
The Beginning of Royal Government in Biterrois

An interpretation based on the records of the 1247 *enquête*

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0. Introduction

Louis IX's *enquête* conducted in the year of 1247 was designed to investigate the misdeeds of royal officials, and the *enquêteurs*'s reports about these cases in themselves reveal the impact of royal government down at the village level. The records of the 1247 *enquête* provide a rich source for the study of social and institutional history in France.¹ Some of the records clearly illustrate the humblest level of the royal government, showing the relationship between the governors and the governed people on an everyday, personal level. For most of the places in France, the thirteenth century was a period when the expanding royal government made its presence felt for the first time. By analyzing the records of the 1247 *enquête*, it is possible to describe this expanding process in some detail.² The aim of this paper is to comprehend and visualize the beginning of royal government in Biterrois at the village level, by examining the records of 1247 *enquête*.³

The royal government in Bas-Languedoc, in which Biterrois is located, began with the Albigensian Crusade led by Louis VIII in 1226, following that by Simon de Montfort in 1209. After that, Bas-Languedoc was divided into the eastern *sénéchaussée* of Beaucaire-Nîmes and the western *sénéchaussée* of Carcassonne-Béziers. In the *sénéchaussée* of Carcassonne-Béziers, a *sénéchal* was established at Carcassonne as the head of the *sénéchaussée*, and a *viguier* was instituted at Béziers. The *viguier* was assisted by a *juge* and a *sous-viguier*, and they composed the *curia* of Béziers. The royal administration of Biterrois operated under the aegis of the *curia*. Under the supervision of the *curia*, the *bayles* were responsible for the villages and the *châtelains* were placed in some important fortifications.⁴ Then, how did the royal officials actually govern this region in the initial stage of royal government: “simple repression” or “complex

1 The records of the 1247 *enquête* were published by Delisle: L. Delisle, ed., *Les enquêtes administratives du règne de Saint Louis (Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France, XXIV)*, Paris, 1904; repr., Farnborough, 1967. (Hereafter designated as *RHGF, XXIV*)

2 This paper is inspired by the study of Bartlett: R. Bartlett, “The impact of royal government in the French Ardennes: the evidence of the 1247 *enquête*,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 7, 1981.

3 The primary sources I have used are the following: *Querimoniae biterrensium pars prior anno 1247 (RHGF, XXIV, pp. 319–358)*; *Querimoniae biterrensium pars posterior anno 1247 (RHGF, XXIV, pp. 359–385)*. (Hereafter designated as QBI; QBII)

4 A. R. Friedlander, *The administration of the seneschalsy of Carcassonne: Personnel and structure of royal provincial government in France, 1226–1320*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, pp. 25–50.

reciprocity”⁵ In the following sections, by observing the exactions committed by royal officials against the inhabitants in the records of the *enquêteurs*, I will try to give some light on the relationship of the royal officials (governors) and the inhabitants (the governed people) in the early stage of royal government (1226–1247) at the village level.

1. Background Information

Before entering directly into an analysis, we should have a brief look at this region.

In Biterrois, the phenomenon of *incastellamento* occurred between 1080 and 1150. Around 1150, the *probi homines castri*, about 20 local elites who had substantial property, appeared in each *castrum*, that is, in each village. At the end of the twelfth century, they began to be differentiated from the seigneur and the chevaliers of the village, and they became the representatives of the inhabitants, leading the self-government of the community (*consulat* etc.). Generally, the chevaliers did not participate in the self-government of the community and the clergy were excluded from the community members.⁶

The seigneurs stood above this local village world. The great princes of the realm, the viscounts of Béziers, do not appear to have exerted much direct influence, and a number of medium and small seigneurs coexisted as the masters of each village. As the divided succession weakened and impoverished the medium and small seigneurs, they often came to own a village jointly as co-seigneurs.

From this we can form an image of the villages in Biterrois in the thirteenth century as in the following schema:

A seigneur or co-seigneurs–community of inhabitants directed by local elites

In the face of the Albigensian Crusade, the seigneurs in Biterrois did not make any collective resistance; this fact disclosed the absence of solidarity or cohesion and rather it implied the opportunism. In fact, most of the seigneurs in Biterrois accepted the change of their “overlord” and managed to subsist as “vassals.” In other words, there were few seigneurs who did rebel against Simon de Montfort or Louis VIII and thus were eliminated.⁷ In contrast to this, the seigneurs around Carcassonne cooperated to resist and their collective revolt ended in failure, followed by the settlements of northerners. On the other hand, the seigneurs around Beaucaire and Nîmes did not rebel, and their elimination and the northerners’ settlement could not be found.

5 On a model of simple repression, see M. Bourin, “Le massacre de 1209,” in *Histoire de Béziers*, Toulouse, 1986, p. 110: De fait, cette jeune administration royale, parfois par méconnaissance des usages locaux, plus souvent par esprit de pillage, soumit la région et la ville à une coupe réglée. ... Mais ces administrations locales de la première époque n’étaient pas tous des vautours nordiques venus piller le riche pays du vicomte Trencavel. Parmi les administrateurs dont se plaignent les habitants, dans les enquêtes menées au milieu du siècle, il y avait autant d’indigènes que de Français. ...

On a model of complex reciprocity, see M. Bourin, “L’administration locale dans la viguerie de Béziers au début du XIV^e siècle,” in *L’administration locale et le pouvoir central en France et en Russie. Comité français des sciences historiques*, Paris, 1990, pp. 107–114: Les “bayles” royaux sont à la charnière de la machine administrative royale et de la population. De leur efficacité, de leur fidélité, de leur zèle, dépend l’efficacité de l’administration royale. ... Les bayles ... constituent un milieu homogène, très comparable d’ailleurs à celui des consuls et syndics, chargés par leurs concitoyens de l’administration communale. ... le bayle est l’intermédiaire entre les “hauts fonctionnaires” de la sénéchaussée et les populations locales. ... Au vrai, plus que la diligence même des bayles, c’est la communauté globale d’intérêts entre le roi, son agent et les populations qui font l’efficacité de cette. ... Bien que les plus hautes fonctions en soient confiées à des étrangers à la région, l’administration locale, dans la viguerie de Béziers, fonctionne par la volonté des populations locales.

6 M. Bourin, *Villages médiévaux en Bas-Languedoc: Genèse d’une sociabilité, Xe–XIV^e siècle*, I, Paris, 1987, pp. 254–272, 311–330; Idem, *Villages médiévaux en Bas-Languedoc: Genèse d’une sociabilité, Xe–XIV^e siècle*, II, Paris, 1987, pp. 145–202.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 115–128.

2. Analysis

Now let us turn to the analysis of the records. In this section, I will take up the relationship of royal officials (governors) and inhabitants (the governed) at the village level, by observing the exactions committed by royal officials against the inhabitants.

Table 1 shows the quantity of the exactions committed by royal officials against the inhabitants of each village in Biterrois between 1226 and 1247.⁸ If we direct our attention to “the exactions against the whole of the village,” these villages can be grouped into two groups:

Group X: No exactions made against the whole of the village (Caux, Cessenon, Pézenas, Servian)

Group Y: One or more exactions made against the whole of the village (Roujan, Tourbes, Colombières, Nezignan, Boujan, Espondeilhan, Puissalicon, Montblanc, St-Geniès)

From this difference, we can understand that in Group X the royal officials managed to govern the inhabitants of the villages with some good care.

This interpretation is corroborated by some instances: favor to the inhabitants of the villages in Group X; and disfavor to the inhabitants of the villages in Group Y. We can recognize the existence of favor given to the inhabitants of the villages in Group X in the following cases:

- 1) When the people of Tourbes recaptured the cattle which had been robbed of by the people of Servian, the *sénéchal* Baucelin de Linas imposed a fine not upon the people of Servian but upon the people of Tourbes.⁹
- 2) When the people of Espondeilhan were in litigation with the people of Servian, the *curia* of Béziers imposed 200 sol. upon the people of Espondeilhan as the court costs, against the custom of the *curia*. Furthermore, the members of the *curia* dubiously visited Servian and contacted the people of Servian during the litigation.¹⁰
- 3) When P. Faber, an inhabitant of Tourbes, won a lawsuit against the three inhabitants of Servian, the *sénéchal* Jean d’Escrennes didn’t want to force them to pay a fine of 16 l.¹¹
- 4) The *sénéchal* Jean de Fricampis abolished the notaries public in Puissalicon and Roujan, and allotted these posts to Pierre, an inhabitant of Caux.¹²

No example like these is found about the inhabitants of the villages in Group Y. In addition, we can recognize the existence of disfavor given to the inhabitants of the villages in Group Y in the following case:

- 5) As the jurisdiction over movables and minor justice moved to Pézenas after 1242, the inhabitants of Roujan had to go to Pézenas when a trouble arose.¹³

No instance like this is found about the inhabitants of the villages in Group X. Then, why did the royal officials govern the inhabitants of the villages in Group X with some considerable care? This can be explained if we turn our attention to the size of the village and to the issue as for whether a seigneur or one of the co-seigneurs was eliminated in the Albigensian Crusade.

⁸ Table 1 is made on the basis of QBI and QBII.

⁹ QBI, 153.

¹⁰ QBI, 136.

¹¹ QBI, 156.

¹² QBI, 151; *RHGF*, XXIV, p. 677, no. 99. (the records of the 1262 *enquête*)

¹³ QBII, 43; *RHGF*, XXIV, p. 677, no. 99. (the records of the 1262 *enquête*)

Table 1: The exactions committed by royal officials against the inhabitants in Biterrois

Village	Sénéchal		Curia of Béziers		Royal officials stationed at the outside village		Royal officials stationed at the village		Size of village	Elimination of a seigneur or one of the co-seigneurs in the Albigensian Crusade	Royal officials stationed at the village
	Against the individuals of the village	Against the whole of the village	Against the individuals of the village	Against the whole of the village	Against the individuals of the village	Against the whole of the village	Against the individuals of the village	Against the individuals of the village			
Caux	1	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	Medium	•	39
Cessenon	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	Medium	•	13
Pézenas	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	Medium	•	7
Servian	6	0	4	0	0	0	6	0	Medium	•	16
Roujan	0	5	7	2 (with sénéchal) 1	23	1	12	1 (with sénéchal) 1	Medium	×	0
Tourbes	3	3	4	5	0	2	8	1 (with viguier) 1	Medium	×	1
Colombières	0	3	9	8	0	0	4	2 (with viguier)	Small	×	0
Nezignan	1	1	0	3	7	2	0	0	Small	×	×
Boujan	0	1	1	0	0	0	1 (with viguier)	0	Small	×	0
Espondeilhan	0	0	2	2	2	1 (with viguier)	0	0	Small	×	×
Puissalicon	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	Small	×	×
Montblanc	1	0	1	3	1	1 (with viguier)	1	3	Small	•	0
St-Geniès	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	Small	•	×

Group X: medium-sized village with its seigneur or one of the co-seigneurs eliminated in the Albigensian Crusade

Group Y: medium-sized village with its seigneur or one of the co-seigneurs not eliminated in the Albigensian Crusade, or small-sized village

We can posit a probable explanation for this. In Biterrois, where most of the seigneurs remained and subsisted, the villages in Group X, which are medium-sized with its seigneur or co-seigneurs eliminated in the Albigensian Crusade, became essential strongholds of royal government. As the community of the inhabitants directed by local elites was not politically ignorable when the royal officials tried to govern the villages in question, they had to devote a certain care to the community of the inhabitants.

The following fact offers sufficient proof for our supposition that the villages in Group X were essential strongholds of royal government:

Group X: Many exactions were committed by the royal officials stationed at the village in question against the inhabitants of the outside villages.

Group Y: Almost no exaction was committed by the royal officials stationed at the village in question against the inhabitants of the outside villages, or no royal official was placed at the village in question.

From this, we can understand that the royal officials stationed at the villages in Group X took the place of eliminated seigneurs and had large powers over the outside villages beyond the village at which they were placed.

As a final illustration, the case of Caux may serve to strengthen and complement the preceding points. We can recognize a harmonious relationship of the royal officials and the inhabitants of Caux (*consulat* of Caux) in the following instances:

- 1) By order of the *viguier* of Béziers, the *bayle* of Caux, P. de Frenè, took “measures for grain (*pogneriae*)” away from the mills of Mougère etc. and made P. Maurannus weigh them in the presence of the consuls of Caux.¹⁴
- 2) The *bayle* of Caux, G. de Valle Congreia, imposed 10 sol. upon the two inhabitants of Roujan. Because they didn’t use “a unit of weight (*mensula*) in Caux” but “a unit of weight in Gabian” for “a measure for grain (*pogneria*)” at the mill of Mougère which they possessed.¹⁵

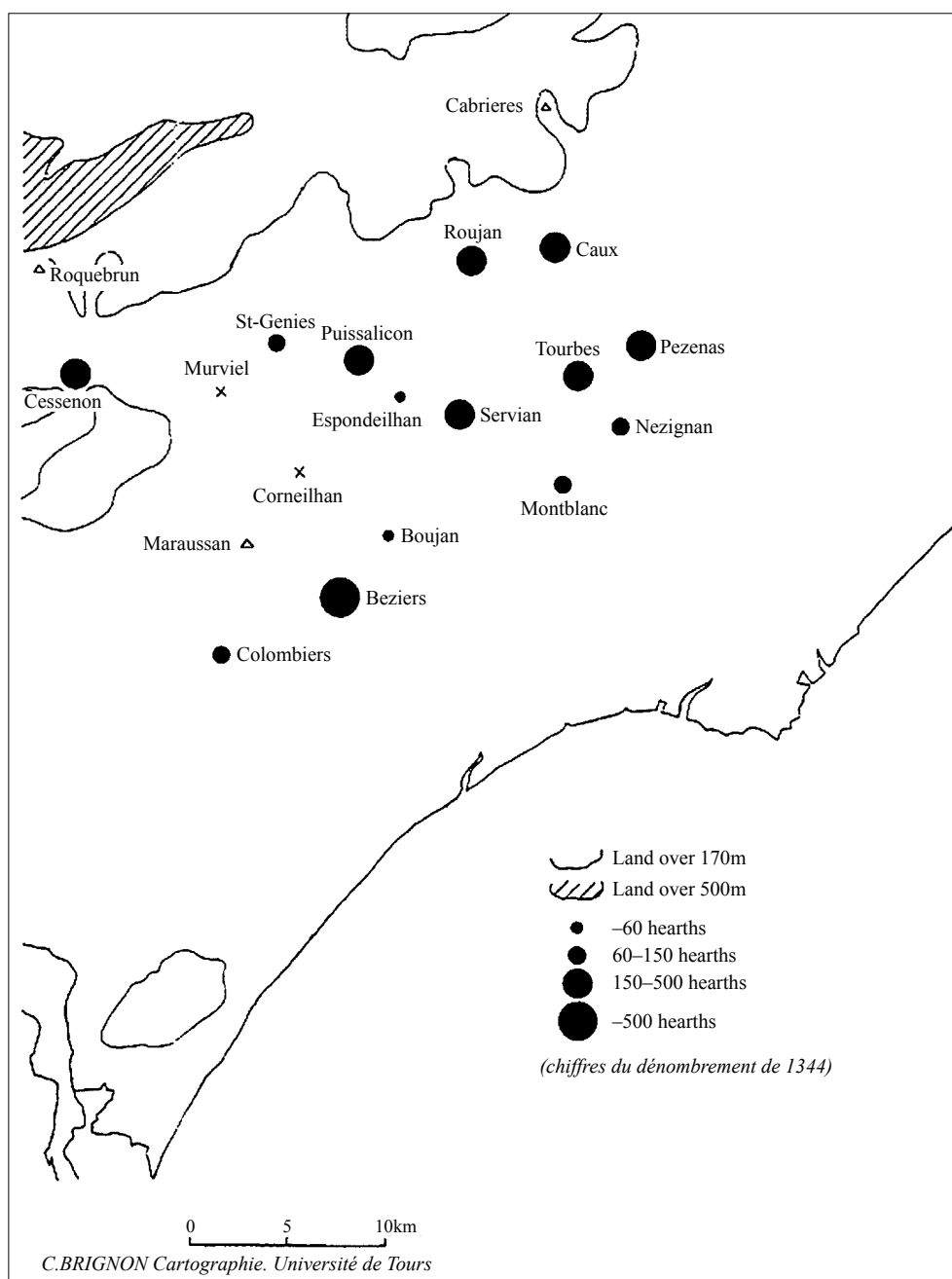
In the early fourteenth century, when the royal government was firmly established, an assignment of the functions about the supervision of the weights and measures was complementary in each village in Biterrois: the surveillance was assigned to *consulat*, the execution to royal officials.¹⁶ This complementary assignment was early realized in Caux in the former half of the thirteenth century.

Furthermore, we can comprehend the active relationship of the royal officials and the inhabitants of Caux in the following examples of the promotion of the inhabitants in Caux from a minor official to a superior one:

¹⁴ QBII, 44.

¹⁵ QBII, 44.

¹⁶ M. Bourin, “L’administration locale dans la viguerie de Béziers au début du XIVème siècle,” in *L’administration locale et le pouvoir central en France et en Russie. Comité français des sciences historiques*, Paris, 1990, p. 111.



Made on the basis of M. Bourin, *Villages médiévaux en Bas-Languedoc: Genèse d'une sociabilité, Xe–XIVe siècle*, II, Paris, 1987, pp. 136, 158.

- 1) Pierre Bedos: the *bayle* of Caux, the *bayle* of Alignan → the *viguier* of Capestang¹⁷
- 2) G. de Cassaignas: the subordinate of the *bayle* of Caux → the *sous-viguier* of Béziers¹⁸

17 QBI, 53, 167; QBII, 34.

18 QBI, 13, 78, 79; QBII, 52, 79, 80; A. R. Friedlander, *op. cit.*, pp. 48, 339.

3. Conclusion

The relationship of royal officials (governors) and inhabitants (the governed) in the beginning of royal government (1226–1247) in Biterrois was neither a simple repression nor a complex reciprocity. The nature of relationship was varied from village to village: there was the kind of village which turned out to be a stronghold of royal government on account of two coincidental conditions, that is, the size of village and the elimination of a seigneur or one of the co-seigneurs in the Albigensian Crusade, whereas there was another kind of village which did not become a stronghold of royal government. The inhabitants of the former kind of village were governed by royal officials with good care. In addition, in a certain case, this kind of village exhibited a cooperative and active relationship working between royal officials and inhabitants.

Indeed the size of village is an important factor, but this difference of the relationship can be interpreted as a consequence of the fact that the political act of seigneurs naturally had a vital significance in the period of political earthquake, and this difference also ought to be interpreted in terms of the particularity of Biterrois, where the seigneurs did not make any collective resistance and betrayed the absence of solidarity or cohesion and the opportunism.

In this paper, I have tried to take a socio-political approach to the royal government at the micro level. This approach will, I hope, throw a new light on the study of royal government in Languedoc.

Supplement: counter-examples

Village	Exactions made against the whole of the village	Size of village	Elimination of a seigneur or one of the co-seigneurs	Exactions made by the royal officials stationed at the village against the outside villages
Maraussan	×	medium	●	×
Roquebrun	×	small	?	4
Cabrières	●	small	●	0
Murviel	×	medium	×	3
Corneilhan	×	medium	×	0

- Maraussan: One of the co-seigneurs in this village sold his seigneurial right of *castrum* to B. Maraussan, and then the king acquired it from him by exchange (QBI, 36). It seems that this village did not become an “active” stronghold of royal government because of the nearness to Béziers.
- Roquebrun: Though this village was small, it seems to have become a stronghold of royal government toward a mountainous district.
- Cabrières: Though this village was small, it is considered to have been a stronghold of royal government (A. R. Friedlander, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 88). The reason why the exactions were made against the whole of the village may be related to the size of village. This village had formerly been subjected to the viscount of Narbonne, and the inhabitants seem to have taken part in the revolt of 1242 (QBI, 86). After the revolt, the inhabitants were banished and not allowed to enter and live in their houses (QBI, 93).
- Murviel: inexplicable
- Corneilhan: inexplicable