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978-1-107-58556-0 - Savaric De Mauléon: Baron and Troubadour

H. J. Chaytor

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I
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MAULÉON is now the little town of Châtillon-sur-Sèvre, about half way between Nantes and Poitiers. In 1736 the name was changed to provide a titular seat for a certain Count of Châtillon. Some ruins are still to be seen of a castle standing upon a promontory which descends steeply to the river L'Oing; a vaulted gateway and two towers alone remain of Savaric's family fortress. That family¹ first appears in records about the year 1090; a Raoul de Mauléon is mentioned in charters of donation about 1085 and in 1094 and 1099. A Foulques de Mauléon is also mentioned in a document of this period, but his relationship to Raoul cannot be traced. Raoul had three sons, Savaric I, Raoul II and Ebles. Savaric left two sons, Savaric II and Aimeric, but upon his death the property went to Raoul II by the *droit de viage* or *droit de retour*, which was in force in this family as in other Poitevin families, such as the Viscounts of Thouars and the Sieurs of Parthenay-Larchévêque. Under this custom real property was inherited by all children in turn and in order of age. Thus, on the death of the holder of a fief, his sons inherited only his personal property; the fief went to their eldest uncle, and his eldest nephew did not inherit until all his uncles were dead. But the uncle in possession enjoyed only the usufruct; he could not alienate any part of the fief without the consent of his eldest nephew, the eventual heir. This custom, which was not abolished until 1514, was no doubt intended to modify the hardships caused by the right of primogeni-

¹ See Appendix 1.

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ture; it may have been the cause of the occasional family dissensions with which we meet at a later date. Raoul II died before 1155 and his brother Ebles came into the property; he was already Lord of Talmond by his marriage with Eustachie de Lezay, who died in 1170; he also became Lord of La Rochelle. He left two children, Raoul III and Guillaume, and as the other branch had died out, Raoul III succeeded to the considerable estates about 1180. He is mentioned by the troubadour Bertran de Born in his *sirventes* "Puois Ventadorns" (Appel, no. 11, p. 28): this was a manifesto of the league formed against Richard Cœur de Lion in the early part of 1183, as a result of Richard's quarrels with his elder brother, the "Young King"; Bertran hoped that Raoul would join his side. Raoul accompanied Richard on his crusade in 1190¹ and was rescued by the king from capture by the Saracens at the battle of Joppa. He married one Alix de Ré and died about 1202,² leaving three children, Savaric III, Eustachie, Viscountess of Chatellerault, and Jeanne, Viscountess of Rochechouart. Raoul's possessions had been recognised by Henry II in a document, undated but belonging apparently to the middle years of his reign: "Rex confirmavit Radulpho de Maleon et Willielmo de Maleon et Savarico filio ejusdem Radolphi totum Talemondeis et les Mostiers des Mafels et Curson cum omnibus pertinentibus de Talemondeis. . . ac etiam rex concessit praefato Radulpho et Willielmo et Savarico decem milia solidorum monetae annuatim percipienda in praeposi-

¹ *Gallia Christiana*, II, p. 1403.

² Savaric signed no document before this date, which is also the date of the first mention of him in P. Meyer, *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, I. 12158. (R. Lejeune, *L'œuvre de Jean Renart*, Liège, 1935, p. 100.)

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tum de Rupella.”¹ William was the younger brother of Raoul and the uncle of Savaric; all three are mentioned in this document as heirs under the *droit de viage*.

The date of Savaric’s birth cannot be stated with any certainty; it was before 1180, as his name appears in a charter of that date. The troubadour biography speaks of him as a “rics baros” of Poitou, that is, as the lord of extensive possessions; he may have obtained these or some of them before the death of his uncle by John’s donation in 1204 (see p. 15). His uncle died in 1214. The biography gives a list of his possessions which are identified by Chabaneau as follows: Talmont, in La Vendée (arrondissement des Sables-d’Olonne), Fontenay-le-Comte (La Vendée), Châtelailon (Charente Inférieure), Bouhet (Charente Inférieure, arrondissement de Rochefort, canton d’Aigrefeuille), Benon (arrondissement de la Rochelle, canton de Courçon), Saint-Michel-en-l’Erm (arrondissement de Fontenay-le-Comte), l’île de Ré, Angoulins (arrondissement de la Rochelle) and two places, the islands of Nives and of Nestrine, identification of which is doubtful. He married Belle-Assez, daughter of Guillaume de Chantemerle, Lord of Pouzauges and Pareds, an inheritance perhaps included in the “many other fair places” accorded to him by his biographer, who praises him highly: “A fair knight was he, courteous and instructed, and generous above all generous men. More than anyone in the world he liked gifts and ladies’ service and tourneys and song and amusement and composing poems, holding courts and

¹ MS. Harl. 311, f. 130 r. (S. d’Ewesii collectanea plerumque historica); *Romania*, L, January 1924, p. 98. This was continued by John in 1199 with modifications of rights over La Rochelle: see Appendix 2.

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showing generosity. More than any other knight he was the true friend of ladies and lovers, and was anxious to meet good men and to do them pleasure. And he was the best warrior that ever was in the world. Sometimes he was fortunate and at times came to harm. And all the wars which he had were with the King of France and his men.” This statement is entirely incorrect, as are very many statements in these biographies. “And of his exploits there might be made a great book, if anyone would write it, of one who was most modest, merciful and true, and did more fine deeds than any man whom I ever saw or heard of, and was minded to do yet more.” Savaric’s life covers a period within which the feudal nationalities were broken up and the unification of France was begun. The Albigeois crusade and the collapse of the Anglo-Norman rule were the two events which chiefly contributed to further this process of change. No violent efforts were at first required of the French crown. Philippe Auguste and Louis were able to utilise other forces for their own ends: the religious fanaticism of de Montfort’s crusaders and the incompetence of John gave them a foothold which the Hundred Years’ Wars and the battles of Crécy, Agincourt and Poitiers could not permanently endanger. Provençal gave way to French, the troubadour was forced to emigrate, the society which had supported him decayed, feudal independence was broken down and the brother of the King of France became Count of Poitou.

The Poitevin nobles gained a reputation for inconsistency and unreliability;¹ they shifted their allegiance

¹ See Meyer, *Le Maréchal*, III, p. 24 n. 3, where allusions to this subject are collected.

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from one overlord to another upon no discoverable principle or pledge except their own self-interest. It must be said for them that it cannot have been always easy to decide where their obligations lay. The fact that the county of Poitou was united with the duchy of Aquitaine was a cause of various complications. Richard Cœur de Lion had been made both duke and count in 1176 or 1179: whether this appointment abrogated the rights of his mother Eleanor is not clear: in 1185 he was obliged to return Poitou and probably also the duchy to Eleanor, and her rights, in any case, reverted to her at the end of his reign. Richard had given the county of Poitou to his nephew, Otho of Saxony, whose tenure lapsed when he was chosen King of Germany in 1198, in the year before Richard's death. The title of Duke of Aquitaine, though conjoined with that of Count of Poitou, was, in fact, purely conventional and nothing more than part of the formula that appeared in the protocols of acts and deeds. Geographically speaking, the northern part of Aquitaine was Poitou; the southern part, from Bordeaux and including the archdiocese of Auch, was Gascony. These two provinces had separate seneschals and administrations. When Otho assumed the title, Gascony was not his to govern; it was part of the dowry of Berengaria, Richard's queen, and there is no evidence that Richard ceded it to Otho. Hence, from 1196 at least, about which date Otho appears to have held the title, Duke of Aquitaine is merely a courtesy title equivalent to Count of Poitou, and German historians refer to Otho as "the Poitevin". After Richard's death in 1199 Eleanor renewed her own title to the duchy by doing homage to Philippe for it: she then

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gave Poitou to John as her heir, but received his homage for it as count, a precaution which she doubtless took to prevent the possibility of forfeiture to Philippe, the suzerain. John, however, styled himself Duke of Aquitaine. When Philippe in 1202 pronounced John's fiefs as forfeit to himself, the legal position in Poitou was further obscured by this action and any Poitevin noble might be excused for wondering to whom his allegiance was due.¹

There was the further fact that the inhabitants of the land between the Loire and the Garonne had little in common with the populations of Normandy and Brittany. Under the dynasty of the Counts of Poitou, Aquitaine had regarded itself as a feudal nationality. When that dynasty ended and Queen Eleanor became its last representative, if unity was destroyed, antipathy to the North was not diminished. The ideal of every territorial lord was independence, and a determination to resist foreign domination became the only basis of a common policy. This resolve was intensified by the efforts of France and England to secure possession of the province. The cases of Normandy and Anjou were different. When Philippe declared John a disobedient vassal, and his fief as forfeit to himself, he gained the adherence of Norman and Angevin barons, not only because they despised John, but because they were becoming conscious of affinities between themselves and the Frenchmen of Philippe's dominions; language was no such obstacle as it was between the Poitevin and the Parisian;² social life

¹ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions to the Rolls Series*, ed. Hassall, London, 1902, p. 455. In 1215 the position was changed: Reginald de Pons, a noble of Saintonge, then became Seneschal of Poitou and Gascony in conjunction and thereafter the two offices became one.

² Poitevin, so far as documentary evidence is available, shows some affinities with Provençal but belongs to the northern dialects. Brunot, *Histoire de la Langue française*, Paris, 1905, I, pp. 324-5.

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and customs were similar. The case of Aquitaine was not the same; difference of language was a real barrier and society lived a different life. Hence the men of Aquitaine supported John against Philippe as they had fought for Richard against Henry II. Independence was their object, and fusion with Normandy and Anjou their aversion. John as a nominal overlord suited them admirably; he was too remote, too incompetent, and too short-sighted to interfere seriously with their ideals of regionalism.

A further complication was introduced by the increasing importance of the towns during this period. The development of the commune had improved the standard of living and increased the security of the workers and craftsmen who became more numerous as trade increased. Feudal lords were obliged to treat the towns with some consideration and could no longer disregard them in calculations of policy. A typical case is that of La Rochelle, which owed its rise to the protection of the Mauléon family, though marriages or conquests had transferred it to the Dukes of Aquitaine, to the Counts of Anjou or of Poitou from time to time. These overlords exacted various tolls and taxes which were a continual source of vexation to the inhabitants. When Henry II of England married Eleanor of Aquitaine, he claimed the town through his wife, and Ebles de Mauléon, who then regarded himself as the overlord, was obliged to give way. Henry realised that a mere change of suzerainty was not likely to content this mercantile centre, and therefore granted the town a new charter which was received with the greatest satisfaction. It was in part a confirmation of privileges already promised or acquired; the commune was recognised, the citizens

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were granted certain rights of administering justice, were allowed to construct fortifications and to defend themselves against any infringement of their privileges; taxes upon inheritance and other port and harbour duties were abolished. The town remained faithful to Henry during the revolt of his sons and was prepared to support John, until his selfish incompetence made their position impossible. John had confirmed the charter granted by Henry: the Mauléon family were to have the Talmondais and its revenues as compensation for abandoning any claims they had on La Rochelle.¹

Savaric de Mauléon first appears in history in the year 1202 when he may have been some twenty-five or thirty years of age. John Lackland had followed Richard Cœur de Lion on the throne of England in 1199; Philippe Auguste of France supported the claims of John's nephew, Arthur of Brittany, and acknowledged him as heir to Normandy and Brittany over which he claimed feudal rights. War followed between Philippe and John, which was interrupted by the French king's matrimonial difficulties. He wished to divorce Ingeburge, the sister of Knud VI of Denmark, with whose hand he had acquired the shadowy rights to the crown of England which descended from Sven II, and which Philippe hoped would provide an excuse for repeating the conquest of 1066. Immediately after the marriage Philippe displayed an invincible antipathy for his bride,

¹ Four mentions of Raoul de Mauléon in 1200 suggest that he was in John's confidence; see Rot. Chart. 1, pp. 58, 59: "Johannes etc. Radulpho de Maloleone seniori Pictavensi salutem. Mandamus vobis quod omnes feudos et terras quos dedimus bachellariis quos retinimus de familia nostra in balliva vestra, qui homagium et fidelitates et ligentias nobis non fecerunt in manum nostram capiatis, donec aliud preceptum habueritis, nisi fidelitatem nostram et ligantiam [*sic*] jurare voluerint." (Feb. 3, 1200.)