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DATA PROCESSINE

Henry VI and the Daughters of Armagnac: A Problem in Medieval Diplomacy

by

Samuel E. Dicks*

According to the English chronicler, Edward Hall, the count of Armagnac, Jean IV

. . . sent solempne Ambassadors to the kyng of Englande [Henry VI], offeryng hym his doughter in mariage, not onely promisyng hym siluer hilles, and golden mountaines with her, but also would be bound, to deliuer into the kyng of Englandes handes, all suche castles and tounes, as he or auncestors deteined from hym, within the whole duchie of acquitayn or Guyen, either by conquest of his progenitors, or by gfyte of deliuery of any Frenche kyng: offryng farther, to aide the same kyng with money, for the recouery of other citees, within thesaid duchy, from him and his auncestors, by the Frenche kynges progenitors, the lorde de Albrethe, and other lordes of Gascoyn, iniustely kept and wrongfully withoulden.¹

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Hall is not accurate in every detail, but he does call attention to an interesting, although unsuccessful, sequence of events in medieval diplomacy which occurred during the latter stages of the Hundred Years War.

The outcome of the Hundred Years War was not yet clear in the early 1440's. Although the French princes of the blood were eventually to come wholeheartedly to the aid of Charles VII, the Valois monarch, they had not yet done so. Following the unsuccessful efforts for a peace between Henry VI and Charles VII at the Conference of Calais in 1439, the leading nobles engaged in numerous intrigues generally aimed at weakening the powers of Charles VII. Early in 1440, Charles found his control of France severely weakened by a plot composed mainly of nobles and mercenary captains. This conspiracy, known as the Praguerie, was designed to remove Charles VII from power and form a regency under the dauphin Louis, then sixteen years old. However, the plot was soon suppressed. Philip the Good of Burgundy was able to bring about the release of Charles, duke of Orleans (a captive of England since Agincourt) and, thus, cause Charles VII to be wary of a possible plot against him that might include the liberated duke. Plans were even initiated in 1442 to wed the young Lancastrian monarch to a daughter of the count of Armagnac, prominent vassal of Charles VII, apparently without the permission of the Valois monarch. English relations with the count of Armagnac had been cordial since at least the summer of 1437, when a truce had been negotiated with the French count providing for the cessation of hostilities and the free movement of

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¹Hall's Chronicle, pp. 202-203. The "lord de Albrethe" referred to by Hall was Charles II, sire d'Albret, who occasionally changed sides in the Hundred Years War.

peoples between Armagnac and the English-held Guienne.² The English had probably negotiated the truce in order to strengthen the security of Guienne. This same reason, as well as a desire to promote the defection of a Valois vassal, probably accounts for the interest of the English in the 1442 negotiations concerned with a marriage. Since Henry would be twenty-one on December 6, 1442, a matrimonial alliance for the continuation of his dynasty was also desirable.

The motives of Jean IV, other than the obvious desire to marry one of his three daughters to the king of England, are not clear. He had been in conflict with Charles VII and the dauphin over lands in neighboring Comminges. Perhaps he had reason to believe that the tide of war would begin to go in favor of the English. However, according to Jean IV himself, his primary motivation was a suggestion from the dukes of Brittany, Orleans, and Alençon, in separate letters to him. Thus, the three princes apparently hoped to bring Jean IV to their side in their quarrels with Charles VII. Yet, whatever the count's motives were, his timing was bad, for during the summer and autumn of 1442, Charles VII initiated in and around Guienne one of the largest offensives of the war.

On May 13, 1442, a letter of safe-conduct was granted by Henry VI to Jean de Batute (Batuco), canon and archdeacon of St. Antonine in the church of Rodez, including Hugh Guisardi, canon and archdeacon major of the same church, eighteen other ambassadors, and a retinue of fifty. Negotiations in England between Henry VI and the members of the Armagnac delegation proceeded quickly. On May 28, Henry commissioned Sir Robert Roos, a member of previous embassies, Thomas Beckington, the king's secretary and later bishop of Bath and Wells, and Edward Hull, who had just returned from Guienne, to go to Armagnac to negotiate a marriage agreement. These English ambassadors were to choose the daughter of the count named in their instructions. However, before they departed from Plymouth, Henry sent them a letter dated June 23, in his own hand and containing his personal seal, saying

²Archives historiques du département de la Gironde, XVI, 245-247; Rymer, Foedera, X, 673; Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England (PPC), V, 44-45.

³Hall, op. cit., p. 202.

⁴Thomas Beckington, Memorials of the Reign of King Henry VI: Official Correspondence of Thomas Bekynton, Secretary to King Henry VI., and Bishop of Bath and Wells ("Rolls Series," No. 56), II, 40, hereafter referred to as Beckington.

⁵Rymer, op. cit., XI, 6.

See quotation from Hall in opening paragraph, above.

Rymer, op. cit., XI, 7-8. Hull remained in England and was to cross later with forces going to Guienne. He arrived in Bordeaux on October 22 (Beckington, II, 180-181; 216). A journal or protocol of the embassy to the count of Armagnac was written by Thomas Beckington or by a member of his retinue. Similar in nature to Beckington's protocol of the 1439 conference at Calais (PPC, V, 334-407), it was first edited, in translation, by Nicholas Harris Nicolas under the title, A Journal by One of the Suite of Thomas Beckington, afterwards Bishop of Bath and Wells, during an Embassy to Negotiate a Marriage between Henry VI and a Daughter of the Count of Armagnac, A. D. MCCCCXLII. An abridged French translation by G. Brunet, based upon this English edition, was published in the Indicateur, an obscure Bordeaux journal, and reprinted at Paris in 1842 (Journal du voyage d'un ambassadeur anglais à Bordeaux en 1442 traduit et accompagné de quelques éclaircissemens). See also, Henry Ribadieu, Histoire de la conquête de Guyenne par les Français de ses antécédents et de ses suites (Bordeaux, 1866, pp. 142ff). The protocol, written mainly in Latin, but including various documents in French and English, was edited by G. Williams and published in the original languages in the "Rolls Series" (Beckington, II, [177]-248; see note 4, above). Although all of the editions contain valuable notes, the edition by Williams is preferred to that by Nicolas, the latter containing numerous errors, particularly concerning place-names in France.

that their instructions were to be interpreted in a broad sense, i.e., that, as Batute had offered, the choosing of a wife among the three daughters should be left to Henry. The ambassadors, explaining that this letter abrogated their original instructions and commission, delivered these documents to Henry on June 30, requesting new ones. However, the king returned the documents, asserting that they were valid as amended by his personal letter. He also specified that an artist be commissioned

. . . portraie the iij. doughters in their kertteles simple, and their visages, lyk as ye see their stature and their beaulte and color of skynne and their countenaunces, with almaner of fetures; and that j. be delivered in all haste with the said portratur to bringe it unto the Kinge, and he t'appointe and signe which hym lyketh; and therupon to sende you word how ye shal be gouverned.8

On Tuesday, July 10, the English ambassadors and Batute sailed for Bordeaux. After an incident in which a shark had been speared, Beckington led an interesting religious ceremony to gain a favorable wind:

Demum pro vento habendo dictus dominus meus secretarius devoto et humili corde promisit et flexit argentum[?] beatissimae et gloriosissimae Virgini[s] Mariae de Etona; et post votum sic factum in honore dictae Virginis, cum ceteris in navi quos incitabat facere ut ipse fecerat: quo facto cantaverunt antiphonale Sancta Maria. Qua finita, ventus vertit se in aquilonem, et ibi flavit magis continue.

They reached the Garonne River on Saturday, July 14, and arrived in Bordeaux on the following Monday. Batute left the party on July 21 to report to the count of Armagnac.10

Meanwhile, Charles VII had invaded Guienne with one of the largest armies he had ever assembled. On June 24, he relieved the town of Tartas, sixty miles south of Bordeaux, and, after a four-day siege, gained the town of St. Severs in the following week. Roos and Beckington wrote letters to Henry VI and to Lord Ralph Cromwell, treasurer, apprising them of French gains. According to the ambassadors, even Bordeaux and Bayonne were threatened, and the people were hesitating to resist, for they held little hope of aid from England.11 The bearer of the letter was accompanied by Pierre Berland, archbishop of Bordeaux, who was going to England to plead for aid. He appeared before the king's Council on August 21.¹² Roos received letters on July 31 from the count of Armagnac and Batute. Although the count regretted the existing circumstances that prevented Roos and his party from journeying to his

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⁸Beckington, II, 177-184. ⁹Ibid., p. 184 "Next, to gain a wind, my said lord secretary, with a devout and humble heart, promised and bent silver [coins?] to the most blessed and glorious Virgin, Mary of Eton; and, afterwards, he encouraged the others in the ship to do the same. Next, they sang the antiphon, 'Sancta Maria.' When they finished, the wind shifted to the When they finished, the wind shifted to the north and blew more steadily."

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 185-186. During the embassy, the count was either at Lectoure, the main town of his county, located about seventy miles southeast of Bordeaux, or at Auch, his capital, located about ninety miles southeast of Bordeaux and twenty miles south of

¹¹Ibid., pp. 186-193. Monstrelet (The Chronicles, III, 356-361) provides details on the military undertakings of Charles VII in Guienne. 12PPC, V, 198.

lands, Batute assured them that a safe-conduct which had been re-

quested from Charles VII should be received shortly.¹³

On August 9, Roos and Beckington wrote another melancholy letter to Henry VI, informing him that the well-fortified town of Dax in Gascony had fallen to Charles VII on August 3, that Bayonne was being besieged, and that they feared the armies would next march on Bordeaux. For the utmost secrecy the letter was written in three lines on parchment across the length of the skin and sewn into the hem of an old pilgrim's garment. According to the letter, unless Henry sent aid, all of Guienne would be lost. Roos was then chosen regent of Guienne on August 15, and he began to plan with Gaston de Foix, captal de Buch, for the defense of Bordeaux.

Roos received letters on August 24 from Armagnac and Batute, dated August 20, reiterating their honorable intentions. The count had sent messages to Charles VII requesting safe-conducts, although no reply had yet been received; Batute believed that the king was aware of the purpose of the mission and doubted that he would grant a safe-conduct. He believed that Roos might have been able to come and depart in early August, but since that time the king's forces had come very near to the lands of the count of Armagnac.¹⁶

Roos replied to the count on August 24 to the effect that he should accept, as truthful, the contents of a leter which he (Roos) would send to Batute. In a letter penned on the same day to Batute, Roos then showed clearly his ire and lack of patience, stating that he doubted that Henry VI would agree to the marriage if he knew that the count's eldest son, Jean, the viscount of Lomagne, had joined the forces of Charles VII.¹⁷ Roos also stated that he was confident that, when the English forces arrived, they would first attack and destroy the Armagnac possessions. He concluded by saying that he and his party would return to England on the next ship after they made arrangements for the defense of the area, unless Batute and his master changed their attitude.¹⁸ This letter did not reach Batute, however, until about Septem-

¹⁸It is interesting to note that the critical letter was not written to the count, but to Batute, a man of rank roughly comparable to that held by Roos. Such a letter to one of superior station would have been highly improper.

¹³Beckington, II, 193-195. The count's letter had been written at Lectoure on July 21, the day of Batute's arrival there. Batute's letter had been written on July 29. One should note that the time required for traveling from Bordeaux to Lectoure, a distance of seventy miles, was two days. As will be seen, the time necessary for this trip was greatly increased as the Valois threat became greater.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 196-197. According to Monstrelet (III, 395-361), Dax (also spelled Ax, and Daqs) had been besieged five weeks. Dax was recaptured by the English before the end of August (Beckington, pp. 246-247). The letter apparently reached the king at about the same time as the archbishop of Bordeaux appeared before the Council (August 21.) On August 22, the Council ordered wheat to be sent to Guienne, and on August 24, plans were made to raise money for forces (PPC, V, 198-200). For a letter sent to the wealthy abbot of Bury outlining the conditions noted in Roos's letter of August 9, and requesting money, see Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France during the Reign of Henry the Sixth, King of England, "Rolls Series," No. 22, II, 465-466, hereafter referred to as Stevenson (ed.).

¹⁵Beckington II, 197 et passim. Captal, or captau in Gascon, was the title of the chiefs or lords of Buch, Traine, and Le Testede, all in Gascony. He was strongly partisan to England as was his son Jean, viscount of Longueville. Both became knights of the Gaste:

Garter.

16 Ibid., pp. 198-200.

17 He had been an active supporter of the Valois for several years and was a participant in some of the recent military engagements. Apparently, Isabel of Navarre, the countess of Armagnac, was also a partisan of the Valois monarch (ibid., p. 201).

ber 15, indicating a Valois presence in the lands between them. Batute's answer, written at Auch and dated September 15, did not reach Bordeaux until October 11. Batute replied that both he and the count had been both astonished and pained by Roos's letter. They could not understand what Roos had meant when he had said they should change their attitude, for Roos was well aware that they were highly desirous of completing the negotiations. Batute asserted that the recent actions of the viscount of Lomagne should not impede the planned marriage, for, since a treaty had not yet been agreed to, neither the viscount nor the count could disobey the commands of their king. Indeed, if they had, their lands would have been seized and pillaged. He reminded Roos that the marriage was first suggested by the dukes of Brittany, Orleans, and Alençon, and further asserted that the English had no cause for invading the lands of the count of Armagnac, since the current military conflicts had not originated with him.

On Friday, October 12, Roos and Beckington answered Batute's letter of September 15. The English ambassadors tried to qualify some of the more bold assertions contained in Roos's letter of August 24, replying that they were pleased that the count still wished to arrange a marriage and would have been astonished if he had changed his mind, in spite of the fact that recent developments had implied such a change. They hoped that he would effect his plans for a marriage agreement so that they might return to England without further delay. On the next day, Roos wrote that, since there appeared to be no opportunity for them safely to go to the count, Batute or another person with full powers should come to Bordeaux or to a safe intermediate location to negotiate the dowry and other such matters.²¹

The ambassadors sent letters to Henry VI, Humphrey of Gloucester, and Cardinal Henry Beaufort on October 18. Only the letter to the king is copied in Beckington's protocol. In this letter they described in detail the rapid advances of Charles VII in Guienne, and asserted that even a small English force would have been able to halt the French. They noted how the French advances had impeded their mission and informed the king that Batute had been unable to obtain for them safe-conducts from Charles VII. However, they in no way questioned the sincerity of the count, as earlier they had done in the letter to Batute.²²

On Monday, October 22, Edward Hull arrived from England with letters to the ambassadors and the people of Bordeaux announcing that

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 200-201.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 206-209.

²¹Ibid., pp. 210-212. Letters from the count were addressed only to Roos, who was head of the embassy. From September 15 onward, Batute's letters were also addressed to Beckington and, after his arrival, to Hull. It was apparently proper diplomatic practice for the count to correspond only with the person of highest rank.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 212-216.

an English force was being formed and would shortly come to their aid.²³ On October 26, Roos, Hull, and the captal de Buch successfully led a force of four hundred against the French in and near the town of St. Loubes, located about seven miles from Bordeaux and across the Garonne. Hull had brought from England an artist named Hans, presumably a Dutch or German painter, to execute the portraits. On November 3, Roos wrote to the count that Hans had been sent to him and urged the count to encourage the rapid completion of the portraits. A more detailed letter to Batute, signed by all the ambassadors, urged that a person be sent to Bordeaux or to the intermediate point of Mount Secure (i.e., Monségur, near Marmande and La Réole) to negotiate various matters relating to the marriage. They noted that Hull was astonished by the long delay and asked Batute to hasten matters, since their embassy had begun nearly half a year ago.²⁴

Another copy of Batute's letter of September 15, which had been originally received on October 11, arrived on November 5 with the notation that, since he had not received a reply, he was sending a copy of his previous letter. Letters dated November 7 and 8 were received on November 19 from the count and Batute, in which the count thanked Roos for his efforts. Batute assured the English ambassadors of the count's continued desire to meet with them or to send representatives to a safe location to do so. However, the state of the country prevented a meeting at the present time. He hoped that, since English forces were coming to Guienne, roads would soon be open. He concluded by stating that, if the English so desired, the count would be willing to mediate a truce or establish a peace with the French. Batute wrote that this arrangement would be desirable for a number of reasons, but especially for the completion of the marriage.²⁵

Letters dated November 22 from the count and Batute were received on December 16. The count acknowledged that Roos's last letters had been received and the artist was at work. Batute observed that the first portrait would be completed in a few days, and promised that he would encourage the painter to complete all of them as soon as possible. He and the count saw no reason to take any risks concerning a possible meeting, since the count had offered to mediate a truce which, if successful, would remove any obstacles. The English ambassadors replied

²³The promised aid later proved to be most ineffective. In March of 1443, John Beaufort, earl of Somerset and nephew of Cardinal Beaufort, was made a duke and appointed captain-general of all "France and Guienne" for seven years. Cardinal Beaufort and his supporters hoped that Somerset would show more aggressiveness against the Valois forces than had Richard, duke of York, the Lancastrian governor of France. Somerset had apparently planned on sailing to Bordeaux, but landed in Cherbourg and marched southward, pillaging the lands of Francis I of Brittany, a supporter of English efforts for peace. The Norman chronicler, Thomas Basin, observed that he was not sure whether Somerset had discovered his own intentions. He returned home after enjoying the hospitality of Richard of York at Rouen. He should not be confused with his younger brother, Edmund, marquis of Dorset, who succeeded him as earl (later duke) of Sonierset. PPC, V, 251-263, 281, 298, 409; VI, 12-22; Jean De Wavrin. Recueil de croniques et anchiennes istories de la Grant Bretaigne, a present nomme Engleterre, "Rolls Series" No. 39, IV, 352-353; PRO, Calendar of French Rolls, p. 359; Thomas Basin, Histoire des regnes de Charles VII et de Louis XI, Société de l'histoire de France, I, 150; James H. Ramsay, Lancaster and York: A Century of English History, A. D. 1399-1485, II, 54-55.

²⁴Beckington, II, 216-222.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 222-227

on December 22 that the artist should have completed his task by then. If the paintings had not yet been sent, they urged that they be forwarded immediately. They believed that if the count attempted to mediate a truce, it would cause his activities to become more suspicious and would jeopardize plans for the marriage. The English ambassadors wrote to Batute on December 30 that they were leaving soon for England, but hoped to return shortly. They praised Batute's conduct and anticipated that the artist would soon return to Bordeaux.²⁶

Beckington left Bordeaux for England on January 10, 1443. Forced to remain at Crowdon in Brittany (perhaps Crozon, south of Brest) because of bad weather, he did not reach England until February 10. On January 14, Roos, still at Bordeaux, received letters dated January 3 from the count and Batute. He left for England soon after. Beckington reported to the king at Maidenhead on the morning of February 20, and met Roos on the latter's arrival there that evening. According to the letters from the count and Batute, dated January 3, the artist had completed one painting and was beginning his work on the other two. However, the extremely cold weather had prevented him from mixing and applying the colors, thus causing the long delay. Batute observed that the count had anticipated Roos's reaction to his offer to mediate. The count was sincere in the offer, though opposed by both sides. Batute and the count emphasized their sincere desires for the completion of arrangements for a marriage.²⁷

No further activities are known to have occurred between representatives of Henry VI and the count of Armagnac relating to the proposed marriage. Charles VII abandoned his winter capaign in Guienne because of the weather and a lack of provisions.²⁸ The presence of French forces in Guienne had not only interfered with communications between Jean IV and the English ambassadors, but had also caused the count to procrastinate in his relations with the English. The fact that his eldest son was serving with Charles VII probably helped lessen the chance that his lands might be invaded, although any agreement with the English that would have been unpopular with Charles VII would probably have resulted in lands being confiscated. His fears kept him from carrying out his wishes. The only way he could agree to the marriage without arousing the ire of Charles VII was to negotiate a truce. This solution held no hope of success because of the military advantage of the French at that moment, yet it gave Jean IV an excuse for additional delaying. Had English forces arrived earlier, however, the embassy might have been a success.

It has been suggested that the Armagnac marriage was suuported by Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, but opposed by William de la Pole,

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²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 228-234.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 235-243. Hull remained in Bordeaux, where he was made constable of the city.

²⁸Ribadieu, op. cit., pp. 164-167; PPC, V, 256-264; 415-416.

earl of Suffolk, a leader of the Beaufort party.²⁹ Suffolk may have had a more conciliatory attitude towards Charles VII at this time, but there is no conclusive evidence that he caused plans for the marriage to be cancelled, or that Gloucester had specifically favored the marriage.³⁰ However, within a few months, the dauphin (the future Louis XI) invaded the lands of Jean IV, imprisoning him and his family, mainly because of the latter's claims to land in Comminges. This event, more than any other, served to end thought on the part of Henry VI concerning the daughters of the count of Armagnac.

Isabel, the youngest daughter, is generally believed to have been the most likely candidate for a royal marriage. Following the death of her father in 1450, she maintained an incestuous relationship with her brother, Jean V, and bore him children. Their relationship scandalized the monarchy and church, eventually bringing about the confiscation of the Armagnac lands by Louis XI.³¹ In view of the problems encountered by Henry VI during the latter years of his reign, however, it is doubtful that a life in England would have been much happier for her.

In the spring of 1444, a truce was signed between Charles VII and Henry VI at Tours. As a result, Margaret of Anjou, niece of Charles VII, was betrothed to the young English king. Thus ended a minor but interesting chapter in medieval diplomacy.

²⁹Ramsay, op. cit.; II, 47. Gloucester, who yearned for the glorious days of his late brother, Henry V, opposed any agreement with the Valois that would compromise the Lancastrian claim to the crown of France. Cardinal Beaufort, an uncle of the late Henry V, desired a peaceful solution to the conflict and supported an abandonment of the claim to the crown of France in return for full Lancastrian sovereignty, i.e., without doing homage, over those areas of France long held by the English. See, Dicks, The Question of Peace: Anglo-French Diplomancy, A. D. 1439-1449, pp. 56 et passim.

³⁰At his trial in 1450, Suffolk was accused, among other things, of acquainting Charles VII with the purpose of the embassy and, thereby, causing the latter's invasion of Guienne, Rotuli Parliamentorum ut et Petitiones et Placita in Parliamento, V, 180. However, according to Monstrelet, III, 344ff, Charles had planned, as early as March, 1442, to go into Guienne. The Armagnac embassy to England was in May. Gloucester used the earlier intention of Henry VI to marry an Armagnac princess as an excuse for opposing the king's marriage to Margaret of Anjou in 1444, but this does not mean that he had supported the Armagnac marriage in 1442; Hall, p. 204.

³¹Nouv. Biog. Univ., III, 257-259.

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