



MONTAUT

Plan of the bastide of Montaut

XIV century

The foundation of the bastide (fortified village) of Montaut

The first question which comes to mind concerns the existence of the bastide of Montaut.

All the authors¹ and they are numerous, which studied, at the very founding, the creation of the bastides in the XIII and XIV centuries, emphasize their defensive role, which we will further define, for those which are located along the borders. It is the case of Montaut, last village of Béarn, bordering Bigorre, and because of this fact located in a strategic position.

Thus on February 1, 1308, the countess Marguerite de Foix-Béarn, founds the bastide of Montaut at the limits of her territories, bordering Bigorre from where the insecurity could come and which she wanted particularly to supervise. The legend tells that she traced herself with a chalk line the place of the village, giving its dimensions of 62 X 70 meters.

This foundation is attested by a document preserved at the Departmental records of Pau,² which relates to the treaty of *paréage* entered between Marguerite, countess of Foix, viscountess de Béarn and Castelbon and Guilhem Arnaud, abbot of Saint Pée de Geyres *the year of the Lord 1308, with the calendes of February*.

This long document, compiled in ancient Béarnais, appears as an annex in its integral transcription. We will retain the principal elements.

It specifies, among other things, that there would be one fair per year and one market day per week. This would consolidate the point of view of certain authors affirming the presence of a market on the place of our village.

This treaty, if one believes the testimony of Hugues de Laas, abbot of Saint Pée who in fact made a *vidimus* (copy) on December 9, 1359³, would have been concluded between the two partys in reality on January 25, 1301, its application not effective until 7 years later. It related at the same time to Lassun, Montaut, Mosle (Mouscle) and Laber (disappeared village).

It was confirmed on April 18, 1327 by Raymond Arnaud de Bazillac who promised Gaston Fébus to be observer; it was the same way in June 1374.⁴ The countess Marguerite took the new bastide under her immediate jurisdiction and gave it autonomy and an administrative authority exerted by elected jurats. Just as Montaut benefited "For de Morlaas" (ancient capital of Béarn) they carried signs distinctive of their authority, when they returned justice, the *capayrou*, the hood or small pèlerine red pier on their shoulders.^{4b}

The abbot Bonnacazes writes in 1772: "In the past Montaut confronted with Asson. Three districts make it up: Louzun (Lassun), somewhat close to Coarraze (debris of old dwellings as well as the walls of Saint Hilaire and the cemetery). One made there station during the Rogations. In this district there were approximately fifty houses; there remain five or six about it which are still inhabited; the other district

Mourle, close to Saint Pée, where there are seven or eight very old houses. Montaut is the third district. “

These remarks are confirmed by Dubarrat, more than one century later in 1899.⁶

The first inhabitants - the first enumeration.

The first *poblants* (colonists) were probably freed junior-serfs. The settlement was rather slow since with the enumeration of 1385, ordered by Gaston Fébus, counts only 39 fires which only represents a population of approximately 200 inhabitants.

Preserved at the Departmental records⁷ it states, among other things, for each village the name of each inhabited house. It is interesting to recall that at the time, the most populated city of Béarn was Orthez; 436 fires, and that Pau was credited only with 124 fires!

Here is the list montaltoise:

- l'osyau de Johan Poy
- deu crestiaa
- de Arnauton de Lacaze
- de Pe de Porte
- de Menjolet de. de Bere
- de Bernardon d'Ossa
- de Menioo d'Arriu
- d'Amauton de Sent-Poli
- autre hostau deu medix
- l'ostau de Johan dit Esquerre
- d'Arnaut Crabe
- deu Faur
- de Menjolo de Père
- de Guilhem Perer
- de Goalhardet de Germ
- autre hostau davant lo deu diit Meniolo de Pee
- l'hostau de Bernadon d'Arnaut deu Capera
- autre hostau coste deu diit Goalhardet
- I' hostau de Goalhardet de Yerm
- autre hostau coste deu diit Bernadon d'Arnaut Capera
- l'ostau d'Anautolo de Garni
- de Bemat de Soberbiele
- d'Arnaut de Lassus
- de Pee de Yerm
- de Guilhem de Mirebent
- de Guilhem de Cortie
- de Guilhem de Colome
- d'Aramon de Casso
- de Bernade de Casso
- de Bernât Baroo
- deu Barbée
- l'ostau de Bernadon deu Toyar
- deu Caperaa
- de Johan d'Arriu -autre hostau deu dit Berber.

The contents of the paréage (joint sovereignty by two rulers)

Each one of them was given inside the bastide a ground of a determined capacity (see further). External grounds were also allocated to the whole of the community in *the herms of Asson*.^{7b}

On the other hand, each inhabitant was to discharge his quota of taxes, ancestor of our land tax, then the *taille* (a tax on the peasantry), the *taillon* (a tax for military expenditures), as many revenues from taxes fell into the cases of the lord and the abbot of Saint Pée.

To allow communication between its two banks it was necessary to plan the construction of a bridge out of wood on the Gave. We know, according to the files of Lestelle⁸ that this project appeared in the treaty of foundation of 1335, at the time this community acquired the privilege of passage, without being able to affirm the existence of it; its treaty of foundation gave it, indeed, the rights of pasturage on the plateau of Ger.

The bastide's plan, which one will find in the appendix, on which one sees the original squaring still rather clearly provides for two principal arteries (the streets Torte and the Lassun, today) cut at right angles by *carrérots* (alleys), thus forming a certain number of squares or rectangles inside of which each one received his ground.

The bastide, and its inhabitants, as envisaged by For de Morlaas⁹ were committed to be strengthened by surrounding the place with a ditch (*barat*) and a palisade (*pau*) was to be made. At each end of the principal street, two gates, open during the day and closed at night, condemned access. The inhabitants whose ground was next to the palisade had the obligation to maintain it as well as the ditch which preceded it. Gaston III will order, a few years later, that all the community take care of the good state of their palisade.¹⁰

The treaty also provided that the furnaces would belong to the Lord of Béarn; the house of the abbot, from where difficulties came; it had in more 25 days of ground, each one of them, corresponding to 3.300 of our areas.

The central place was drawn to receive eight houses on each side, in small batches: 14 levelling courses (a levelling course is equivalent to 0,46m.) broad by 60 of depth, that is to say a ground of 178 m².¹¹

Founded at the limits of the territory of the Viscount of Béarn in order to survey and to repel the possible incursions coming from Bigorre, the bastide of Montaut was a sort of advanced sentinel.

The reign of Gaston Phoebus

The majority of Gaston Phoebus (1343) and the end of the regency of Aliénor de Comminges in 1345 will bring a complete administrative reorganization to Béarn.

In order to contact its subjects, as is the custom at the beginning of a reign, Gaston, accompanied by his mother, makes a round of homages through Béarn.

He goes to Nay, sits of the "baylie" on January 3, 1344. Montaut had delegated on January 4,¹² a small group of "neighbors": Maeste Domengé, Johan deu Pouey, Johan de Colomé, Bernard de Sobiraa,

Guilhem de Cortie, Ramon de Sent Polii, Ramon d' Abadie, Bernard d'eu Perer, Ramon de Cazanave and Guilhem de la Case. The texts of the homages were consigned in a register by Pierre d'En Per Auger, notary, who belonged to the escort of Fébus.

The text of the homage, almost always are the same as follows: *That one knows that very noble and very powerful lady Madam, Alienor de Comminges, countess of Foix, viscountess de Béarn and of Marsan, mother and testamentary tutor of very noble and powerful lord monseigneur En Gaston, by the grace of God count and Viscount of the aforesaid county and Viscount, of the same monseigneur the count and Viscount by the will and under the authority of the aforesaid the Madam mother and tutor, namely one after the other, posing their right hand on the Holy Gospels of God and the true cross posed on them, swear, that the aforementioned Madam the countess and viscountess and aforesaid tutor for the time of her supervision, and the aforementioned monseigneur the count and Viscount and natural lord and for all the duration of his life, present swore to those of Montaut, for themselves and in the name of all the community of the aforesaid place, appeared as is said by mandate to notify them that (Aliénor and Gaston) will be good and honest lords towards the community of Montaut, will hold them in their privileges and customs, franchises and liberties, will protect them, will defend them, on the inside and the outside, against any wrong and attacks according to their honest capacity¹².*

The administrative reforms resulted in the creation of new impositions and the establishment of a censier (tax collector). We know as well that the income of Montaut in 1362 is 1083 florins.

In order to better determine the new issue of capital of each one of his subjects (*the creix*) Gaston decides in 1380 an investigation made by baillage and community in order to perceive an additional tax of an amount equal to 3.5 to 4%.¹³ This decision was followed by sharp reactions, taking into account his additional tax “weight”, in our village as well as elsewhere when recalcitrant’s were punished with legal fines. It is obvious that it was not good to call in question a decision of the viscontal capacity!

In 1385 is created a censier general and a taille of 2 francs per fire (chimney).

In 1378, a gathering of the army was organized in Morlaas. Accompanying them there noble and commoners.

It was made up of 750 riders and 1200 infantrymen, 650 workmen in charge of the operation of the “engines” bombard (cannon) and machines of jet (catapult). Recruitment was done at a rate of one man per 25 fires.^{13b}

Montaut sent three archers in the persons of: Bernardon de Carloo, Monicot de Pont, Domenyoo de Pée. Thereafter the priests, at the time of the gatherings of the army, were grouped by two or three to provide a horse; thus, the priests of Coarraze and Montaut.¹⁴

NOTES

1 We will quote only Curie-Sembres Toulouse 1880, Trabut-Cussac 1954 Higounet 1975.

2 E 289 f° 11 ADPA

3 *Directory of Saint Pée 1884*

4 Idem 1884

4b Note 3 of the page 116 *Gaston Fébus and the sovereignty of Béarn* P.Tucoo-Chala 1981.

5 *Memories of the abbot Bonnecaze* BMP:

6 Abbé Dubarrat

7 7E300ADPA

7b the *herms* are waste lands or left in waste land.

8 the country house of Lestelle was rested by Gaston II, father of Gaston Fébus in 1335.

9 the “*For de Morlaas*” was a collection juridically governing the customs and habits of a certain number of communities inhabitants of Béarn.

9b Higounet *Country houses and Frontières* emphasize the defensive role of the country houses located along the borders. Their inhabitants were to maintain the small strengthened enclosure surrounding this one. It consisted of a surmounted ditch of a broad ground lifting on which a palisade was built which stopped only at the two principal ends to make place with two doors.

10 P.Tucoo-Chala *Gaston Fébus and the sovereignty of Béarn Pau 1981* page 58, note 18. Local persons in charge were named to ensure themselves some, Registre E 302, folios 139 and 140.

11 P. Tucoo-Chala *op. cté* page 374 N°10

12 P. Tucoo-Chala *Gaston Fébus, Prince of the Pyrenees* ED. J & D Biarritz 1991 pg 27. We adapted a text of homages.

13 P.Tucoo-Chala *op, cit.* page 145, note 106.dit that the cre/x indicated, at the origin, the annual appreciation of a herd thanks to the birth of the young animals.

13b P.Tucoo-Chala *op;cit.* pages 156 et 157.

14 Archives Montaut FF1 ADPA.