

# The Archives of Gascony Under English Rule

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THE official who had custody of the archives in Gascony while it was an English possession was the Constable of Bordeaux, the chief financial officer of the duchy. At the London Parliament held after Easter 1293 Edward I ordered that each successive constable render yearly his accounts at the Exchequer, there to be heard by the treasurer and barons.<sup>1</sup> Such is the origin of the enrolled accounts of the constables of Bordeaux, to be found in the Public Record Office on the Pipe Rolls (E372) and Foreign Accounts (E364). It was the practice of each constable to list, toward the end of his account, under the rubric *staurum mortuum*, the material goods in the castle of L'Ombrière at Bordeaux for which he was accountable. These included the archives. The last of these lists is that of Edward Hull, whose account covers the period from Michaelmas 1446 to June 24, 1451:

Item, in the exchequer of the said castle of Bordeaux, a book of *Sporleys* covered in green that begins IN NOMINE DOMINI AMEN; another book of

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<sup>1</sup> *Rotuli parliamentorum*, i. 98 no. 11.

patents covered in green that begins HENRICUS DEI GRACIA; two books covered in black, one beginning SOLUTO MATRIMONIO and the other, TOUTZ CEUX QUI CESTES LETTRES; one book called *Code*, which begins IN NOMINE DOMINI JHESU CHRISTI AMEN; one complete book that begins RECOGNICIONES FEUDORUM; one other book of laws that begins INCIPIT LIBELLUS DE ORDINE JUDICIORUM; one other book without cover that begins ASSIDUIS POSTULACIONIBUS ME; one book covered with green that begins CUM TOCIUS NOSTRE REI PUBLICAE; one small book covered with black that begins BELLA PER EMATHIOS; one book of ordinances that begins ACTUM FUT; one book without cover that begins INCIPIT LIBER MORBORUM; one book "A", which begins on the first folio IN ISTO [MS., *Inquisito*] PRIMO LIBRO; one book "B", which begins on the second folio DE HOMAGIO; one book "C", which begins on the second folio QUALITER; one book "D", which begins on the second folio DE INQUISITIS; certain quires of a certain book of laws; one book on which people swear to abide by customs; nineteen other large books of paper . . .

Then at the end Hull's attorney adds that on June 24, 1451, the enemy, the King of France, "with certain of his accomplices" seized the castle and all its contents, the city of Bordeaux, and the duchy "through sieges and subjugations"; hence "the same former constable stands to be exonerated for all precious objects whatsoever and for all the aforesaid objects, stores, and instruments whatsoever." And the treasurer and barons of the Exchequer are so directed by writ under the privy seal.<sup>2</sup>

So the end. This was before the fall of Castillon. Two years later Bordeaux and Aquitaine were to be permanently lost to the English. It is thus not inappropriate that Hull's archives should have included a copy of Lucan's *Civil War* (*Bella per Emathios*). But we can ignore Lucan and the law books that Hull's attorney mentions and Gilbert the Englishman's *Compendium Medicinæ* (*Liber Morborum*, written in the midthirteenth century)<sup>3</sup> and concern ourselves with the others. These take us back to the reign of Edward I—or rather to the Lord Edward—where the story of Gascon archives really begins.

A distinction must be made between records preserved in Gascony and those preserved by what we should now call the Home Government. The former were products of the local administration and were probably more numerous than their counterparts at Westminster and in the Tower. There was already a "keeper of

<sup>2</sup> Exchequer L.T.R. Foreign Accounts 91.

<sup>3</sup> A. de Poorter, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la bibliothèque publique de la ville de Bruges* (Paris, 1934), ii, no. 469. I owe the reference to my colleague, Francis S. Benjamin, Jr.

the rolls" in Gascony by 1284,<sup>4</sup> and the Gascon ordinances of Edward I in 1289 must have resulted in a considerable bulk of records. The constable, for example, was to "have another faithful and suitable clerk for whom he is willing to answer who shall be continually in the same castle [of L'Ombrière] to write papers and rolls pertaining to the office of the aforesaid constabulary." Again, it is ordered that besides "there be in all bailiwicks a scribe of bailiwicks, a public notary." There were also records of as-sizes, judges of appeal, auditors of cases, the constable's controller, receivers, collectors of customs, and bailiffs—in short, the same sorts of documents now to be found in the Public Record Office.<sup>5</sup>

But what the Gascon archives really contained at this time can only be guessed at, because so far as the Duchy of Aquitaine is concerned the Gascon War of 1294–97 had as cataclysmic an effect as did the French Revolution on all local archives. Robert Leisseth, the English constable at Bordeaux at the time, faced with the possible loss of the city, sent the records first to a house of the Friars Preachers in Bordeaux and then to England for safe-keeping. These were "transcripts of ancient registers of feudal recognitions and of charters and a great many other documents" by which the King's Council in Gascony "was accustomed to inform itself concerning lands and ancient laws, liberties, and conditions of the country."<sup>6</sup> But the crew of the ship in which they were being transported, because they had not been paid their wages, dumped the whole lot in the house of the White Friars on the island of Oléron and went their way. Soon afterwards—shortly after March 22, 1294—the French took the island, plundered the friary, and captured the records. Apparently only one of the registers was ever recovered, and this was "a book with a black cover, containing part of the fees and dues of the lord king and duke in that duchy of Aquitaine, in which book are contained 118 written folios and 5 blank folios."<sup>7</sup> Pierre Aimeri, Constable of Bordeaux, bought this book from an esquire of Oléron about 1302 for 15 *livres tournois*. This is the first of Hull's "two books covered in black" and has just been reconstituted, though not yet published, by J.-P. Trabut-Cussac. It is to be identified with Liber *H*, later found in the *Chambre des Comptes* in Paris but now lost.

<sup>4</sup> *The Gascon Calendar of 1322*, no. 194.

<sup>5</sup> G. P. Cuttino, ed., *Gascon Register A (Series of 1318–1319)*, typescript, no. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Diplomatic Documents, Chancery, 27/14, fo. 3v, printed in *Speculum*, 17: 81 (1942).

<sup>7</sup> Exchequer Accounts 160/1, m. 3.

Little else survived. In 1310 John Salmon, Bishop of Norwich, and Jean de Bretagne, Earl Richmond, made an extended inquiry into the state of Gascony. One of their commissions was "to set up a public archive,"<sup>8</sup> and the mangled report submitted to them listing the 140 documents found in the castle of Bordeaux bears eloquent testimony to the appalling state of the archives.<sup>9</sup> Most of these refer to the Lord Edward's sojourns in Gascony in 1254-55 and in 1261. In connection with the same inquiry Jean Guittard, controller, reported to the earl that no ancient registers of homages and dues and no extents were to be found in the castle later than about the year 1303. He suggested that a new extent be made and that the results be incorporated into two books, one to be kept in England and the other in Bordeaux.<sup>10</sup>

The lack of archives in Gascony severely hampered the King's Council there as well as the English commissioners appointed to treat with the French at Périgueux in 1311. As a result of a petition by Master Guillaume de Cazes in July 1315, on behalf of that council, action was initiated by the Government in England to remedy the deficiency. Between November 29, 1318, and March 6, 1319, Master John Hildesle and 14 other clerks, copying documents in the Wardrobe and the Exchequer, amassed a total of 991 folios and 16 *pargamena*. These 144 quires were handed over to William Montague, the newly appointed seneschal, who took them with him when he left for Bordeaux in March 1319. They were not to remain there long. So many errors and defects were discovered in them that on November 24, 1319, they were ordered to be returned to England for correction against the originals. Once back in London, they were deposited in the Wardrobe, where they were bound into five volumes covered with green leather and numbered *A* through *E*. Only one has survived. It ultimately found its way into the collection of that manuscript thief, Sir Robert Cotton, and is in the British Museum cataloged as MS. Julius E. i.

Growing out of this series of registers was another project, Walter Stapeldon's scheme for a complete classifying and cataloging of the archives of the Exchequer and the Wardrobe. Two volumes represent the fruits of this undertaking: one bearing his name, which was not concerned with Gascony, and the other, compiled by clerks working under Henry of Canterbury between

<sup>8</sup> *The Gascon Calendar of 1322*, no. 217.

<sup>9</sup> *Gascon Register A*, no. 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Gascon Register A*, no. 13.

1320 and 1322, a calendar of documents pertaining to Gascony. It contains 2,099 entries, including the registers mentioned above, and is an index of most of the Gascon documents then available in England. A copy of the calendar compiled by Henry's clerks was later sent to Bordeaux and is first listed in the account of Bernard Angevin, which runs from March 28, 1427, to October 21, 1431.<sup>11</sup> His successor, Walter Colles, also mentions it in his first account (October 21, 1431–Michaelmas 1435), but had to answer for it as missing in his second (Michaelmas 1435–August 6, 1439).<sup>12</sup> This copy has presumably disappeared.

What incident or petition led to the second series of registers is not known, any more than are the circumstances or conditions of the undertaking. We know only that between July 12, 1354, and January 30, 1355, Master Andrew Ufford and a staff of clerks copied four of the registers compiled in 1318–19. They were bound in boiled red leather and lettered *A* through *D*. Shortly afterwards they were at Bordeaux. John Streatley, constable from April 4, 1354, to September 20, 1361, listed them in his account; and they are the same as those listed by Edward Hull. Some time after 1468 they were transferred to the *Chambre des Comptes* in Paris. Only one, *Liber B*, has survived. This found its way, shortly after 1600, into the library of the dukes of Brunswick, where it is cataloged as Wolfenbüttel MS. 2311. It is a volume of feudal recognitions and was edited by Charles Bémont in 1914, but he identified it incorrectly. The three others were dispersed or lost in the fire of 1737, but not until Baluze and other savants had managed to make extracts from them.

Thus, of the original 1318–19 series of five registers, two have survived: *A*, the original, and *B*, a copy of the original made in 1354–55. There is no trace of *C*, and there are no extracts made later from it. *Liber D* fared better: there exist a table and an analysis of the 1354–55 copy of it; and it is to be hoped that M. Trabut-Cussac will undertake a reconstruction of it. It contained the results of the inquest made by the Bishop of Norwich and the Earl of Richmond in 1310–11, referred to above. *Liber E* also has presumably left no trace. But of the five, two are available and a third can be made so. What this means for materials for the history of the Duchy of Aquitaine can be suggested by pointing out that the typescript alone of Register *A* runs to 1,245

<sup>11</sup> Exchequer L.T.R. Foreign Accounts 67, m. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Exchequer L.T.R. Foreign Accounts 70 and 75.

pages, incorporating 346 documents relating to almost every phase of Gascon history from 1027 to 1318.

These registers can be supplemented by two other items from Hull's list. His "book of patents covered in green" can be identified with Latin MS. 9134 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, which was published by H. Barckhausen as tome 16 (1878) of the *Archives Historiques du Département de la Gironde* under the title "Chartularium Henrici V. et Henrici VI. regum Angliae." It was once in Colbert's library. It is not, however, a cartulary but rather a register begun by the constable of Bordeaux at the beginning of Henry VI's reign, to keep a record, as they appeared, of important acts affecting the administration of the duchy.<sup>13</sup> Hull's other black book that began TOUTZ CEUX QUI CESTES LETTRES was compiled between 1382 and 1423. It, too, found its way to the Chambre des Comptes, where it was known as Liber *F*. It contains feudal recognitions from 1273 to 1274 and an abridged version of homages done to the Black Prince in 1363-64. A table of contents of it was made in the seventeenth century. Using this as a point of departure, M. Trabut-Cussac has reconstituted and published it as *Le Livre des hommages d'Aquitaine* (Bordeaux, 1959).

Hull's inventory, of course, represents only a list of what was at Bordeaux in 1451; it is not an index to the archives as they existed throughout English rule in the duchy. Quite a few documents can be found listed in the accounts of his predecessors that are not recorded by Hull. They appear for a while and then drop out of sight. There was, for example, "a paper book bound in red in which are contained the *facta* of Gascony pertaining to the king," which appears on the accounts from 1354 to 1387. It may have become part of the archives of the King of Navarre. Some records may have been returned to England. The most likely explanation of their disappearance is suggested in letters of Edward III dated at Clarendon on December 3, 1331, addressed to the seneschal and constable, ordering that in the future officials on leaving office must surrender to the constable by indenture "registers, papers, and other memoranda in any way touching their offices," which they had been accustomed in the past to take

<sup>13</sup> But see the Issue Rolls 675, Easter 4 Hen VI (17 July 1426): "Willelmo Hill, uni clericorum de cancellaria regis, in denariis sibi liberatis per jus proprium de regardo speciali pro scriptura registri omnium provinciarum Burdegale et Vasconie ac cujusdam alterius libri de fidelitate et serviciis eorumdem dominiorum in thesauria regis remanentis ad salvo ibidem custodiendum pro commodo ipsius domini regis per consideracionem thesaurarii et camerariorum de scaccario—c s."

with them as their own property.<sup>14</sup> This regulation must have been difficult to enforce; and unfortunately there was no Hyde Park Library or Truman Library in those days, nor was there any disposition to create one.

Even so, now that so much has been done towards reconstituting the Gascon archives, we find ourselves with an *embarras de richesses*, for in addition to these we have available the resources of local French archives, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Archives Nationales, and, much more important, the Public Record Office and the British Museum. The history of Gascony under English rule can now, and really for the first time, be written.

<sup>14</sup> Rotuli Vasconie 43, m. 3. At the same time it was ordered that the office of the *prévôté* of L'Ombrière be committed to an Englishman.

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