French kings' justices. This period of extreme tension over Gascony's constitutional position corresponded with a time when the higher echelons of the Roman Catholic Church happened to be dominated by men of the duchy. Both

popes of Edward II's reign were born in Plantagenet territory, and whilst the latter pope, John XXII (1316-1338,) spent most of his life in Paris before his election, his predecessor Clement V (1305-14) was firmly attached to Bordeaux (having been its Archbishop,) and remained so until his death, frequently basing his court in the city.¹ Moreover, sixty-three out of the one hundred and thirty two cardinals of the Avignon papacy (1309-1378) came from the duchy of Aquitaine, reflecting its manifest political importance at the time.²

Bearing all this in mind, it is rather surprising that the historiographical output on medieval Gascony, especially under Edward II, has been so scant, at least within the English-speaking historical field. Whilst there has been a great deal written about the medieval wine trade as well as the tortuous series of diplomatic negotiations and minor wars between England and France, rather little has been expended on all other areas: much of medieval Gascony's ecclesiastical, social, economic (other than its wine trade,) political (other than diplomatic) and administrative history is essentially yet to be written.³ Even Edward II's most recent and most exhaustive biographer omits even one detailed section on his Gascon affairs, which does rather seem to be something of an historical injustice to the territory of which he was duke and as much

¹ The Papal court's visits to Bordeaux were of such immense political intrigue - and therefore gastronomic extravagance - that Edward I once had to write to the justiciary of Dublin ordering him to send his army fighting the Scots two-hundred tons of wine, for 'by reason of the pope's staying in Gascony, wine has not been brought thence to [England] in the usual quantities.' *CPR 1301-07*, 433.

² M. W. Labarge, *Gascony: England's First Colony: 1204-1453* (London, 1980), 92-3.

³ For studies of the wine trade, see M.K James and E. M. Veale (eds.), *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (London, 1971) and E. M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies* (London, 1954), 1-97. In terms of English diplomacy of the period, the works of Pierre Chaplais and George Cuttino still dominate the field: P. Chaplais, *English Medieval Diplomatic Practice* (London, 1982); P. Chaplais, *Essays in Medieval Diplomacy and Administration* (London, 1981), essays I-XI; P. Chaplais, 'The War of Saint-Sardos' (1323-1325): Gascon Correspondence and Diplomatic Documents', *Camden Society Third Series* 87 (London, 1954); G. P. Cuttino, *English Diplomatic Administration 1259-1339* (London, 1940); G. P. Cuttino, *English Medieval Diplomacy* (Bloomington, 1985).

chief executive as he was in England, Wales and Ireland.⁴ A. Ruddick has shown how this drought in the study of Gascony is not just confined to the reign of Edward II: in her article *Gascony and the Limits of Medieval British Isles History*, Ruddick makes a compelling case for reintroducing Plantagenet Gascony into the mindset of the ‘English’ or ‘British’ medieval scholar, as she argues that it was very much in the mindset of those at the time.⁵

There are, however, two historians’ works which prove to be rich oases in the historiographical desert that is Gascony under Edward II: M. W. Labarge’s *Gascony, England’s First Colony* and M. Vale’s *The Angevin Legacy and the Hundred Years War*.⁶ Labarge’s is a broad study and is the most useful for the general student of Plantagenet Gascony. She puts particular emphasis on the ecclesiastical importance of Gascony during the early fourteenth century, as well as the duchy’s corresponding period of prosperity (caused mainly by the enormous demand for wine in England,) despite the serious difficulties of public administration.⁷ Vale also highlights the weakness of Edward II’s government in Gascony, and argues that it was partly due to this that tensions within the duchy rose considerably in the run up to the Hundred Years War, and ultimately helped cause its outbreak. In particular Vale describes how private wars between the high Gascon nobility were allowed to flare up during the

⁴ J. R. S. Phillips, *Edward II* (New Haven, 2010). There have been a small number of chapters, or sections of chapters of other historians’ works on Edward II which have focused on Gascony, but none can claim both broadness and depth: N. Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II: 1321-1326* (Cambridge, 1979), 134-148; T. F. Tout, *The Place and Reign of Edward II* (2nd edn., Manchester, 1936), 191-202.

⁵ A. C. Ruddick, ‘Gascony and the Limits of Medieval British Isles History’, in B. Smith (ed.), *Ireland and the English World in the Late Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2009) 68-88. There is one exceptional period for which historians have devoted much more attention to Plantagenet Gascony: that of the Black Prince’s rule in the duchy. However, these works are uniformly focused on the Black Prince himself, with some study on Gascony being a necessary requirement for understanding his life and times: e.g. R. Barber, *Edward, Prince of Wales and Aquitaine: A Biography of the Black Prince* (London, 1978); D. Green, *Edward the Black Prince: Power in Medieval Europe* (Harlow, 2007).

⁶ Labarge, *Gascony*; M. Vale, *The Angevin Legacy and the Hundred Years War: 1250-1340* (Oxford, 1990).

⁷ Labarge, *Gascony*, 92-8, 78-91.

early fourteenth century, undermining the king-duke's authority and allowing situations to be exploited by the Capetian kings. He also argues that the merchant class had become too powerful and too factional (along Anglo-French lines) by the end of the reign of Edward II for the king-duke's government to be fully in control of the capital and economic centre, Bordeaux.⁸

In this mixed picture of Gascony as portrayed by Labarge and Vale, one common theme emerges which requires further exploration: that of the weakness of the Plantagenet administration. Vale mainly puts the government's ineffectiveness down to Edward II being 'an insecure and episodically arbitrary ruler,' and to the great difficulties caused by the nearly constant appeals by Gascons to the Parlement de Paris.⁹ Otherwise, Vale actually describes the existing administrative structure put in place by Edward I in 1289 as being rather a strong one, albeit with some instances of corruption.¹⁰ Labarge, on the other hand, is more sympathetic to Edward II: although he didn't help himself by never going to Gascony as king-duke, or by changing the seneschal of Gascony as many times as there were years in his reign, this was neither entirely his fault, nor the entire problem. She cites the inherent inefficiencies and corruption which Edward I's 1289 reforms did not go far enough to properly address - as well as the endemic Bordeaux factionalism and the increasing numbers of cases at the appellate court in Paris - as badly undermining the Plantagenet regime and severely affecting Edward II's chances of ever being able to rule there effectively in a

⁸ Vale, *Angevin Legacy*, 111-139, 160-74.

⁹ Vale, *Angevin Legacy*, 173, 67-70. This is a view shared by T. F. Tout, who says that in studying Edward II's rule of Gascony, 'we see the same notes of normal feebleness of control, and spasmodic, though earnest, efforts towards reform, which characterised his policy in numerous other directions.' T. F. Tout, *Place*, 193. E. C. Lodge has asserted that 'Edward II might still have made something of his Continental possessions had he had even a fraction of the character or ability of his father' without actually exploring Edward II's rule of the duchy at all, skipping from one chapter on Edward I's reign almost straight onto another on Edward III's. E. C. Lodge, *Gascony Under English Rule* (London, 1926), 69.

¹⁰ Vale, *Angevin Legacy*, 71, 69.

time of heightened Anglo-French tension.¹¹ The contrast between Labarge's and Vale's interpretations is fundamentally important since it deals with one of the most crucial issues of all: the ability or inability of an English-based Crown to consistently hold onto power in South West France.

This dissertation seeks to shed light on two interrelated questions posed by this existing historiography. The first section will assess what changed and what remained the same in terms of Plantagenet kings' policy towards Gascony from the time of Edward I's administrative reforms in 1289 until the overthrow of Edward II in 1326-7. Were there any obvious differences between Edward I's attitude towards Gascony and his son's? Did either of them follow a more overtly "pro-Gascon" policy than the other? If historians such as Vale are to be justified in their overall damnation of Edward II's rule in Gascony, then his track record must be studied in some detail, and compared and contrasted to that of his supposedly "successful" father. The second section will look at to what extent the Plantagenet administration in Gascony really was in the mess that Labarge and Vale describe during Edward II's reign, and to reassess the reasons given as to why this was the case: were the problems his administration faced largely inherent, of his own making, or down to third-party (namely French) involvement?

In order to conduct such a study, this dissertation will mainly draw from the Westminster Chancery records of the period. These include the Close, Patent and Fine Rolls, which have been invaluable to medieval historians due to their tremendous breadth of subject matter. Drafted by the Chancery and stamped with the Great Seal,

¹¹ Labarge, *Gascony*, 62, 102-5.

these letters were sent to public officials all over the realm including Gascony, and then duplicated onto the various Rolls. They include appointments, dismissals, pardons, fines, writs and payment requests amongst all manner of other types of executive order – G. R. Elton once described their variety as ‘overwhelming.’¹² Just as or perhaps even more revealing than what is actually ordered within these letters are the very detailed contexts habitually provided by the clerks, shedding light on a great variety of aspects of public and private life from across the breadth of medieval society. They can sometimes be as valuable linguistically as they are in content; this dissertation will show how occasionally the use of certain language demonstrates the attitudes of the English executive towards Gascony.¹³ Yet they will be used primarily to build a picture of the general policies of Edward I and Edward II regarding Gascony, by assessing what was ordered to the high officials in Aquitaine by the Westminster Chancery in the kings’ names. One of the chief problems with these sources is, as Elton highlights, the impossibility of telling exactly how much the king himself had input into specific orders.¹⁴ Because of this, the historian must always read them as being letters of the Crown and not of the monarch himself - nevertheless the collective mass of political decisions taken within them necessarily reflects the overall policies of the two kings to a more than adequate extent.

Part of another set of Chancery documents, the Gascon Rolls, are also to be used for the period 1317-27.¹⁵ These cover a range of letters which were sent out to the Gascon

¹² G. R. Elton, *England 1200-1640* (The Sources of History: Studies in the Uses of Historical Evidence; London, 1969) 33.

¹³ Elton would disagree that anything can be gained from the phrasing of Chancery documents, as he says: ‘the record is formalised and therefore remarkably neutral.’ Elton, *England*, 44. However, despite its formality, in certain letters the language clearly has political overtones and occasionally betrays the emotions of the king, particularly under desperate circumstances, as will be shown below.

¹⁴ Elton, *England*, 44.

¹⁵ TNA, C 61/32, 33, 35-38.

administration, rendering them particularly useful to all historians of the duchy. Unfortunately, up until now they have only ever been published in Latin, and only up until 1317, perhaps partly explaining the underwhelming quantity of historiography on Gascony. However, the author has had access to a portion of the Rolls currently being translated and published by the *Gascon Rolls Project*, which is set to increase the prospects of a brighter future for medieval Gascon history.¹⁶ The fact that access is limited to just the latter ten years of Edward II's reign does not pose too much of a problem, as the content in the other Chancery documents is well suited to the first section of the dissertation anyway, as they tend to be rather more politically important individually, reflecting Edward I's and Edward II's policies. The Gascon Rolls for 1317-1327 will be most useful for the second section, as they tend to deal with technical affairs of administration in the duchy, and can shed light on why it was in the mess that it was supposedly in.

War and Finance: Two Gascon Policies under Edward I and Edward II

Just three years after Edward I's visit to Gascony finished in 1289, the French king Philip the Fair confiscated the duchy on a flimsy pretext (supposedly due to piracy, endemic on virtually all coastlines throughout the late middle ages and certainly nothing new in the 1290s,) and poured troops into the region, prompting the Gascon War of 1294-1303. Edward lost the war and along with it the capital Bordeaux and the major part of Aquitaine. However, through fierce defence and counter-attacking on

¹⁶ See *The Gascon Rolls Project* website: <http://www.gasconrolls.org/index.html> (accessed 30/4/11.) As an indicator of the significance of this project, see M. Burrows, 'The Publication of The Gascon Rolls by the British and French Governments, Considered as a New Element in English History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (New Series)*, 6 (1892), 109-124 – this article detailed why it was so important for the Rolls to be published 119 years ago; and only now is it about to happen. I must express my sincerest thanks to Dr Simon Harris of the University of Liverpool, lead researcher of the project, for kindly sending me a preview.

the part of Edward's forces, the English remained in occupation of the area around Bayonne in the south, and the fortresses of Bourq and Blaye on the Gironde River to the north. Fighting ceased in 1297, but only after the disastrous French defeat on their concurrent front against the Flemings at Courtrai was a peace treaty concluded in 1303, heralding the withdrawal of French troops from the duchy.¹⁷ For a period of around nine years then, Edward I's territory in Gascony was a fraction of what it was before and what it was after the conflict. King Edward was immensely anxious to hold onto this fraction, however, and the documents of the period reveal just how he managed to do so.

The first priority when war broke out was to get a military force out into Gascony, at the very least to protect Bayonne, Bourq and Blaye. The records show how Edward spared little expense in hiring Englishmen to get out there: he offered tax breaks, debt relief and sometimes even land for anyone who went out on his service, from whatever social background.¹⁸ Even if a noble's knight or a father's son went out to Gascony, the whole house could expect rewards.¹⁹ The government clearly had a problem convincing people to go - perhaps this isn't surprising considering the sporadic violence of the war; some people opted to give their sons land for life before they left, clearly not expecting to return.²⁰ In many cases this was probably just as well, as lands left unattended at home were subject to frequent plundering by

¹⁷ Labarge, *Gascony*, 75.

¹⁸ E.g. *CCR 1288-96*, 368, 375, 456, 459, 465; *CCR 1296-1302*, 52, 83.

¹⁹ *CCR 1288-96*, 391, 432; *CCR 1296-1302*, 32.

²⁰ *CPR 1292-1301*, 169. Even Edmund, the king's brother, sought reassurance that if he died in Gascony, his heirs would be paid debts due to him by the exchequer – *CPR 1292-1301*, 156.

outlaws.²¹ Other incentives offered by the government included pardons for criminals in return for service – there are a very large number of such pardons issued by the Chancery during the period, some even for murderers.²²

Having scrambled an army by any means possible, Edward was just as determined to nourish it properly, which wasn't easy, even after the end of hostilities in 1297. As Gascony was a net food importer anyway under peaceful circumstances, there was nowhere near enough food from the remnants of Plantagenet territory to provide for both the local population and an English army, so the government had to take measures in the form of financial subsidies, food shipments from England, and licenses for purveyance in the countryside around Bayonne in order to meet the demand.²³ At times the situation was clearly desperate: in April 1302 the Chancery sent an unusually frank and threatening letter to the sheriff of Essex, ordering him to send out grain immediately:

[T]he king greatly needs corn now for the maintenance of his men...[t]he sheriff is enjoined not to neglect this as he loves the king's honour and would wish to avoid his wrath.²⁴

²¹ *CPR 1292-1301*, 114-115, 216, 234. In the case of one unfortunate Elias de Hauvill, the breaking into of his manor and the robbing of his goods was perpetrated not by outlaws, but by his own wife. Amice de Hauvill seems to have felt that the provisions her husband had left her whilst he was away in Gascony were not sufficient for her maintenance – the sheriff of Northampton was given the unenviable task of expelling her from the house. *CCR 1288-96*, 518.

²² For the pardon of murderers, see *CPR 1292-1301*, 246, 420.

²³ *CCR 1288-96*, 489; *CCR 1296-1302*, 5, 84, 103-6, 506, 521, 524; *CPR 1292-1301*, 398; *CPR 1301-07*, 44, 64; *Syllabus*, 124. See *CPR 1301-07*, 35 for an order to assist in the purveyance of grain, wine and cider to feed the local castles.

²⁴ *CCR 1296-1302*, 524.

Once Edward had proved militarily that he had every intention of holding onto his remaining Gascon territories - however small and at whatever cost - he wasted little time in making sure they were governable by making Bayonne his new administrative centre. Historians who have shown no hesitation in declaring how much more important Bordeaux was than any other city in Plantagenet Gascony have rarely noted how during the Gascon War the importance of Bayonne to the Plantagenet regime rose tremendously as the existing Bordeaux administration disappeared entirely. When looking through the Chancery records of the period, all letters to Bordeaux suddenly stop being written; replaced by several hundred entries relating to Bayonne. The traditional offices of the seneschal of Gascony and the constable of Bordeaux disappeared with the capital, only to return with the French withdrawal of 1303. The seneschal was replaced by a King's Lieutenant – an office firstly held by Edmund the king's brother and then after his death by John de Hastings - and the constable by an established king's clerk, Thomas de Cantebrug.²⁵ King's Lieutenants were considerably more powerful than seneschals, as they technically held all the authority of the king-duke in Gascony - this was a textbook example of a regime under threat installing a more autocratic leadership structure.

Edward I and his temporary regime were highly successful at holding onto the remaining Plantagenet territories, as well as maintaining the loyalty of the local nobility and populace. This was both largely due to the unpopularity of the French occupiers, (whose brutality, administrative carelessness and economic incompetence did them no favours)²⁶ as well as to the attractive policies of Edward I, which we can

²⁵ *CPR 1292-1301*, 247.

²⁶ Vale, *Angevin Legacy*, 215-223. Economically speaking, the French were not at all helped by their inability to capture the English fortresses at Bourg and Blaye on the Gironde, which completely blocked off the vital Bordeaux wine trade.

call decidedly “pro-Gascon,” or more particularly, “pro-Bayonnais.” The most important of these was the thorough repayment of debts by the English crown to the Bayonnais nobles and merchants who had lent Edward considerable sums to fight the war. From 1297 until the end of his reign, Edward was absolutely determined to repay his debts to the Gascons before those of anyone else, including even his major Italian creditors, the Frescobaldis.²⁷ This seems all the more generous when it is considered that by 1299, Edward’s finances looked as if they were on the verge of a crisis similar to one suffered earlier in 1294 – when the Riccardi were expelled from England, leaving Edward with no foreign creditors until the Frescobaldis arrived in 1297.²⁸ This willingness to put his Gascon subjects first - and the bankers second - showed more than anything else just how committed Edward was to his French possessions.

When Edward II came to the throne in 1307 (with the lost Plantagenet territory in Gascony now fully restored,) he quickly reversed his father’s policy of paying off the Gascons before the bankers: he ordered the bailiff of Southampton to pay only the Frescobaldis out of its wool customs, and to cease paying Gascons (who had been assigned by Edward I the customs of Southampton as their specific means of repayment.)²⁹ It is unclear what sort of reaction this prompted from the Crown’s Gascon creditors (one can’t imagine it was very positive,) however fourteen months later Edward reversed the order to Southampton, having decided to make Amerigo Frescobaldi the constable of Bordeaux so he could pay himself out of the Gascon

²⁷ There survives a document which explicitly states to the Frescobaldis this surely controversial policy, which potentially could have left Edward without overseas financial backers for years. In it the Chancery orders the Frescobaldis to collect the customs on wool in the British Isles only once Gascon merchants had had their debts satisfied by them. The letter was dated in April 1301, and this remained official policy until the accession of Edward II. *CPR 1292-1301*, 586.

²⁸ M. Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1990), 402-3, 522.

²⁹ *CCR 1307-1313*, 37.

treasury's customs instead.³⁰ One way or another then, under Edward II it was clear that the Gascons were going to have to pay for the war of 1294-1303, a stark reversal of the policy of Edward I.

The episode of the Frescobaldis in Gascony was not a happy one for anyone concerned. They were viewed with deep suspicion, not only because they were so obviously put there by Edward merely to pay themselves, but also because of their links with that most despised of all early fourteenth century lords, Peter de Gaveston. The English high nobility were far from comfortable with the Frescobaldi society being in such close proximity to Bernard Cailhau, a Bordeaux faction leader and the nephew of Gaveston.³¹ They therefore took the opportunity of the famous Ordinances of 1311, which imposed limitations on the king's power, to order the arrest of the Frescobaldis in Gascony (on the charges of failing to account properly and of debasing the coinage,) and to expel the whole society from the realm, the Crown's debts to them unpaid.³² Rather astonishingly perhaps, two English defaults in two decades did not deter yet another Italian banker, this time Anthony de Pessagno of Genoa, from filling the Frescobaldis' shoes and taking on the mantle of financing Edward II's government. Once more, in order to recoup his debts, Edward sent the banker to Gascony in September 1317 - this time in the office of seneschal of Gascony, supposedly a position more protected from corruption than the constable of

³⁰ *CCR 1307-1313*, 168. In these early years Edward II showed every sign of deference towards his bankers; the Chancery made it clear in this second letter to the collectors of the wool custom in Southampton that Edward only reversed the order 'with the assent of the merchants of the Frescobaldi.' There seems little doubt as to who was in control of the king's financial arrangements at the time. For the appointment of Frescobaldi as constable of Bordeaux, and their explicit rights to recoup their debts from the Gascon treasury, see *CPR 1307-1313*, 234, 278.

³¹ Labarge, *Gascony*, 103-4.

³² *CFR 1307-1319*, 96, 107. Although it is unclear whether the Frescobaldis were guilty at the time of the Ordinances, as soon as Amerigo heard the news that he was to be dismissed as constable of Bordeaux he tried unsuccessfully to steal as much money and wine from the duchy as possible. It was for this reason that the society was expelled from the Plantagenet realm altogether. Labarge, *Gascony*, 104.

Bordeaux as it did not have direct access to the Gascon coffers.³³ However, de Pessagno seems to have been a more honest financier than he was a seneschal; he was dismissed twelve months later for having forged king's documents to the Papal court.³⁴

This use of the Gascon treasury to pay off his bankers, and the willingness to appoint such financiers to high office there, goes some way to suggest that to Edward II, Gascony was viewed primarily as a source of revenue for the English Crown. Edward was not afraid to call on the Gascon nobility to provide food, finance and arms to fight the Scots either (wars which could never have resulted in any benefit to Gascony,) particularly during and after the years of the Great Famine (1315-1317,) which didn't affect Gascony.³⁵ This is more evidence that Edward was determined that Gascony should offer its resources to the rest of the Plantagenet Empire in return for the Crown's periodic military assistance. The tragic irony of this policy is that when it came down to it, Edward failed to deliver protection to the Gascons when they most needed it on the outbreak of the War of Saint-Sardos, the second French invasion in three decades.

The War of Saint-Sardos was very different in character to the Gascon War of 1294-1303, even though its fundamental causes were much the same: this time the short term pretext for French invasion was in retaliation against a rogue Gascon lord who

³³ De Pessagno's mission to Gascony seems to have been primarily twofold: firstly to recoup debts of 11,000 l. and secondly to use his influence to borrow another 20,000 l. from the Gascon nobility for the Crown. TNA C 61/32 m. 17 (20 September 1317, 3 October 1317); TNA C 61/32 m. 14 (4 November 1317).

³⁴ TNA C 61/32 m. 5 (23 October 1318); TNA C 61/32 m. 3d (27 January 1319). It may be that the real reasons behind de Pessagno's dismissal lay with his unpopularity with Countess Margaret of Foix and other Gascon nobles. The Chancery wrote a letter to Foix in October 1318 assuring her that Pessagno had been revoked of the powers to borrow from the Gascon nobility. He was dismissed by November, yet it was not until January 1319 that he was actually arrested for the alleged forgery.

³⁵ CPR 1313-17, 478; CPR 1321-4, 94; *Syllabus*, 189, 215, 216, 219.

had sacked a new French *bastide* within Plantagenet territory, and who appeared to be supported by the English seneschal of Gascony – the real underlying reasons were, of course, the constitutional tensions arising over appeals to the Parlement de Paris and issues of homage. The key reason it was a very different war was because Edward II did not fight back – or at least, he didn't send out any troops to support the Gascon garrison, who actually did remarkably well considering their lack of royal support. In fact, had Edward got an effective force out to Gascony of the same kind his father sent in 1294, all the evidence suggests that he might well have scored something of a decisive victory over the French, as the Gascon resistance was fierce due to the memories of the awful French administration last time (especially in Bordeaux, which in 1324 held for the Plantagenets, unlike in 1294 when it capitulated) and the French armies were in a comparative state of disarray. As it was, Edward sued for peace as soon as he could (and by sending his queen to negotiate with Charles, he ultimately lost her loyalty, and with her return at the head of a military force in 1326, his crown) and the resulting truce diminished his territory by around half.³⁶

The Administration of Aquitaine

Having established that Edward II was much less passionate about defending Gascony's welfare both militarily and financially than was Edward I (even during a time of comparative fiscal strength,) in what sort of state then was the Gascon administration during this time of royal antipathy towards the duchy? For if Edward was not willing to oversee the affairs of Gascony himself – which is hardly surprising, as the domestic strife at home and the war with Scotland was intense - the local

³⁶ Vale, *Angevin Legacy*, 232-44.

government needed to be able to. Before investigating the complex problems facing the Gascon administration at this time however, it is worth just briefly clarifying its structure. As has already been discussed, although the King of France was legally supreme and was technically the sovereign lord of Aquitaine (as it was a part of France,) for all executive purposes the King of England was at the very top. His dialogue with the duchy took place through the same Westminster governmental offices that dealt with English affairs, namely the Chancery and the Exchequer, of which the Chancery had a special Gascon wing, dealing with the various petitions and other bureaucracy which came its way. In the duchy itself, power was exercised by the seneschal of Gascony and its finances controlled by the constable of Bordeaux – both of these officials were normally, though not always, Englishmen with a track record of service. Below these two figures were various sub-seneschals and sub-treasurers of the Gascon regions (or *sénéchausées*;) so for example, the Agenais had its own seneschal and treasurer, who were accountable to the seneschal of Gascony and the constable of Bordeaux respectively. Below this level, each *sénéchausée* was administered by an unquantifiable number of clerks, provosts, judges, sergeants, keepers of castles, and *bayles* (chief administrative officers of small towns or villages.)³⁷ As will become clear below, the imprecise and unregulated nature of some of these lower level jobs were a cause of considerable confusion and frustration to those in the upper tiers of power at the time.

Meanwhile, there was already more than enough irregularity in the higher Gascon offices to cause considerable political instability. Edward II appointed nineteen new

³⁷ The French king sometimes caused problems by insisting that these lesser seneschals were of equal rank as the seneschal of Gascony; thereby causing appeals from these *sénéchausées* to bypass the seneschal of Gascony and go straight to the Parlement de Paris. P. Chaplais, 'The Chancery of Guyenne' in J. C. Davies (ed.), *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Oxford, 1957). , 65-69.

seneschals of Gascony in as many years, and thirteen constables of Bordeaux.³⁸ Exactly why Edward felt the need to rotate his Gascon officials in this way is unclear, except in the few cases when we know the cause was allegedly corrupt activity, as it was in the cases of Frescobaldi and de Pessagno above. However, the majority of seneschals and constables were moved to other posts in England, not sacked outright, and rarely were reasons written down for the change in personnel. This turnover rate of high officials points towards a failure - to use a modern political catchphrase - to maintain a "strong and stable government." The instability was exacerbated by the requirement of the seneschal to conduct an oath-taking tour of the duchy as soon as he had taken office. As the chief assistant to the seneschal of Gascony put it in 1319:

When [the seneschal] has gained knowledge of the country and the people and ought to remain to serve the king and the people better [in order] to reform the country and put it in a better state, then, Sire, he is taken away.³⁹

At the lower level, it is revealing to analyse the attempts of the single seneschal who had enough time in Gascony to begin to understand its problems (as well as the only seneschal who was a native,) Amaury de Craon (1313-16, 1320-22,) to improve the state of the duchy's government through instituting ordinances of reform. There were two sets of ordinances which de Craon was largely responsible for. The first was instituted when King Edward visited Amiens to pay a belated homage to Philip V in July 1320 - the publication of these Ordinances coincided with the re-appointment of

³⁸ Tout, *Place*, 193-4.

³⁹ Labarge, *Gascony*, 103.

de Craon as seneschal, heavily suggesting that he was involved in their formation.⁴⁰ The second set were instituted in Pontefract in February 1323, after they had been discussed at length at York in July 1322, three months after de Craon handed over the *sénéchausée* to Fulk Lestrangle and had come to England. In this instance it is certain the de Craon was involved in their formation, as he was sent out from Pontefract with a copy of the Ordinances and the power to enforce them.⁴¹

The Pontefract Ordinances were fundamentally procedural in their nature: they dealt with issues such as who should have the power to appoint sub-seneschals and treasurers, and who should have use of the Gascon seal. The earlier Amiens Ordinances, on the other hand, attempted to deal with some of the real, pressing problems facing the duchy's administration.⁴² The preamble states the primary reason for the issuing of the Ordinances: that 'officials...of the king in the duchy behave badly and inflict much harm on the king's subjects, while others usurp or ignore the king's laws.'⁴³ The first ordinance goes on to dismiss all officials from their posts 'without delay,' save those who had been granted their offices for life. Such an ordinance, following such an introduction, points towards a major crisis of confidence in the entire Plantagenet administration in Gascony. The second ordinance invites practically anyone who wishes to testify against any of these officials to make a complaint to the seneschal, with the promise of justice attached. Already then, the document is an extraordinarily reforming one, and must have seemed revolutionary to Gascons at the time.

⁴⁰ TNA C 61/33 m. 7 (22nd July 1320).

⁴¹ TNA C 61/35 (8th February 1323).

⁴² It seems rather odd, therefore, that considerable space has been given over by the historical field to the nature of the Pontefract Ordinances, whereas the Amiens Ordinances have virtually never been discussed. Chaplais, 'Chancery,' 70, 79-80; Labarge, *Gascony*, 106; Tout, *Place*, 201-2.

⁴³ For a full copy of the Ordinances of Amiens, see appendix.

In the final six ordinances, there are clues as to why the first two might have been so draconian. There seems to have been a serious problem with officials holding more than one office or *baylie* at a time, leading to the delegation of office to proxies not appointed by Bordeaux. Another problem was that people were holding the offices of *scribania* (the administrative clerk of a local area) without even being literate. The final ordinance alludes to there being an inordinate number of serjeants in the duchy, and orders for these positions to be cut in number. Ordinances five and seven hint at widespread corruption amongst all these lower offices. All in all then, a rather chaotic picture of the lower levels of administration is portrayed – in fact the evidence suggests that Edward and his higher officials were not at all sure of how many people worked for them in the duchy, and what all these people were actually doing, or even meant to be doing.

No doubt for some unfortunate “administrators,” the Ordinances of Amiens spelt the end of a comfortable and easy existence at the expense of the king-duke. However, issuing these ordinances was a far easier task for Edward and de Craon than it was to enforce them. By the time of the Pontefract Ordinances of February 1323, little headway seems to have been made; hence the attachment of the Amiens Ordinances to the Pontefract ones, and in fact, a separate re-issue in August of that year, three years after the originals.⁴⁴ In part, this was due to the logistical problems of inquiring into corruption allegations, and indeed of who was eligible to be dismissed under the Ordinances (at least two cases emerged when an official who had been granted office for life, exempt from the summary dismissals under the first Ordinance, was wrongly

⁴⁴ TNA C 61/35 (8th February 1323; 8th August 1323).

sacked by de Craon.)⁴⁵ However, it was also always inevitable that such drastic reforms could never be fully carried out quickly, as some of these officials, if not most of them, were genuinely needed and not as easily replaceable as might first have been assumed.

There were a number of underlying reasons why the Gascon administration was in the mess that it was in; though for most of them it could be said that they were as much symptomatic of weak government as they were causal. Vale has shown how Gascony during the reign of Edward II was riddled with factional conflict amongst the mercantile classes and private wars among the nobility, and how the seneschals showed themselves to be powerless to prevent it.⁴⁶ Both of these problems, however, were not confined either to Edward II's reign or to Gascony as a region: civil strife was at times worse in Bristol than it was in Bordeaux and private war was common in the marcher lands in both Wales and Ireland.⁴⁷ Yet the conflicts within Gascon society did have one crucial, extra dimension to them: the involvement of France and its increasing willingness to exploit such divisions.

The ever-increasing number of appeals made by Gascon nobles and citizens to the Parlement de Paris, and the willingness of the Parlement to overturn decisions of the seneschal of Gascony gave different groups more of an incentive to take positions on pro-English or pro-French lines. Historians have highlighted how these appeals undermined the position of not just the seneschal of Gascony and his judges, but also

⁴⁵ TNA C 61/33 m. 1d (24th May 1321).

⁴⁶ Vale, *Angevin Legacy*, 112-39, 160-174.

⁴⁷ An obvious case in point is the English Civil War of 1321-22, which grew out of feuds between Welsh marcher lords – Phillips, *Edward II*, 364-369, 373-397. For the Bristol rebellion, in which factionalism had its part to play, see E. A. Fuller, 'The Tallage of 6 Edward II., and the Bristol Rebellion', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 19 (1894/95), 171-189.

the status of King Edward himself and the English Parliament as the dispensers of justice.⁴⁸ The culture of appeals to the Parlement de Paris no doubt encouraged powerful lords such as Armanieu d'Albret to lean towards the French politically, and even in d'Albret's case to rebel against Edward during the War of Saint-Sardos.⁴⁹ The same was true in terms of the intensely polarised politics of Bordeaux, which was at times paralysed during Edward's reign due to a long running and high profile appeal in response to the execution of a faction member.⁵⁰ The French themselves felt their influence in the duchy growing, so much so that from around the time of Philip V's accession in 1316 onwards, the number of cases reported to Westminster concerning abuses by French officials started rising at an alarming rate.⁵¹

A not altogether separate problem was the border between Aquitaine and the rest of France, in that it was very fluid and was often difficult to define as a result of the various wars and boundary changes which had taken place since the Treaty of Montreuil in 1259.⁵² This frequently led to minor territorial disputes, which in a few cases caused considerable aggravation, the most obvious example in the case of the War of Saint-Sardos. The administrative confusion of all the boundary changes and the appeals to Parlement was great enough that a Gascon Register and a Gascon Calendar were compiled in Bordeaux; documents charting the ownership of all the land in the duchy, and the details of all the processes and treaties conducted with the

⁴⁸ Although it was not strictly constitutional, G. Pépin has shown how sometimes Gascon petitions and appeals were considered by the English Parliament; the king having chosen to let Parliament, and not himself and his Chancery adjudicate. G. Pépin, 'Petitions from Gascony: Testimony of a Special Relationship' in W. M. Ormrod, G. Dodd and A. Musson (eds.), *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* (Woodbridge, 2009) 124-129.

⁴⁹ Vale, *Angevin Legacy*, 240-1.

⁵⁰ J. A. Kicklighter, 'English Bordeaux in conflict: the execution of Pierre Vigier de la Rouselle and its aftermath, 1312-24' *Journal of Medieval History* 9, i, 1-14.

⁵¹ *Syllabus*, 193, 194, 197.

⁵² For a detailed account of these treaties and processes, see Cuttino, *English Diplomatic Administration*, 62-99.

French over the previous decades – these were large and rather innovative archival projects for the time.⁵³

In terms of the role of the seneschal of Gascony; it seems that too much was expected of him. He was, despite Edward I's reforms which tried to limit the seneschal's external involvement, still directly or indirectly too tied up in affairs in Paris and Avignon to be an effective governor in Bordeaux – and as has already been mentioned, the obligatory oath-taking tours took away from time spent running the duchy. The constable, meanwhile, was expected to return to Westminster once per year to account for the duchy's finances – another policy of Edward I's, who was trying to control corruption. Well intentioned though this was, it does seem to have been an inefficient means of accounting, and as the cases of Frescobaldi and de Pessagno suggest, probably didn't do much to control corruption either.⁵⁴ On Westminster's involvement in general, it is perhaps telling in the very existence of the Gascon Rolls, and the section of the Chancery that was responsible for them, that the governmental machine in Bordeaux could have been considerably more devolved and therefore efficient. An enormous amount of bureaucracy came Westminster's way, a lot of which arguably could have been better and more quickly dealt with by the regional administration. The Gascon Rolls testify to a huge number of tiny local affairs routinely being decided upon by the central government of England.⁵⁵ Orders were in fact issued by Edward II to try to stop so much work coming in from Gascony, and yet the seneschals kept sending in requests for confirmation of their

⁵³ *Gascon Register A (series of 1318-1319)*, eds. G. P. Cuttino and J.-P. Trabut-Cussac, 3 Vols. (Oxford, 1975); *The Gascon Calendar of 1322*, ed. G.P. Cuttino, Camden Third Series, LXX (1949). These archival projects have been identified as the major precedents for the great calendaring of Exchequer documents in Westminster under Walter Stapeldon in the 1320s. M. Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church under Edward II: Walter Stapeldon, Treasurer of England* (Cambridge, 1983), 167-8.

⁵⁴ Labarge, *Gascony*, 56-58.

⁵⁵ TNA C 61/32, 33 35-38.

decisions, and locals kept on sending their petitions to the king; in this latter regard a dominant factor no doubt was the widespread mistrust of the regional administration.⁵⁶

Conclusion – Gascony: An Impossible Inheritance?

This dissertation has largely reflected the traditional historical view of Edward II's rule of Gascony as being a fundamentally weak one, and has also shown how his attitude towards the Gascons was rather ambivalent, particularly when compared to that of his remarkably pro-Gascon, hard-fisted father, Edward I. However, before this picture can honestly be attributed to the two kings' rule of the duchy, several points need to be borne in mind. The first, rather simple point is that Edward I lost the vast majority of his Gascon possessions in 1294, and with it the support of his capital city, Bordeaux. It is certainly true that through an enormous effort to send out a fighting force and to ensure the loyalty of Bayonne and the powerful southern Gascon nobility by means of a remarkably liberal use of financial incentives, Edward I hung on to a vital foothold in France. However the fact remains that it was only the French defeat against Flanders at the Battle of Courtrai in 1302, heralding their subsequent withdrawal from Aquitaine in 1303, that saved Edward I dying having suffered a colossal loss of territory. Had the French king been able to remain in occupation of the duchy for some years into the less militarily able Edward II's reign, it is quite possible that Bayonne, Bourg and Blaye would have eventually fallen and Edward I's

⁵⁶ Chaplais, 'Chancery', 63-4.

historical reputation would now be a more tarnished one, with his son receiving a more sympathetic reception.

The second problematic issue with any view that regards Edward II's reign as weak or, indeed, as a failure, is that during his reign the Gascon economy flourished. Despite the political turmoil and poor leadership of the period, the duchy's wine growers and merchants still turned over an immensely profitable trade.⁵⁷ Of course, it could be argued that this was hardly a difficult task, as the English thirst for wine was seemingly unquenchable, and all that was needed was a means of export that was not too prohibited by high taxes. The entrepreneurship of the merchants of Bordeaux and the sailors of Bayonne was long established, and doesn't seem to have been deterred by Edward II's less generous monetary policy towards them in comparison with his father's. It is possible, therefore, to view Edward II's banker-friendly financial policy in Gascony as actually rather a sensible one, as he realised that the merchants of Gascony would continue selling their wines in great volume anyway, thereby contributing to the prosperity of the region and to the Gascon treasury's coffers. The disposable wealth available to the king in Bordeaux, meanwhile, was very convenient for paying off the Crown's debts to the bankers, especially during a time of domestic strife and expensive war in Scotland.

The third, most complex, problem faced by the proponent of royal weakness in the duchy of Aquitaine is that it is very difficult to get to the heart of why this weakness existed, and even harder to establish how far Edward II and his Westminster government were actually responsible for it. Many problems which Edward faced

⁵⁷ Labarge, *Gascony*, 78-91.

were either inherent in the system of his father, or were the result of external factors. First and foremost, it must be remembered that Edward II faced intense domestic opposition from among the English nobility for virtually the entire duration of his reign, as well as a long, bloody war in Scotland. Although Edward's ancestors were French and Bordeaux was the largest city in the Empire, there is no doubt that Edward II's primary responsibilities lay in England and the British Isles. Edward had neither the time nor the political unity at home to be able to spend long periods in Gascony like his father Edward I did, and nor did he have the political and military capabilities and ambitions of his son, Edward III, who launched the Hundred Years War in 1337. By 1324 Edward had effectively deferred power to the Despenser family, who were so concerned with keeping their strong grip on the king and on their tremendous wealth in England that the future of Gascony meant little to them; hence the lack of English military support to the Gascon garrison during the War of Saint-Sardos.

At the same time as circumstances in England made any direct governance of Gascony impossible for Edward, the French Crown caused serious and constant problems for the regional administration in Bordeaux, as it had done for many years before Edward II's time. War was always an imminent possibility due to the frequent demands for homage and because of the unstable nature of the borders, but even in times when the threat of violence was not quite so ominous, the influence of France was greatly felt through the Parlement de Paris, and in particular the opportunities this institution's appellate court status gave pro-French Gascon nobles and factions to undermine Edward II's authority, whilst providing legal incentives for others to do so. In this way, the private wars of the nobility within Gascony and the violent

factionalism of the merchant and civic classes of Bordeaux, whilst still driven primarily by material self-interest, took on an extra nationalist dimension.

The problems faced from within Gascony, meanwhile, were for the most part inherent and deep-seated - not just amongst the noble and the mercantile classes, but crucially, within the existing administrative system. Corruption was common, and administrative inefficiency was ingrained. However much Westminster wished to play a *laissez-faire* role in the day to day affairs of Gascony, it continually found itself forced by the perceived and actual weakness of the duchy's own government to make decisions that it was not best placed to make. In the lower tiers of the Gascon administration, there was a serious lack of coherency and considerable abuses of office, exacerbated by the unregulated and endemic appointment of inappropriate officials to wrong types of job. When Edward II and his seneschal, Amaury de Craon, tried to institute a major reform of the lower levels of the Gascon government in 1320, they perhaps rather predictably found that the problems of the structural status quo, with all its vested interests attached, were far harder to uproot than they were to identify.

The above points about Edward I's comparative fortune and the prosperity of the duchy of Aquitaine during Edward II's reign despite these inherent internal and external problems faced by Gascony's administration cannot, however, mask the overall fact that Edward II's rule was largely an ineffective one, and could have been better managed. By sending the Frescobaldis and Anthony de Pessagno to Bordeaux so that they could pay themselves from its treasury, Edward was inadvertently fostering the culture of corruption in that city, and in the case of Amerigo de

Frescobaldi, actually ended up losing his major financier as a result. His inexplicable habit of changing seneschals and constables was undoubtedly damaging to the stability of the region, and seriously hindered his chances of ever bringing about administrative reform. Most crucially of all, however, Edward II and his Despenser government failed to adequately support their still remarkably loyal and resilient Gascon subjects when war came in 1324, meaning that at the time of Edward's deposition in January 1327, Plantagenet territory and influence in South West France was considerably weaker than it was at his accession in 1307. Whilst it was never likely then, that Edward II would find a way to solve all Gascony's problems and preside over a period of political stability in the region, it must also be held true that he did not help himself in this regard, and that in fact, his rather ambivalent attitude towards the duchy ended up damaging the Plantagenets' overall standing in France.

Appendix - The Ordinances of Amiens, 1320.¹

7 August. Westminster. For the king, concerning the observance of ordinances.

Order to the seneschal of Gascony and the constable of Bordeaux to hold and observe and put into execution the following ordinances made for the reform of the state of the duchy, and for the peace of the king's subjects there, made by the advice of the king's council, which have been made in response to many complaints of various men that have alleged that many officials, bailiffs and ministers of the king in the duchy behave badly and inflict much harm on the king's subjects, while others usurp or ignore the king's laws:

1. all ministers and officials who hold their offices or baylies under the seneschal and constable, other than for terms of life, should be removed without delay, and others put in their place;
2. the seneschal and constable or those deputed to do so should inquire with diligence into the conduct of all the officials, bayles and ministers, and should hear the complaints of all those who wish to complain about them, and do full and speedy justice for the king and complainants; and those officers who are found to be suitable and faithful should be restored to their office and bayle, or to another place just as is expedient; and others who are insufficient should be removed from office in perpetuity;
3. that no official or minister, however suitable, should hold more than one office or baylie, unless the office or baylie is small and close by and can be done by one man, and the seneschal and council have considered it expedient for the king;
4. that each person holding his office or bayle in the duchy, should reside in his baylie, and execute his office in person;
5. whomsoever holds office of baylies or other remuneration in those parts, if they have letters from the king, they will gain nothing by virtue of the letters, unless express mention of the previous office or remuneration in those letters;
6. that no-one should hold the office of scribanie in the duchy unless they are sufficiently literate to exercise that office and reside in the office, and are able to answer for it to the king;
7. that those who receive a baylie or office from the constable of Bordeaux for a certain person, should not grant the office to others for a greater payment;
8. because many complaints have been sent to the king that his subjects in the duchy on account of the excessive number of serjeants in the same duchy are much aggrieved, the seneschal, by the advice of the council in those parts, should restrict their number, so that the king and his subjects are better served.

By K. and C.

¹ TNA, C 61/33 m. 5 – translated by staff of the Gascon Rolls Project at King's College London, the University of Liverpool and the University of Oxford.

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