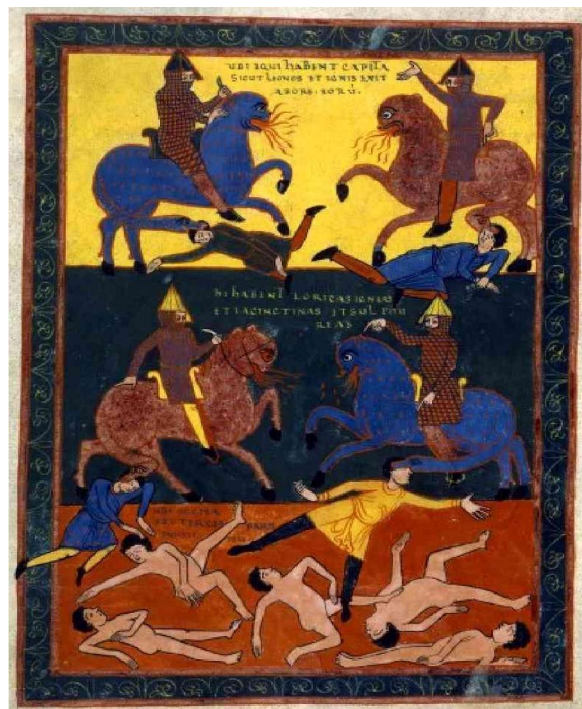


Agots of Gascony and Navarra, *Outcasts of Scandinavian origin?*

Joël Supéry

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Abstract: A millennium ago, communities of outcasts rejected for obscure reasons appeared in Gascony and Navarra. They were called Agots or Cagots. Reasons of such an exclusion have been in discussion for more than 500 years and are still debated today. Genetics may solve this mystery one day, but it won't be that easy: there is still a strong taboo around them. They belong to a dark page of History and nobody –especially Historians- likes dark pages. We believe these Agots could be descendants of Scandinavian colonists. Such a hypothesis has never been considered until then for a simple reason: Norsemen were not supposed to have settled in Gascony.



These warriors who are riding monsters are enemies of Christianity. Their helmets and cuirass design them as warriors of Norse origin. The bodies below are those of their victims, people of Gascony. Beatus Saint Sever, 1070.

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“By this time, the perfidious people of Norsemen, submitted to the Christ in appearance, but not in truth, invaded the maritime shore of Gascony and settled in a large plain called Taller. Guillaume-Sanz waged battle and did such a carnage that still today one sees more bones lying on the ground of this plain than vegetation.” Historia Abbatiae Condomensis.¹

Norsemen defeated at Taller around 982 had been ruling the country for 140 years. Those Scandinavians living in Gascony for six generations marrying local women had become Gascons. Many of them didn't feel like leaving what had become their land. This means that people of Gascony should, at least for a representative part of them, be blond and blue eyed. The first thought to come in mind is: if Gascons with blue eyes were common, then we would know it. Such an argument has never been opposed to reject our theory of a Scandinavian settlement in Gascony. The reason is simple: blue eyed Gascons are quite common, now numerous. The strange fact is that there is a taboo around them.

In 1842, the novelist Elie Berthet is writing: *« He was a tall young blond man, with athletic shapes, but with pale complexion, wet eyed, which revealed timidity in the temper. It was not difficult to recognize in him one of these descendants of Visigoths which race remained pure in Basque countries, among indigenous population which since Middle Age devoted them a mortal hate. »*²

An old song was telling:

Among the people, the Cagot

is famous for being the most beautiful,

*blond hair, white skin and blue eyes.*³

In his novel *Hossegor* (1910), J.H. Rosny evokes the descendants of whalers of Capbreton. *« Degenerated remains of a Germanic people we still call Goths: pale, dirty blond hair, blue eyed, ultimate descendants of Visigoths »*.⁴

In Capbreton, these whalers were known as Gahets, in Biarritz, they were called Agotacs. Most of the time, French authors call them « Cagots ». We won't use that term for it has been so often used that it has today many insulting meanings. The word « Cagot » qualifies a hypocrite with religion or a tramp. We'll use the term Agot.

Agots belonged to a « people » that was also present inland all over Gascony and Navarra in Spain. Called Gahets along the coast from Bayonne to Bordeaux, Capots in Armagnac, Cougots south of Toulouse, Agots, Ladres or Gaffos in Navarra, Cagots anywhere else, these people were not only despised, but also feared. They had to wait 1789 to become equal with other French citizens, but until 1914 it was still a shame to be one of them. The Great War, mixing all Frenchmen in the horror of the trenches proved Agots were brave and

¹ *« En ce temps-là, le peuple perfide des Normands, soumis au Christ en apparence, mais non en réalité, envahit les rivages maritimes de la Gascogne et s'installa dans une grande plaine appelée Taller. Guillaume-Sanz leur livra combat et fit un tel carnage qu'aujourd'hui encore on voit plus d'ossements jonchant le sol de cette plaine que de végétation. »* Historia abbatiae Condomensis in Mussot Goulard, 1996, p.64.

² *« C'était un grand jeune homme blond, aux formes athlétiques, mais au teint blanc, aux yeux humides, qui témoignaient d'une certaine timidité dans la caractère. Il n'était pas difficile de reconnaître en lui un de ces descendants de Visigoths dont la race s'est conservée pure dans les pays basques, au milieu de ces populations indigènes qui depuis le moyen Age lui ont voué une haine Mortelle. »* Elie Berthet, L'Andorre, 1842, p.68.

³ *Parmi tous les gens, le Cagot est réputé pour être le plus beau, Cheveu blond, peau blanche et les yeux bleus .*Porqueres I Gene, 1998.

⁴ Rosny Jeune (1859-1948), *Hossegor*, 1910.

good men who deserved respect and brotherhood. Despise was over. However, even today, descendants of Agots tend to erase their shameful ancestors from their lineage and those who are not have no envy to know why their ancestors segregated these people. Taboo is still strong today. On last year, I was at a summer market in Moliets, a seafront village in the Landes. There was a farmer selling sausages and ham. He was from Hagetmau in Chalosse, a country where Agots were numerous. I began to talk about them. The guy only knew of a street called « rue des Cagots » but didn't know the meaning! His partner kept silent a long time and when he understood I had respect for these outcasts and that my curiosity was not unhealthy, he began to talk about local traditions, his blue eyed friends and woodworking factories in the area, but never mentioning his skilled ancestors...

Agots have been mentioned and studied very early, but never a possible Scandinavian origin has been considered. In 1579, Francois de Belleforest believed them converted Jews. In 1599, Giovanni Botero saw in them abhorred Cathars. In 1613, Florimont de Roemond recognized in them Visigoths. In 1640, Pierre de Marca was convinced they were Saracens. In 1847, Francisque Michel believed them Spanish refugees arrived during the reign of Charlemagne. In 1910, Doctor H.M. Du Fay "demonstrated" they were Leprous. Others suggested they were rejected carpenters (Cursente, 1998) or these famous « cadets de Gascogne » (Guerreau, 1988), those sons who couldn't inherit the farm because of an elder brother and who had to seek for another life somewhere else or remain at the farm as a servant. Incidentally such a Germanic inheritance tradition is quite surprising in the south of France, a supposed country of Roman law.

Recently a genetic study led by a Basque center of research (Martinez Cruz, 2012) revealed a significant proportion of markers IM-223 and IM-253 which are often associated with Nordic origins⁵. Could these Agots be descendants of the men defeated at Taller in 982? Are there social, juridical or historic clues that these Agots –who represented no more than 2% of the population according to Françoise Berriac⁶- could have been Scandinavians in origin ?

There are several clues which can help us to figure out their origin.

No weapons, no dogs, no horse.

Agots had a special status with many interdictions. For instance, Agots couldn't ride horses, have dogs or own any weapon except for a knife which blade had been blunted. Such interdictions suggested a political origin of the segregation: they would have belonged to a people of warriors who had been defeated on the battlefield and were feared. Some believed them descendants of Visigoths who ruled over the country from 412 to their defeat by the Franks in 507. In 1613, Florimond de Raemond (Raemond looks like the Scandinavian name Roemund), member of the parliament of Bordeaux, is writing "*There is great appearance that they are the remnants of the Arian Goths who had been defeated at our doors... and that the victorious left life to some miserable scum, which escaped the fury of the fight to live in different places assigned to them in Guyenne and Languedoc.*" He's adding: "*Anywhere, custom of the country defends them to have weapons or knives that are not blunted. Why such interdictions if not to mark and testify of sedition and rebellion?*"⁷

⁵ Martinez Cruz, Begonia, *Evidence of pre-Roman tribal genetic structure in Basques from uniparentally inherited markers*, PNAS, 2012

⁶ Françoise Berriac, *Une minorité marginale du sud-ouest : les Cagots*. Histoire, économie et société, 1987. Vol.6

⁷ « Il y a grande apparence que ce sont les restes de Goths ariens, qui furent défaits a nos portes... et que le victorieux donna la vie à quelque misérable canaille, qui échappa a la furie du combat, à la charge de se séparer en divers lieux qui leur furent assignés pour leur demeure en Guyenne et en quelques endroits du Languedoc, après avoir abjuré leur hérésie. » p.11 « En

Historian Alexandre Du Mège, in 1846, is sharing this opinion: *“No historic circumstances would prevent us from seeing in the Cagots, or Gothic dogs, in the Agote families of Labour, Soule and Bearn and in the Capots of Armagnac, the hated rests of these Visigoths who dominated the countries neighboring the Pyrenees and who hold during a long time Spain under their yoke.”*⁸

However such an origin was also contested. Most of the Agots were found along the coast and the rivers, Pays Basque and Navarra as if they had come from the sea and were much less numerous around Toulouse and Languedoc, the kingdom of Visigoths. Others objected that Visigoths were respected and certainly not despised. In 1579, Francois de Belleforest is writing: *“Some say they are the remnants of the Goths left in Gascony, but it is bad saying as most of Houses of Aquitaine and Spain, nay the greatest are issued from the Goths.”*⁹

No trade.

Agots were not allowed to trade, even to sell their production at the local market. They were subjected to banishment measures typical of Leprous status. They couldn't walk barefoot, couldn't enter the market except at the end of it, couldn't touch the goods and had to show what they wanted to buy with a freshly cut stick, they had to wear a red piece of tissue on their shoulder for an easy identification. This suggests that they were rejected for sanitary reasons. The fact is that very often a *maladrerie*, a hospital for Leprous, existed in the largest communities of Agots. Leprous people settled among these communities, but it doesn't mean Lepra was the origin of their exclusion.



Agots had to wear a red piece of tissue with the shape of goose foot on their shoulder and often they had to have a sculpted face on the lintel of their main door. This one is from Hagetmau. Some houses still have it, many have erased that mark.

quelques lieux la coustume du pays leur défend de porter armes ny mêmes avoir des cousteaux qui ne soyent émoussez. A quoy sont bonnes ces défenses si ce n'est pour marque et témoignage de sédition et rébellion, compagne certaine et infailible de l'Hérésie ? » Florimont de Roemond in Francisque Michel, p.12.

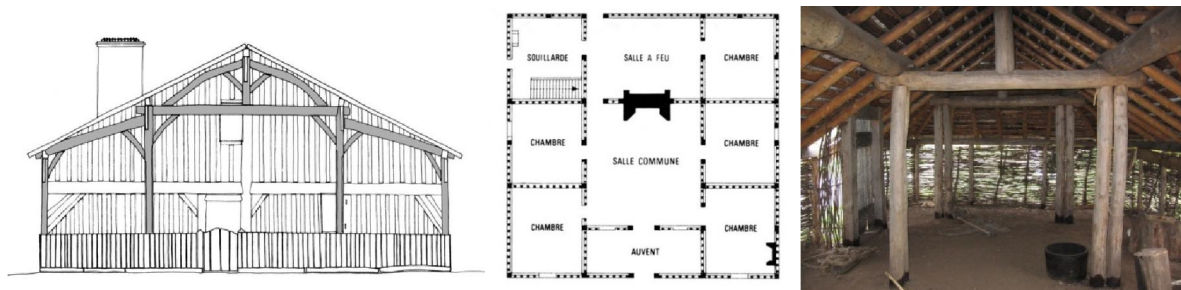
⁸ *« Aucune circonstance historique n'empêcherait de voir dans les Cagots, ou chiens goths dans les familles Agotes du Labour, de la Soule et du Béarn et dans les Capots de l'Armagnac, les restes détestés de ces Visigoths qui... dominèrent dans toutes les contrées limitrophes des Pyrénées et qui tinrent pendant longtemps l'Espagne sous leur joug. .. » Alexandre Du Mège, 1846*

⁹ *« D'autres dient que ce sont les restes des Goths demourez en Gascogne; mais c'est fort mal parle car la plupart des maisons d'Aquitaine et d'Espagne, voire les plus grandes sont issues des Goths, lesquels longtemps avant le Sarrasinesme avoyent receu la religion Catholique pour quitter l'Arrisnisme » Belleforest , 1579.*

Such a commercial banishment could also be a clue of a Scandinavian origin. Norsemen were skilled traders and it is certain that those of Gascony were involved in trade with Spain and the Mediterranean. During the Scandinavian period, Lapurdum the Roman garrison city had become Bayonne, an active port trading with Northern Europe. According to Ibn Kordadbeh¹⁰ weapons, furs, amber and slaves, typical wares sold by Vikings, were traded across the Pyrenees during that period. We also know that oil, salt, wine and millstones were exported toward Northern Europe. It is clear that trade between Spain and Northern Europe developed during the « Viking period » and that Bayonne was the hub of this trade. After his victory, the count of Gascony immediately seized Bayonne expelling Scandinavians chiefs from the mouth of river Adour. He wanted to control this new Eldorado. Victors of Taller may have feared that the defeated Norsemen could regain by trade the power they had lost on the battlefield. Their descendants had to be controlled.

Woodworkers and carpenters.

Agots were famous as skilled woodworkers, boat builders and carpenters. They were in charge of building roofs, frames of houses and barns, bridges, fisheries, mills, docks, barrels and anything that could float. The typical houses of the Landes with their wooden frame were all assembled by Agots. The owner was finishing the work filling the walls with cob. This was the reason why Agots were protected by the nobility. Having Agots among his men was a chance for a lord. We know of the count of Foix, Gaston Phébus, passing contract in 1379 with Agots to build the roof of his château in Montaner. Some say they were in charge of the frame of Notre Dame in Paris. Agots were despised by common people, but protected and respected by the Greats. Even in the Church, low clergy attacked them while high clergy took their defence. In their fight for freedom and Justice, they often called for the parliament, the bishop and even the Pope and most of the time got judgment in their favor.



The structure of traditional houses of Landes and Pays Basque made by Agots is always the same: a long central room with a fire place and bedrooms (two or three) on each side. This is the structure of a skali, except that the beds have been replaced by bedrooms. Another interesting fact, the frame is not triangulated (Mediterranean tradition), but less sophisticated, as in a Viking house and houses of Normandy (see photograph). Houses of the Museum of Marquèze, Landes. See Christian Lassure. http://www.pierreseche.com/grande_lande_auvents.htm. Interesting fact.

This talent for woodworking has been regarded as another proof of their Leprous origin. Wood was a purifying material which cannot transmit any disease. This would have been the reason why Leprous people could work wood. However, we can hardly believe that Leprosy is a gift that provides a natural talent to work wood. Moreover, Agots were not only working

¹⁰ Kordadbeh Ibn. This Persian official wrote around 870 *Le Livre des routes du royaume*. In this work, he's describing cities and routes of the known world. He is mentioning the goods arriving in Saragossa from the Pyrenees: slaves, furs, weapons and amber. Now Franks forbade trade of weapons and limited in a great extent slave trade. These products neglected by the Franks made the fortune of the Vikings. Who else at that time would have ventured to cross Europe ravaged by Norsemen and to defy Frankish order?

wood. They were also making ropes, worked iron, made barrels, carved stones and weaved. Such a diversity of crafts excludes the sanitary explanation. In fact, they were involved in all the works related to storing, transformation and transportation of goods. They seemed to belong to a people with a great culture of handcraft and trade. As were Scandinavians. A Nordic origin would explain much better the clinker built boats of Gascony and Northern Spain than a Leprous origin.



The Pinasse is a traditional boat used for fishing and hunting whale. In the Cathedral of Bayonne, this local merchant ship testifies of the Nordic influences in shipbuilding in Gascony.

We can have the same reflection with the typical “beret béarnais » wrongly called « béret basque”. The beret is made of felt, which is *vadmal*. The other area of production of felt in France was Normandy. Were Leprous people, Cathars, Saracens, Spaniards famous as *vadmal* weavers in Normandy too?

Religion.

Agots could enter the church, but they had a separate entrance, very small, to be sure these tall men and women bend while entering the House of god. They had a special font not to transmit their disease. Often they remained in a corner or behind wooden clays that prevented them from seeing the altar and being seen. In smaller churches, they had to remain outside. The preacher came to give them the Host, but often used a wooden spoon not to touch these people. They had also a separate cemetery.

Before being called Cagots or Agots, they were known as Chrestians or Crestias. This was a pejorative appellation, they were second zone Christians. This name was regarded as another clue in favor of a Visigothic origin. Visigoths were Arianists. Arianism had been condemned as a heresy by the Council of Nicea in 325. It could also fit with Cathars, these Heretics who pretended to be « Parfaits ». The word Crestias could also have qualified “Paupere Christi”, Leprous people. It could also fit with Norsemen.

Historia Abbatiae Condomensis describes the enemies defeated at Taller as « *christianized in appearance but not in truth* » and this same text also states : “ *Among them was a Norseman very strong named Airald who, protected by his cuirass, gave great blows and received some, but without being wounded. Finally, he was captured. His cuirass was removed and a wooden cross was discovered around his neck. This unworthy man was protected by this sacred sign, but as soon as he lost it, he was killed*”.¹¹ Obviously Norsemen

¹¹ « Parmi eux se trouvait un Normand très fort du nom d’Airald qui, protégé par sa cuirasse, portait de grands coups et en recevait de même sans jamais être blessé. On parvint cependant à la faire prisonnier, on lui enleva son armure et l’on s’aperçut alors qu’il portait autour de son cou, l’image de la croix du Seigneur. Cet homme indigne était ainsi protégé par un

of Gascony had tried to enter Christian community, but never managed to become real Christians in the eyes of their enemy. These Crestias, ancestors of Agots, could very well be these Pagans « evangelized in appearance » defeated at Taller in 982.

Chronologic clue.

The first mention of the word Cagot appears in the 14th century, but the word *Christiani* to describe these outcasts appears in *Cartulaire de Lucq* around 1000.

This early mention excludes any later origin.

This excludes Cathar origin. In 1640, Pierre de Marca is writing : Cathars “*began to appear in Languedoc around 1180 and were ruined in 1215 and however Cagots were already known as Christians as soon as the year 1000, as we can see in the Chartulaire de l'abbaye de Lucq and the ancient For de Navarre which was compiled during the reign of Sance Ramires around 1074 is mentioning these people under the name Gaffos, from which came the name Gahet in Gascony, and considering them as ladres is treating them with the same rigor than the For the Béarn*”¹². A Leprous origin is also weakened by such an early mention. Leprous communities appeared around “*maladreries*” founded by the Hospitallers, an order created in 1113, one century after the first appearance of Crestias.

This also weakens few hypothesis of an earlier origin.

Visigoths were defeated in 507 and it would be strange these defeated warriors to be mentioned for the first time as outcasts five centuries later... Same remark for a Saracen origin. Pierre de Marca believes them survivors of the Saracen army defeated near Poitiers by Charles Martel in 732. The fact that outcasts of Muslim origin appear three centuries later would be surprising. If we add the fact these Saracens would have chosen to remain despised for centuries in Christian land rather than to walk few days to reach their Islamic motherland, a Saracen origin doesn't seem serious. If we mention Agots were eating pork, Saracen and Jewish hypothesis have to be rejected. A Spanish origin then? Francisque Michel suggests that these men could have been Christians escaping Moorish Spain at the beginning of the 9th century. The exclusion would be mentioned for the first time two centuries later. An exclusion all the more strange that Christians, victims of Saracens, were brothers and certainly not despicable people. Most of these Christians settled in Languedoc where Agots didn't exist. Such an origin is not logical either.

On their side, Norsemen were defeated in 982 at Taller, near Dax, 20 years before the first mention of Crestias in the *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Lucq*, located 80 km south of Taller. The timing is much more coherent. Chronology suggests clearly that first Agots were defeated Norsemen.

signe sacré, mais dès qu'il le perdit, il fut tué. » *Cartulaire de Condom* in Mussot-Goulard, *Histoire de Gascogne*, PUF, 1996, p.64.

¹² « *Car ceux-ci comencèrent a paraistre en Languedoc environ l'année 1180 et furent ruines l'an 1215 et neanmoins les Cagots estoient reconnus sous le nom de Chrestiens, des l'an mille, ainsi qu'on dans le chartulaire de l'abbaye de Luc; et l'ancien For de Navarre qui fut compile du temps du roi Sance Ramires environ l'an 1074 fait mention de ces gens, sous le nom de Gaffos, d'ou est venu celui des Gahets en Gascogne, et les mettant au rang des ladres, les traite avec la mesme rigueur que le For de Béarn.* » Marca, 1640, p.28-29

Geographic clue.

Place names reveal that Norsemen settled in a very large area corresponding to the kingdom of their ally Pippin II of Aquitaine¹³. Why did Agots only appear in Gascony and Navarra and nowhere else? To tell the truth, people similar to Agots also existed in Brittany where they are named Caqueux. They were famous rope makers. Similar people were also found in the Marais Poitevin, south of Nantes, where they were known as Colliberts. The fact is that in Gascony, many Agots lived along rivers and in swampy areas and were making ropes. The problem with Caqueux and Colliberts is that their appearance may be much more tardy. They could have been rejected in imitation of what had happened in Gascony.

Some mentioned the ways to St James to explain Leper hospitals of Gascony and these Agots. But why such people would appear exclusively in Gascony and Navarra and nowhere else in Europe? More than « racism or a sanitary reflex» coming from local population, we believe a political choice decided of the exclusion of these people. A fact confirmed by trade and weapon bans.



These warriors do not look like Frankish warriors, but like Norsemen. Their shield seems to be circular as was the Norse shield. The artist purposely chose to hide the bottom of these shields. In the Beatus, Normand style shield looking like an angel wing seems to be reserved to Christian warriors. From Saint Sever Beatus. .

The fact that Agots appeared in Gascony and Navarra suggests that a common political power decided of their exclusion. Now, Guillaume Sanche who defeated Norsemen at Taller had married with Urraca, queen of Pampelona. We believe this marriage may have been the political cataclysm which provoked the end of Scandinavian domination in Gascony. Since the capture of the king of Pampelona in 858 by Norsemen, Navarra and Norsemen of Gascony had been allied. This marriage provoked a reversal of alliances: Scandinavian rulers of Gascony lost a powerful ally to the count of Gascony who had suddenly become powerful enough to regain his inheritance. The situation of rulers of Gascony was all the more difficult that they had launched a two years expedition in Galicia the previous years which may have weakened their military strength and given the opportunity of a Gascon offensive. Victors of Taller may have decided of the fate of Norsemen of Gascony and Navarra. These Scandinavians were easy to identify. Their eyes, their hair, their height, their skills designed them to the others as being the “survivors”, hated for having plunged Gascony in the night of Paganism for 140 years.

This dissemination area is nonsense if you consider them Cathars, Leprous, Carpenters, Visigoths, Saracens or Spaniards. It becomes logical if you consider them Norsemen.

¹³ See Supéry, *Viking Place names in Aquitaine, a Southern Normandy revealed ?* Academia.edu, 3 décembre 2014

A text in favour of a Scandinavian origin.

Never Agots of Gascony and Navarra have been supposed descendants of Vikings. Only one author, Palassou in 1815 is mentioning: « *It is not likely that their origin comes from Visigoths or the people of the North who ravaged Novempopulania (Roman name of Gascony) around the beginning of the French monarchy.* »¹⁴ Palassou is the first one to imagine a Scandinavian origin for these men, a possibility he rejects immediately. However there are texts which lead clearly to this hypothesis.

In 1640, Pierre de Marca mentions early texts (For de Béarn, For de Navarre and Cartulaire de Lucq). These texts were not written in Languedoc, but in Gascony and Navarre, the kingdoms of “the victors” of Taller less than a century after the battle. A tradition of Ainoa, a Basque village, says Agots were the survivors of a defeated army confirming the intuition of Florimont de Raemond : “*Anywhere, custom of the country defends them to have weapons or knives that are not blunted. Why such interdictions if not to mark and testify of sedition and rebellion ?*”. Belleforest told us they cannot be defeated Visigoths as Visigoths were the founders of the greatest families of Navarra and were respected.

There are not so many “Gothic armies” defeated in Gascony and if you move apart Visigoths, there is only one left. All these texts point toward Norsemen defeated at Taller in 982. Gascony and Navarra were the epicenters of the Scandinavian kingdom of Aquitaine. The Scandinavian ruler of Gascony was the king of Bayonne, as the ruler of Denmark was king of Hedeby, the ruler of Sweden king of Birka and the ruler of Normandy, the count of Rouen. These kings controlled a port, and through it a commercial route. During the Viking period, replacing the Roman Oiasso (Fontarabie-Hondarribia), Bayonne had become the port of Pampelona, the port controlling the route to Spain and the Mediterranean. It had become the heart of the kingdom of Gascony, the area where Norsemen were the most numerous, powerful and dangerous. This is not surprising to discover there the first texts ruling the status of these *outcasts*.

The Scandinavian hypothesis is confirmed by a text never noticed. In 1621, Martin de Viscaye, is writing : « *Around 412, a part of the latter people flooded Aquitaine and Vasconia and committed so much cruelties that the inhabitants of the land rebelled, united their forces and guided by the nobility managed to destroy or chase the Goths, of which only few miserable scums remained not so dangerous. These miserable scums, according to the author, were the first Agotes and he maintains that so is the constant tradition in Béarn and Basse-Navarre.* »¹⁵ This text confirms the tradition of Ainoa, but not only.

This text is capital. Of course, the author is mentioning 412 which is meaning he refers to Visigoths, but there is something strange. He declares these “*people flooded Aquitaine and Vasconia and committed so much cruelties*”. In fact, Visigoths were given Aquitaine Seconde (Bordeaux, Poitou and Charentes) by their Roman allies and there is no sign of any cruelties committed there and we don't see why they would have committed cruelties in Gascony. Then Viscaye adds : « *the inhabitants of the land rebelled, united their forces and guided by*

¹⁴ « *Il ne paraît pas vraisemblable qu'elle tire son origine des Visigoths ni des peuples du Nord qui ravagèrent la Novempopulanie vers le commencement de la monarchie française.* » Palassou, in Francisque Michel p.54

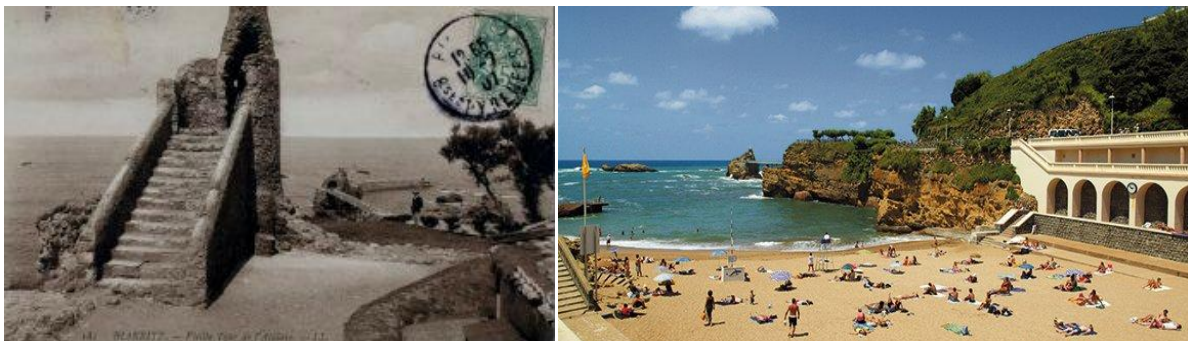
¹⁵ , « *Vers l'an 412, une partie de ce dernier peuple se répandit dans l'Aquitaine et la Vasconie et y exerça tant de cruautés que les premiers habitants du pays se soulevèrent, unirent leurs forces, et guidés par les nobles, parvinrent à détruire ou à chasser les Goths, dont il ne resta parmi eux que quelques misérables, fort peu à redouter. Ces misérables d'après l'auteur, furent les premiers Agotes, et il assure que telle est la tradition constante du Béarn et de la Basse Navarre.* » Viscaye in Francisque Michel, p.17.

the nobility managed to destroy or chase the Goths. » In 507, Visigoths have been defeated at Vouillé, near Poitiers, by a Frankish army led by Clovis, a foreign king and certainly not by « *rebelled inhabitants led by the nobility* ». After that defeat, Visigoths withdrew in Septimania (Languedoc).

On the contrary, Vikings defeated at Taler in 982 were beaten by the count of Gascony and his wife the Queen of Pampelona and the nobility of Périgord and Gascony. This without the help of the king of France who never got involved in the affairs of Gascony after 858. Obviously, Martin of Viscaye is making confusion between Goths of first generation and Goths of second generation. The simple fact that he mentions Béarn and Basse-Navarre, while Visigoths were in Toulouse and Languedoc confirms Martin de Viscaye is making a confusion between Visigoths and Norsemen.

A determining clue: Agots, known as fearless seamen.

Agots were not only remarkable carpenters, but also fearless seamen. In Biarritz and Capbreton, they were hunting whales. If Leprosy could explain in a certain extent woodworking, it cannot explain the love of the sea. Historic epicenter of whale hunting in the Bay of Biscay is Biarritz. This led some people to suggest that whale hunting was a Basque tradition. But, two remarks: first, Biarritz is not a Basque port. Among the twenty reefs surrounding Biarritz, none has a Basque name, all of them have Gascon names. Second, in Biarritz, there were two communities: farmers living around the church two kilometers inland and seamen on the whale hunting port, le Port du Hart. Farmers were Basques, whale hunters were Agotacs, blond and blue eyed Gascons. These Agotacs were living at Gardague, a very Germanic name...



The Humade was the whalers' tower of Biarritz. It was destroyed in 1943 to be replaced by a blockhaus. Whales were taken ashore at the Port Vieux or Port du Hart and cut into pieces of the beach (Right). Whale hunting stopped during the 16th century. No more whales.

Whale hunting in Pays Basque and Gascony has been studied by Pierre Yturbide, Marcel Hérubel and Jean Du Pasquier¹⁶. Vocabulary and techniques are obviously Scandinavian. Yturbide suggested that in the 11th century « Walmanni » (whaler) coming from Normandy followed whales down to the bottom of Bay of Biscaye where whales were giving birth. Interesting hypothesis, but not documented. No text ever mentioned such an arrival of whale hunters from Normandy.

¹⁶ Yturbide, 1918, Herubel, 1931.

Some suggested that Aquitaine may have inherited some of her naval traditions from England. The archeologist Eric Rieth is writing: « *We can wonder if the clink architecture of Medieval “gabarres” and coasters built on the benches of river Gironde and river Garonne has not been influenced in a certain extent by English practices in ship building which were influenced by Scandinavian traditions in Early Middle Age*¹⁷”. Why not whale hunting? For two reasons: first, Aquitaine brought her fleet to England and not the contrary, second, whale hunting was already an old practice when Henri Plantagenêt, husband of Duchess Eleonore of Aquitaine, became king of England in 1154. In his remarkable book, Bernard Saint Jours is writing: « *Compaigne mentions an act according to which every year the abbey of Lahonce would receive a whale taken from those captured at the Port de la Pointe (Capbreton). This donation was granted by the viscount Bertrand who ruled from 1137 to 1170.* »¹⁸ He also mentions another text: « *The oldest chart of rights granted to people of Bayonne is from 1059. This is a bill of Viscount Fortunio Sanche, first hereditary lord mentioned at Bayonne after the occupation by Norsemen. Among concession done to the inhabitants of this town, one sees that the market of Bayonne was declared privileged and exclusive for the selling of whales, tuna fishes, sturgeons, lampreys and other fishes taken in river Gave, river Adour and river Nive until Sorde, Hourgave and Villefranque and along the coast from Capbreton (the river mouth) to Fontarabie (Spain).*”

This mention of the coast is a clear reference to whale hunting and to the traditional *Droit de Varech* of Gascony. Two whales out of three managed to escape their hunters, but wounded, they died at sea and their carcass came back to the coast. The lord owning the coast was a rich man. In Gascony, all the coast from Capbreton to Arcachon belonged to powerful family which members were accused of piracy by the nobility: the Albrets, those who founded Port d’Albret.¹⁹ This text let us believe that whale hunting was a common practice in 1059, one century before the English crown came on the head of Henri Plantagenet.

Some still maintain whale hunting is a traditional practice of locals. A text is mentioning an oil delivery to the abbey of Jumièges, near Rouen, in 670. This would be the proof whale hunting existed before Viking invasions. This is not certain. Whales used to wreck on the beaches and locals may have exploited them without chasing them. To chase whale methodically, you need to have a recurrent outlet, customers who buy quantities of oil. Whale hunting involves an “industrial process” and a strong logistic to deliver oil by sea.

Now, if Basques have their own vocabulary for the coastal sailing, they used a Scandinavian vocabulary when they sailed in high seas²⁰. Basques never had the ability to carry away by boat their oil. Somebody else did and this somebody had a Scandinavian tradition of sailing.

Another history of Agot people.

Across the Ages, Agots were believed to be descendants of Visigoths, Saracens, Spaniards, Cathars, Leprous and even carpenters. What is certain is that the original communities were enriched by several waves of outcasts. We also know that *maladreries* were founded by the knights of the Hospital in these communities. We also know that in Capbreton knights of the

¹⁷ “On est en droit de se demander, dès lors, si l’architecture à clin des gabares et caboteurs médiévaux construits le long des rives de la Gironde ou de la Garonne n’auraient pas été influencée, à un niveau qu’il resterait à déterminer, par les pratiques anglaises de construction navale qui ont subi des influences scandinaves dès le Haut Moyen-Âge.” Rieth, 2002.

¹⁸ Bernard St Jours (1844-1938), *Port d’Albret l’Adour ancien et le littoral des Landes*, 1900.

¹⁹ See Supéry, *Capbreton, Etymologia non grata*, 2013.

²⁰ Erkoreka, Anton, *Los Vikingos en Euskal Herria*, Bilbao, 1995.

Temple had preceded the Hospitallers. All these elements allow us to retrace the History of the Agots of Gascony.

When they were defeated in 982, many Gascons of Scandinavian origin decided to stay in their land. They were condemned to live in communities but not to mix with the others. They were not allowed to marry outside their communities, which were very often rejected in the suburbs of the city but not everywhere. In Capbreton, Biarritz and Bayonne they remained in the heart of the city, the port. This suggests clearly that these Agots were seamen and probably founders of these ports before their exclusion.

When Crusades to Holy Land developed, an order was founded in 1129 to protect Pilgrims going to Jerusalem, the Templars. Rapidly Templars understood that the best way to protect these Pilgrims was to carry them by boat. They became maritime transporters. On the Atlantic side, another pilgrimage was developing; the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella. Templars came on the Atlantic coast to develop transportation by sea. They settled for sure in La Rochelle and Capbreton, the two main ports of Aquitaine. In these ports they discovered communities of seamen. In Capbreton these seamen were considered outcasts and second zone Christians. Templars built their *commanderie* in the port among them. Knights would protect these outcasts and use their skills in woodworking, shipbuilding and seamanship. Everything was getting better for the Crestias of Capbreton. But suddenly their fate changed. By 1312, the order of the Temple, too rich, banker of the king, was dissolute. Templars were arrested, tortured and murdered. Many escaped to Portugal which could benefit of their naval skills and fleets; their *commanderies* in France were seized by the king and given to the Hospitallers. These men did their jobs and installed a Hospital in Capbreton. Gahets de la Punte who were about to enter the Christian community thanks to the Templars, were once again rejected, this time assimilated to Leprous because of the Hospitallers. Hospitallers developed their *commanderies* on the ways to Saint James and when they had to choose a place to build their hospital, they were proposed to build it in the suburbs where Crestias lived. Everywhere, Hospitallers settled among Crestias.

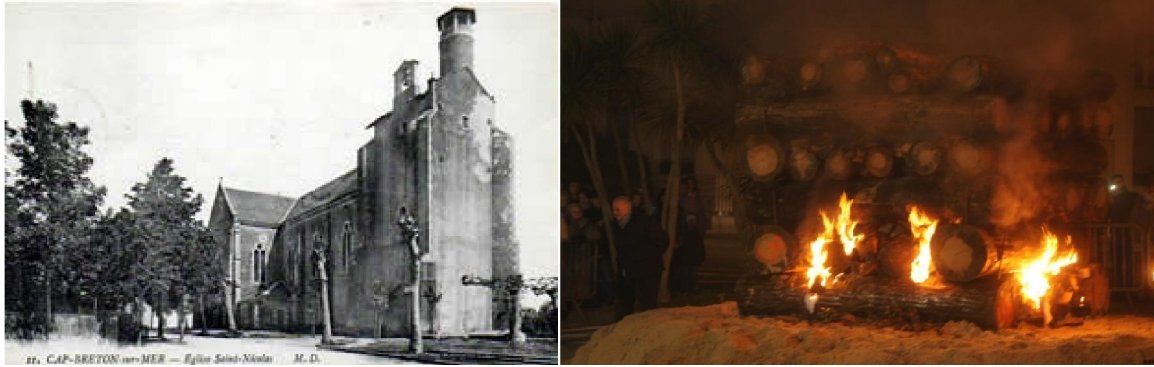
The ways to Santiago de Compostella drained a lot of people, among which many Leprous and sick people. These Leprous came to these Hospitals and settled around. To these communities, probably many outcasts joined across the Ages. Cathars escaping Languedoc, Jews escaping Spain, ancient brigands. This would explain why in some places like in the Val d'Aran or at Ciboure, these outcasts are said brown and rather small. In the 14th century, the term Crestias was no longer convenient to describe these communities of mixed origins and this could explain the appearance of the word Cagot.

Conclusion.

If you consider History (Norsemen ruled over Gascony until their defeat at Taller), texts (Martin of Viscaye indirectly, but clearly suggests a Scandinavian origin), chronology (first Crestias were mentioned 20 years after the battle of Taller), geography (Agots appeared in the common kingdom of the count of Gascony and queen of Pampelona, victors of the battle of Taller), skills (Norsemen were skilled woodworkers, weavers, seamen), bans (no weapons as a clue of their ancient political status, no trade as a clue of their talent in commercial affairs), physical appearance (most of the time they are described as blond, tall and blue eyed) and religion (Crestias were not real Christians in the eyes of others) everything points toward a Nordic origin of Agots.

Now is such an origin possible?

In Capbreton, in December, a wooden tower is erected in front of church Saint Nicolas. After the mass of the 24th, the tower is burnt. This fire commemorates a victory over the Vikings. We believe the tower represents the *maerk* erected by Viking seamen along this sandy coast to mark river mouths²¹. These towers also present in Mimizan (place name Merquedey and Marquedey seem to refer to *maerkhede*, the seamount valley), Contis and probably on other mouths were probably the most spectacular monuments erected by Norsemen and represented their domination over Gascony. Burning the tower at the eve of Christmas symbolized the end of the Pagan night before the rise of Christianity in Gascony



The bell tower of church St Nicolas of Capbreton has always been a seamount to signal the mouth of river Adour. The same type of tower existed in Mimizan until its destruction by a hurricane in 1770. These logs symbolize a tower, la Torrele. This "Torrele" refers to the Norse seamounts, symbol of Scandinavian domination in Gascony.

What is remarkable is that in this port of whalers, using Scandinavian techniques to build boats and hunt whales, using a Scandinavian vocabulary in their everyday life and having a tradition celebrating a victory over Norsemen, Rosny still considered Gahets de la Punte as « *Descendants of Visigoths*. » without even imagining a Scandinavian origin ! At least, Rosny had excuses: he wrote a century ago, he was not a member of the omniscient C.N.R.S and internet didn't exist...

²¹ Supéry, 2005.

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