

Port towns and the control of river and maritime zones in the Middle Ages : a comparative study between western France and northern Castile¹

by

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This study endeavours to analyse the manner in which, during the Early Middle Ages, the main port towns along a vast section of the Atlantic coast of Europe running from Cantabria to southern Brittany organised and controlled their related river and maritime zones within a radius of varying scope (fig. 1). It will focus less on the commercial and financial influence exerted by these towns and more on the means used by their municipalities to consolidate and develop this economic hegemony such as police/legal powers as well as taxes and relations with the supervisory authorities, whether seigniorial or royal. Another aim of the comparative approach is to identify the methods and insights which can be transposed to larger geographical scales.

1. Contrasted coastal and port geography from the mouth of the Deva River to the Breton straits

1.1. Coastlines with marked physical characteristics

Without erring into reductive geographical determinism, it can be considered that natural elements have greatly impacted the conditions for development of ports along the coastlines being studied. From the mouth of the Deva River up to Biarritz (Cantabria, Biscay, Guipúzcoa and the south of Labourd), the coastline is largely rocky, elevated and irregular. But although this sheer ruggedness may seem less than conducive to human activities, if we look closer, we can see that this same coastline is indented by a number of stunning bays and estuaries (or *rias*) which offer safe natural havens. Despite its narrowness, the continental platform is rich in fishery resources which help offset the poor farming possibilities inland. However, a mountainous hinterland with a marked relief and short coastal rivers running rapidly down to the sea impair communications with the centre of the peninsula.

From the mouth of the Adour to that of the Loire, the French coast presents a low general profile and runs along a relatively straight line. It serves as a maritime outlet for five river basins, the Adour, Garonne, Charente, Sèvre Niortaise and Loire which, albeit on widely differing scales, are navigable some distance upstream and accompanied by road networks which cut through plains and plateaus without encountering any major natural obstacles, so greatly facilitating communications with the

¹ This study is part of the work conducted by a research group concerning the ports of Atlantic Europe in the late Middle Ages. Since 2005, it has drawn together researcher-lecturers, researchers and PhD students from the universities of La Rochelle, Nantes, Caen, Artois, Cantabria, La Laguna, Lisbon and Leiden for a day of annual research and collective publications.

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interior. Running for some 250 kilometres and formed by dune ridges bordering an inhospitable hinterland, the coast of Gascony establishes a break in the occupancy of this coastline. Port activities developed in favour of estuaries and low river valleys (the Adour, Gironde-Garonne-Dordogne, Charente, Sèvre Niortaise and the Loire), or sheltered stretches of water such as the 'Pertuis Sea', the Bay of Bourgneuf and the Croisic Straits. To the north of the Loire, the coast curves around in a north-west-south-east direction which is characteristic of the Armorican Massif. It presents long, straight or expansive curved sections embellished by sandy beaches, with low cliffs at either end which are not particularly irregular, intersected by estuaries (Vilaine, Ellé and Laïta, Blavet, Odet) and *rias* which sometimes open out onto branching valleys as well as stretches of water dotted with islands (Gulf of Morbihan, *ria* of Étrel, Lorient harbour). From the point of Penmarch to that of Saint-Mathieu, the major articulations are comprised of gulfs which are open to varying degrees (Bays of Audierne and of Douarnenez, Brest harbour), and secondarily by *rias* (Élorn and Aulne). Port sites are numerous. Only the Valley of the Vilaine River has a broad opening towards the interior.

1.2. The diversity of the coastlines' urbanisation processes

The establishment of ports on the north coast of the Iberian Peninsula stems from a significant process of urbanisation which developed between the mid 12th and mid 14th centuries and concluded in the foundation of 19 coastal towns: 4 in Cantabria, 6 in Biscay and 9 in Guipúzcoa². The port towns of Cantabria, known as of the 14th century under the name of *Cuatro Villas de la Costa de la Mar*, began to take root between 1163 and 1210 with the successive foundations of Castro Urdiales, Santander, San Vicente de la Barquera and Laredo. Leaving aside San Sebastian (before 1180) and Motrico (1209), Guipúzcoa, and even more so Biscay, witnessed the establishment of a scattering of ports between the very end of the 13th century (Bermeo – 1299) and the mid 14th century (Zumaya – 1347), or even later (Orio – 1379). Generally speaking, these were new towns, some of which were founded according to a regular plan sometimes on or near a site occupied in antiquity (Castro Urdiales and Fuenterrabia)³. Most were small scale, both in terms of their surface area and the number of inhabitants. Enjoying a privileged situation, they benefited from administrative autonomy (*concejo municipal*), exercised jurisdiction over a specific territory (*alfoz* or *término municipal*) including inlets and coastal waters and also had economic and tax allowances including a right of monopoly over their port (the *carga y descarga* privilege or loading and unloading privilege). By the mid 14th century, this had resulted in a Cantabrian coastline which was densely occupied by a tight band of twenty or so small port towns. As of the 14th century, simple shores, creeks or small inlets, some close to secondary areas of habitation, others totally isolated, constituted a scattering of ports supplementing those of towns such as San Martín de la Arena near Santander, Santoña, Argoños, Escalante, Gama and Rada near Laredo.

With estuary sites occupied since antiquity by provincial cities (Bordeaux, Nantes, Vannes) or small Gallo-Roman agglomerations (Bayonne, Blaye, Bourg) or to favour transfer of sites (substitution of Locmaria for Quimper), the west coast of France boasted an initial port substrate which medieval creations enhanced. The circumstances behind the birth and development of new foundations such as

² Jesús Angel Solórzano Teléchea and Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu, eds., *El Fenómeno urbano medieval entre el Cantábrico y el Duero: revisión historiográfica y propuestas de estudio* (Santander, 2002). Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu and Michel Bochaca, 'Caractères généraux des villes portuaires du nord de la péninsule Ibérique au Moyen Âge', in *Ports maritimes et ports fluviaux au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2005), 63-78.

³ Javier Añibarro Rodríguez, *La implantación urbana medieval en la costa de Cantabria* (Santander, 2010).

La Rochelle in the second half of the 12th century and Libourne as of the 1270s are fairly well documented⁴. However, the origins of numerous other ports, such as Royan, Rochefort and Marans, remain obscure. Yet the example of Brittany gives us some pointers as to the process which, with a few variants, reflects what we can make out for the Bas Poitou, Aunis and Saintonge. In the 11th century, the crisis of political and religious structures was conducive to the appearance of lordly domains and monastic domains (Redon, Quimperlé). From the second half of the 11th century onwards, new centres sprang up in the form of villages at the foot of castles. On the Atlantic side, these were established at the bottom of estuaries. Only some of them gave rise to towns which, in the late Middle Ages, were key features of the Breton urban network such as La Roche-Bernard, Auray, Hennebont, Pont-l'Abbé, Châteaulin, Landerneau and Brest. To the afore-mentioned list we can add Guérande, the 'central town' of a region disputed between Nantes and Vannes in the 10th and 11th centuries largely due to its salt resources with Concarneau being founded on an island and Le Croisic on the coast. The situation is more complicated if we seek to learn more about the whole host of small ports, whether mere anchorages or grounding points tied to villages, whose existence in the late Middle Ages is revealed by brief references in written sources. The documentary spotlight shone on the Queue de Vache is something of a rare exception.⁵ We must therefore abandon any attempts to draw up an exhaustive list of these ports except in the case of a number of well documented sectors. Indication on a map of the sites identified and able to be pinpointed by default provides, rather like a flurry of dots, an impressionist but highly evocative view of the dispersion and proliferation of port activities. Around La Rochelle, a swarm of small ports were scattered along the shores of the Ré and Oléron Islands and the continental coast of the 'Pertuis Sea'⁶. Bordeaux and Libourne were surrounded by a host of secondary or even 'embryonic' ports jostling together along the Garonne or set out around the twin confluence of the Dordogne–Isle and Isle-Dronne⁷. The same was true around Bayonne on the lower part of the Adour basin subject to tidal forces. In Brittany, some of these small ports were only brought to life by the comings and goings of a few fishing boats used for navigation over a limited scope while others, thanks to the dynamism of seafaring merchants, comprised vessels which participated in the ferry trade, such as Penmarch.

1.3. Different port systems

As of the 14th century, when the emergence of a scattering of ports was drawing to an end all along the coastline in question, a number of ports gained in status thanks to a complex interplay of rivalries, complementarities and sometimes conflicts which caused some to rise up the ranks and others to fall

⁴ Marcel Delafosse, ed., *Histoire de La Rochelle* (Toulouse, 1985) 11-21. Michel Bochaca, Fabrice Mouthon and Hervé Guiet, 'Les bastides du Bordelais: leur établissement et leur destinée de la fin du XIII^e siècle au début du XVI^e siècle', *Cahiers Charles Higounet*, 1 (1994), 67-87.

⁵ Mathias Tranchant, 'Un port à vin à la fin du Moyen Âge: étude de la charte de fondation du port de Queue-de-Vache en 1436', in Christiane Villain-Gandossi and Eric Rieth, eds., *Pour une histoire du fait maritime. Sources et champ de recherche* (Paris, 2001), 301-328

⁶ Mathias Tranchant, 'Les aménagements des ports secondaires de l'Aunis maritime à la fin du Moyen Âge', in Michel Bochaca and Jean-Luc Sarrazin, eds., *Ports et littoraux de l'Europe atlantique. Transformations naturelles et aménagements humains (XIV^e-XVI^e siècles)* (Rennes, 2007) 55-79.

⁷ Michel Bochaca, 'Typologie et fonctions des ports du Bordelais (fin XV^e – début XVI^e siècle)', *Historia, Instituciones, Documentos*, 35 (2008), 63-83.

back. However, the end result would be widely differing port systems between northern Castile and western France (fig. 1)⁸.

The Cantabrian coast presented a dense scattering of 19 small port towns which were unevenly ranked, among which a few principal ports barely stood out. In Biscay and in Guipúzcoa, Bilbao and San Sebastian were characterised by their close involvement in significant levels of international sea trade while the four ports of Cantabria played a regional role above all else.⁹ Bilbao, secondarily San Sebastian and Laredo, thanks to their capacities for naval armaments, served as outlets for wool from the north of Castile of which the merchants of Burgos controlled the trade¹⁰, as well as iron worked in small installations dotted along the Cantabrian coast¹¹. Another feature, this time common to all ports in the north of the peninsula, was the importance of fishing both close to the coast and on the open sea¹². This activity left a significant imprint on the topography (fishermen's neighbourhoods) and the economy (curing, boat building, etc.), while impacting the profile of urban society due to the considerable presence of seafarers.

For the section of the French coast covered by this study, we can immediately dismiss coastal fishing whose economic role was no more than secondary (Labourd, Saintonge, Aunis) or minimal (Bordeaux), with the exception of Brittany (Vannetais, Cornouaille). Albeit moderate, port activity mainly concerned goods traffic. Respectively located on the low valleys of the Garonne, the Dordogne and the Adour, Bordeaux, Libourne and Bayonne nonetheless maintained different spatial relations with the surrounding ports. Crossing the diocese of Bordeaux, the Garonne was a powerful river artery devoid of any tributary worthy of the name. Ports sprang up along the banks of the river or near the mouths of small feeder creeks. They formed a long and dense string which hemmed in both banks, with secondary ports associated with small towns or villages alternating with 'embryonic' ports some distance from inhabited areas. Sitting at the outlets of branched river basins, Libourne and Bayonne organised their relations with other ports on the basis of a network. For its part, La Rochelle had the peculiarity of directly facing the sea while not sitting on the outlet of a major river. Communications with the hinterland depended even more so on land transport since La Rochelle found itself some distance from the two penetrating rivers of the Sèvre Niortaise to the north and the Charente to the south, along which secondary ports had developed such as Marans, Rochefort and Charente (now Tonny-Charente). In Brittany, working ports with a fleet such as Vannes, stood in contrast to passive ports like Nantes which called on vessels and seamen from other ports. Small fishing ports or those of the Loire estuary ensured navigation within a small radius concerning the production of salt farms some of which was transported to Nantes where return freight was loaded, especially wine. Fleets from the ports of Cornouaille, particularly Penmarch, had numerous units of higher tonnage involved in the transport of

⁸ Michel Bochaca, Javier Añibarro Rodríguez, Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu, Alain Gallicé and Mathias Tranchant, 'Géographie portuaire de la Galice à la Bretagne méridionale à l'aube des Temps modernes', Les ports de l'Atlantique de Brest à La Corogne des Temps modernes à nos jours, in Alexandre Fernandez and Bruno Marnot, eds., *Les ports du golfe de Gascogne de Concarneau à la Corogne (XV^e - XXI^e siècle)* (Paris, 2013), 19-32.

⁹ Elisa Ferreira Priegue, 'Las rutas marítimas y comerciales del flanco ibérico desde Galicia hasta Flandes', in *El fuero de San Sebastián y su época* (San Sebastián, 1982), 225-234.

¹⁰ Hilario Casado Alonso, 'El comercio burgalés y la estructuración del espacio económico español a fines de la Edad Media', in *Itinerarios medievales y identidad hispánica* (Pamplona, 2001) 329-356.

¹¹ L. M. Díez de Salazar, *Ferrerías en Guipúzcoa (siglos XIV-XVI)* (San Sebastián, 1983), 2 vol. Jesús Angel Solórzano Teléchea, 'La producción y comercialización del hierro en las Cuatro Villas de la Costa de la Mar', *Studi medievali*, (2006), 71-108.

¹² Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu, 'Las actividades económicas de las villas marítimas del norte peninsular', in *Las sociedades urbanas en la España medieval* (Pamplona, 2003), 195-242.

wine and shortly thereafter woad on the Atlantic coast and onward to the British Isles, Flanders and Holland. A particular case concerns the ports of the salt basins (Bay of Bourgneuf and the Pays Guérandais). The scattering of ports stemmed from production sites which were ranked according to their role (anchoring areas, ports for boarding and landing at the mouths of creeks or basic boarding points on creeks). However, both stood out for the scale of traffic and the more significant international opening for the Bay but also for their role in maritime trade: the passivity of the Bay stood in contrast to the presence of the ferry fleet of Le Croisic in the Pays Guérandais.

The fruit of the development of economic trade as of the 14th century, these port systems also stemmed from more complex interactions to the extent that the principal ports implemented strategies to control their environment but were to enjoy varying degrees of success in this respect.

2. Issues and strategies for controlling river and sea access to ports

2.1. Cantabrian ports: control of the land-sea interface of the municipal jurisdiction and strict application of the 'carga y descarga' privilege

The available case studies allow us to identify three type of strategy for controlling the land-sea interface of the municipal jurisdiction or *término municipal*. The first, developed by San Sebastian, consisted in managing reduction of the original jurisdiction and the adjacent new port towns whose jurisdictions were built into that of San Sebastian (fig. 2). The only port lying close to the border with France in the late 12th century, San Sebastian saw three other port towns spring up: Fuenterrabia (1200), Rentería (1320) and Orío (1379). As of the 1330s, the San Sebastian municipality sought to control the *ria* of Oyarzun over which inhabitants of Fuenterrabia and Rentería also enjoyed rights as local residents. It moved to take the upper hand over both of its neighbours, not only by placing a tax to its benefit alone on vessels mooring at the port of Pasajes as well as goods which were loaded and unloaded there, but also by extending collection of this tax to vessels and goods of the neighbours of Fuenterrabia and Rentería, provoking vehement protests on their part. Continual conflicts undermined relations between the three towns through to the 16th century¹³.

For its part, Bilbao primarily acted to affirm the city's pre-eminent role within the scattering of existing ports. The foundation of Bilbao in 1300 by the Lord of Biscay, Diego López de Haro, was part of this province's late urbanisation process. Around Bermeo, the only previous port town in the mid 13th century, in addition to Bilbao there sprang up Plencia (refounded in 1299), Portugalete (1322), Lequeitio (1325) and Ondárroa (1327). Located at the bottom of the *ria* of Nervión, some 14 kilometres from the sea, Bilbao had to count with the presence of Portugalete at the mouth of the *ria*. Thanks to the privileges granted by its lord and the King of Castile during the 14th century, Bilboa emerged as the main urban and port centre.¹⁴ As of 1310, goods and products travelling along the route from Pancorbo to Bermeo via Orduña had to pass through Bilbao, whose port gradually gained ascendancy over that of Bermeo for products leaving the interior of Castile. Similarly, all products transported on the Nervión upstream of the town from Areta had to be transported to Bilbao for sale. In 1372, besides an extension to the tax exemptions which the inhabitants had benefited from since 1310, Bilbao consolidated its role

¹³ María Soledad Tena García, *La sociedad urbana en la Guipúzcoa medieval. San Sebastián, Rentería y Fuenterrabia ~1200-1500* (San Sebastián, 1977), 542-566.

¹⁴ Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu and Sergio Martínez Martínez, *Bizkaia, Atlas de villas medievales de Vasconia* (Bilbao, 2006), 21-28.

as the principal port by strengthening its monopoly over trade on the *ria* through to Baracaldo and Zamudio¹⁵.

The case of Laredo demonstrates how keen municipal authorities were to control small secondary ports in the interior of and immediately adjacent to municipal jurisdiction. That granted by Alphonse VIII to Laredo in 1200 covered around 100 square kilometres. To the south, these boundaries were based on a number of peaks. It was bordered to the north by the Cantabrian sea, to the west by the *ria* of Asón and to the east by that of Oriñón, an inlet over which the municipality claimed jurisdiction, including on the opposite bank (fig. 3)¹⁶. In 1381, it took proceedings against the residents of Guriezo after they built a mill on the *ria* of Oriñón without authorisation. In 1398, it obtained from the king, Henri III, confirmation of the limits of its jurisdiction and conviction of the residents of areas located near the outskirts of the *término municipal*, Puerto Santa María (Santoña), Argoños, Escalante, Gama and Rada, and Limpías, who were accused of engaging in maritime trade in violation of its *carga y descarga* privilege. Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, Laredo and Castro Urdiales tussled over the collection of duties on boats entering and leaving the *ria* of Oriñón.

Cantabrian port towns also claimed jurisdiction over the coast and the waters located in front of the natural barrier or the imaginary line marking the port's entrance. The example of the *Cuatro Villas de la Costa de la Mar* sums up the nature of this maritime jurisdiction and the issues at stake. San Vicente de la Barquera, Santander, Laredo and Castro Urdiales shared control over the 284 kilometres of Cantabrian coastline. Royal privileges stipulated 4 leagues for San Vicente de la Barquera (2 either side of the town) and 10 leagues for Santander (5 either side). The scope of these 'municipal waters' was defined over the course of disputes and legal proceedings. Covered by the maritime jurisdictions of San Vicente de La Barquera and Laredo, that of Santander stretched from the point of Ballota through to the *ria* of Galizando, to a depth of 10 leagues out to sea or around 55 kilometres (fig. 4)¹⁷. Defence of the *carga y descarga* privilege in these coastal waters brought the Santander municipality into conflict with the inhabitants of San Martín de la Arena who, backed by the powerful Mendoza family, lords of the neighbouring town of Santillana del Mar, loaded and unloaded goods at the mouth of the Saja River, without passing through the port of Santander and without settling the corresponding duties.

The importance of these 'municipal waters' also stems from the fact that they included coastal fishing areas placed under the jurisdiction of fishermen fellowships which regulated use among members and endeavoured to restrict their exploitation by fishermen from other towns. In 1376, Guipuzcoans agreed amongst themselves to ban their neighbours from Biscay and Cantabria from going out to meet vessels loaded with supplies, particularly cereals, and diverting them from provincial ports. They planned to reserve for themselves the right to force vessels to divert in order to supply urban markets suffering from a chronic shortage of wheat.¹⁸

2.2. Ports of Gascony: strategies and degrees of control over river and sea access

¹⁵ Sergio Martínez Martínez, 'Bilbao, une grande cité médiévale malgré son port', *Revue d'Histoire maritime*, 9 (2008), 55-65.

¹⁶ Beatriz Arízaga Bolumburu, 'La villa de Laredo y sus términos jurisdiccionales', in Juana Torres, ed., *Historica y philologica*. In honorem José María Robles (Santander, 2002), 183-195.

¹⁷ Lorena Fernández González, *Santander. Una ciudad medieval* (Santander, 2002), 407-411.

¹⁸ Beatriz Arízaga Bolumburu, 'La perception de la frontière en Guipúzcoa au Moyen Âge', in Denis Menjot, ed., *Les villes frontières Moyen Âge – Époque moderne* (Paris, 1996), 139.

At an early stage, the municipalities of Bayonne, Bordeaux and Libourne made clear their determination to control not just the port itself (infrastructures on land and the adjacent waters) but also river and sea access upstream and downstream from the port. They saw it as a question of preventing the formation of outports and relay points liable to divert all or part of the traffic and so deprive them of the tax revenues and commercial profits associated with port traffic. Without any apparent common plan but acting in perfect unison, all three exploited the privileged position created by the port's establishment on a site at the bottom of an estuary which made it an interface for exchange between a continental hinterland and a maritime foreland (fig. 5).

The means used to achieve their ends were, however, extremely diverse. Sometimes, negotiations were favoured. In 1272, Libourne got Saint-Émilion to agree that wine produced in the latter's suburbs could only be loaded in Pierrefitte between the grape harvest and 2 February and at the port of Libourne for the rest of the year¹⁹. In the 15th century, Bayonne and Dax reached agreement on granting their respective neighbours economic and tax reciprocity, whereas the municipality of Bayonne negotiated with toll-collecting lords, exemptions for the town's bourgeoisie, for instance in Hastingue and Tartas. The mayor and jurats of Bordeaux systematically harassed ducal officers throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly the Provost of Ombrière in charge of the port police, even getting Louis XI to agree to the transfer of the provost's powers to the municipality²⁰. Similar pressures and a policy of *fait accompli* enabled them to force through recognition of an artificial 'droit de banvin' which blocked competition from the wines of the 'Haut Pays Garonnais', banned from descending the river until mid-winter, and to prevent the formation of outports on the Médoc bank of the Gironde by reserving loading of export wines for the port of Bordeaux alone. The mayor and the jurats of Libourne took similar action, in the late 15th century, faced with the inhabitants of Bourg and Soulac in a bid to defend the monopoly of the salt storehouse established in their town²¹. There is also evidence of use of force. Although, in the 1470s, the Libournais contented themselves with training the town's canons on the Dordogne to prevent vessels from sailing as far as Pierrefitte. In 1502 the Bayonnais led a punitive expedition against their neighbours in Capbreton, accused of breaching the loading and unloading monopoly enjoyed by the port of Bayonne on the lower stretches of the Adour. The quarrel led to death and injury since the Capbretonnais responded to the attack with cannon fire²².

The legal advantages which Bayonne, Bordeaux and Libourne gained from this policy were three fold. The three cities exercised municipal jurisdiction over the port and port waters (police, tax affairs, etc.). This jurisdiction was implicit in Bayonne and Libourne to judge from the municipal regulations concerning pilots tasked with guiding vessels or banning attempts to go out to meet such vessels before they moored in front of the town. It is better documented in Bordeaux due to the numerous disputes

¹⁹ Michel Bochaca, 'Libourne au début du XVI^e siècle: espaces et pouvoirs d'une ville du Bordelais', *Annales du Midi*, 106 (1994), 333-352. Idem, 'L'aire d'influence de Saint-Émilion (fin XVe - début XVIe siècle)', *Cahiers Charles Higounet*, 1 (1994), 49-65.

²⁰ Michel Bochaca, *La banlieue de Bordeaux. Formation d'une juridiction municipale suburbaine (vers 1250 - vers 1550)* (Paris, 1997). Idem, 'El control del puerto de Burdeos y de su tráfico mercantil del siglo XIII al XV: jurisdicciones y estructuración del espacio', in Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu and Jesús Angel Solórzano Teléchea, eds., *Ciudades y villas portuarias del Atlántico en la Edad Media* (Logroño, 2005), 91-113.

²¹ Michel Bochaca, 'Libourne et le commerce du sel dans la basse vallée de la Dordogne à la fin du Moyen Âge: enjeux et conflits', in Jean-Claude Hocquet and Jean-Luc Sarrazin, eds., *Le sel de la Baie. Histoire, archéologie, ethnologie des sels atlantiques* (Rennes, 2006), 235-243.

²² Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu and Michel Bochaca, 'Bayona y el control del curso inferior del Adour del siglo XV al principio del siglo XVI', in María Isabel del Val Valdivieso, ed., *Musulmanes y Cristianos frente al agua en las ciudades medievales* (Santander, 2008), 215- 236.

between the mayor and jurats on one side and ducal officers on the other throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly vis-à-vis the Provost of Ombrière who had authority over the port. In 1473, Louis XI transferred the Provost's powers to the municipality which henceforth enjoyed sole jurisdiction over the port and port waters, with the exception, however, of business coming under the admiralty of Guyenne. To different degrees, Bayonne, Bordeaux and Libourne obtained the creation of an exclusivity zone to the benefit of their port. The Bayonne zone extended to Horgave and Bidache upstream and to the mouth of the Adour (now Vieux-Boucau) downstream. Loading and unloading, other than in Bayonne, were subject to prior authorisation by the mayor and jurats who nonetheless had to put pressure on the boatmen of the Adour and the masters of sea-faring vessels to ensure that they complied with these provisions. Exclusivity only concerned salt in the case of Libourne from the Bec d'Ambès through to the confluence of the Isle and the Dordogne and wine in the case of Bordeaux between the Crebat rill and Castillon (Médoc). Finally, protectionist measures were aimed at blocking all competition coming from upstream. The wines and ciders of Chalosse were banned from descending through to Bayonne from Michaelmas until Easter. After the failed attempt to get the kings of England to recognise the interdiction on descending wines from the Haut Pays until 30 November, the Bordelais made up for matters under Charles VII, who introduced legislation in 1454, and under Louis XI who, in 1462, extended the ban until 26 December. Little is known about regulations concerning restrictions on descending wines from the Haut Pays to Libourne due to the lack of documentation. Discriminatory tax measures (cask marking duty) regarding wines from the Haut Pays and other repressive measures to avoid fraud strengthened this system in Bordeaux.

The results obtained by each of the three cities in terms of controlling the zone proved uneven. The determined efforts by the Bordeaux municipality to serve the city's economic interests largely explain how the *Port de la Lune* came to crush all attempts at competition on the low valley of the Garonne and part of the Gironde estuary. The small ports which did not come under the direct jurisdiction of Bordeaux (suburbs) fell within the port exclusivity zone between the Crebat rill and Castillon downstream of the city or the diffuse area of economic influence running upstream to the boundaries of the Haut Pays. Bordeaux thus controlled a string of ports stretching for more than 100 kilometres. Though some way behind Bordeaux in terms of traffic, Libourne managed to consolidate its position as the diocese's second biggest economic hub, carving out a place as the main port on the low valley of the Dordogne. Despite their best efforts, the mayor and jurats failed to scupper the allowance enjoyed by the salt trading fair in Bourg although this commodity had to transit by the warehouse established in their town for the rest of the year. Vessels loaded with Médoc salt from Soulac had to stop at Libourne before continuing upstream but they no longer had to unload their cargo. For payment of duties, a provost certificate from the lord of Lesparre was sufficient to attest to the quantity transported. Finally, the bourgeoisie of Saint-Émilion retained the right to load their wine at the port of Pierrefitte from the grape harvest through until 2 February. The Libournais therefore had to accept partial control. As for Bayonne, the natural displacement of the mouth of the Adour in the early 14th century pushed access to the sea back by fifteen or so kilometres and, above all, made manoeuvring down the channel more difficult due to the shallower water²³. With the upturn in economic activities in the second half of the 15th century, the municipality of Bayonne hung onto its commercial and tax privileges and endeavoured, at all costs,

²³ Michel Bochaca, 'Bayonne et le déplacement de l'embouchure de l'Adour d'après l'enquête de 1491', in Michel Bochaca and Jean-Luc Sarrazin, eds., *Ports et littoraux de l'Europe atlantique. Transformations naturelles et aménagements humains (XIVe-XVIe siècles)* (Rennes, 2007), 97-117.

to maintain the monopoly on traffic enjoyed by its port, clamping down on offenders such as masters of vessels inclined to load and unload in Capbreton rather than taking the risk of continuing up to Bayonne and boatmen on the Adour quick to divert traffic upstream and avoid paying taxes. As of the end of the 1460s, it envisaged major work in order to restore the mouth of the Adour's past navigability and endeavoured to obtain funding from the monarchy to this end. Due to conflicts with Capbreton, the solution consisting in reopening the old mouth at the 'Gouf de Capbreton' was abandoned in the early 16th century. More than willing to use nature as an ultimate solution, the Bayonnais came up with a radical project which consisted in artificially opening up direct access to the sea as close as possible to their city. Work begun in the 1560s was completed in 1578 despite considerable technical and financial difficulties.

2.3. La Rochelle and Nantes: complementary relations with the surrounding ports failing establishment of a monopoly on traffic

Sitting in the heart of the Gulf of Biscay and lapped by the sheltered waters of the Pertuis Sea, La Rochelle was ideally located to benefit from growth in international trade, particularly on its favoured markets of salt and wine. Moreover, it could reasonably hope to take advantage of the logistic, naval and economic appeal of the very dense surrounding port network. These secondary ports, with fairly well distributed functions, contributed to the hosting and armament capacities of the economic area of La Rochelle as well as the coastal defence system which the city oversaw. Along the coast of Aunis, Saintonge and the Pertuis Islands, no fewer than fifty small ports of all sizes were specifically assigned to loading wine and salt for northern Europe and most often traded by Rochelais themselves. Some of these port sites had nonetheless acquired an additional dimension and supplemented their activities by overseeing regional trade. At the mouth of the Sèvre and the Charente Rivers, Marans and, to a lesser extent, Tonny-Charente, served to facilitate river-sea transits through which passed products from the Poitevin and Saintonge hinterlands and where food from interregional trade²⁴ was routed. However, La Rochelle suffered from a major handicap: unlike most havens of its type established at the offloading limit at the bottom of an estuary, its port had no possibility of benefiting from the traffic potential spontaneously generated by a major river. As a result, the relations cultivated by La Rochelle with the surrounding ports of Aunis and Saintonge but also Bas-Poitou formed part of a general policy, gradually defined by the urban authorities in the late Middle Ages, which consisted in controlling potential competition and turning their qualities to full account. The Rochelais, in keeping with a mindset which was essentially protectionist, endeavoured by economic, military and fiscal means to force the broadest possible regional space to become dependent upon it. So it was that on the strength of commercial networks and their financial clout, not to mention control of the salt and wine sectors and the fact that the region's traders and notaries were established within their city walls, they made every effort to limit the role of surrounding ports to that of mere sites for warehouses and loading, only leaving them a meagre share of trading operations. Moreover, with or without the support of the royal authorities, they

²⁴ Mathias Tranchant, *Le commerce maritime de La Rochelle à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Rennes, 2003), 77-229. Idem, 'Les aménagements des ports secondaires de l'Aunis maritime à la fin du Moyen Âge', in Michel Bochaca and Jean-Luc Sarrazin, eds., *Ports et littoraux de l'Europe atlantique. Transformations naturelles et aménagements humains (XIVe-XVIe siècles)* (Rennes, 2007), 55-79. Idem, 'Les Sables, de Savary de Mauléon (1218) à Philippe de Commyne (1472): la lente genèse d'une ville neuve dans sa châtellenie littorale', in *Les Vendéens et la mer, de la grande pêche au Vendée Globe* (La Roche-sur-Yon, 2008), 55-87.

sought to organise a military defence system in which their port played a central role. Finally, by extension of their jurisdiction (creation of the suburbs in 1347, creation of the government in 1373 covering the Aunis and the Pertuis Islands) and the imposition of new duties to their benefit (8 *sous* per barrel of wine harvested outside of the suburbs, brokerage duties, one quarter of the Treaty of Aunis and Saintonge), they tied the ports of Aunis and Saintonge into their own interests. La Rochelle ended up enjoying a strangle hold over its port environment allowing it to fully benefit from its qualities and dynamism without fearing too much competition²⁵.

In Nantes, the importance of both the Loire route and the north-south axis relating to the bridges, is clearly perceived as evidence of enlargement of the jurisdiction of the Provost of Nantes which, in the 15th century, extended over a large part of the earldom of Nantes and even beyond²⁶. Due to the passive nature of its trade, Nantes did not dominate the Loire estuary. The Loire estuary system was organised around a port city as a centre of consumption hosting warehouses and transit operations. Difficulties in moving up river made Pellerin an outpost. The other estuary ports were so many secondary crossroads able to provide estuary products, boats, ships and crews involved - with others - in the Nantes flow of trade. In Brittany, towns were subordinate to the ducal authority although they enjoyed a certain autonomy while the conduct of their regional policy required privileges to be obtained, particularly tax related, aimed at favouring their appeal. In 1407, Nantes obtained a fortnightly duty-free *fayre* for all products sold other than salt downstream and wheat and wine upstream; on 19 September 1420, "trespass" taxes raised at Saint-Nazaire were reduced; in 1424, 'the community of merchants working on the Loire river and the waterway descending therefrom' in which Nantais participated, were made exempt from the Champtoceaux toll.

The legal instrument of 19 September 1420, in which the duke redeployed the arguments of Nantais helps to clarify the issues surrounding this decision. According to the Nantais, the tax raised at Saint-Nazaire was dissuasive and to avoid paying it, merchants from Basse-Bretagne were travelling directly to La Rochelle in order to barter their wheat for wine, whereas Castilians used land routes to transport large quantities of textile products purchased in the north of Nantes, also to La Rochelle. The Nantais positioned themselves as competitors with La Rochelle,²⁷ and kept a watchful eye over the Spanish initiatives due to concerns about the future of the textile trade for which their city was the capital in Brittany. Moreover, at this time, the alliance of Castile with France was undermining relations with England and Normandy and the Castilian wool route was reorganised. In 1424, the staple of Harfleur was transferred to La Rochelle while Nantes, which benefited from a policy of neutrality favoured by the Duke of Brittany, emerged as a technical and, above all, commercial stopover to become one of the four Castilian trading posts - the other three being La Rochelle, Rouen and Bruges - allowing them to control the wool trade. On 20 April 1430, a treaty was signed between the Duke Jean V and Castile meaning that Castilians were henceforth treated like Breton merchants and had a stage duty in the form of a 'grant' (*cofradía de la contratación*), the right to elect a consul and prosecutor and were placed under the jurisdiction of the chancellor of Brittany. It is unclear what influence the Nantais may have been able

²⁵ Mathias Tranchant, 'La constitution de la banlieue rochelaise à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Histoire Urbaine*, 8 (2003), 23-40. Idem, "La Rochelle et ses ports à la fin du Moyen Âge", 85-97.

²⁶ Jean Kerhervé, *L'État breton aux 14e et 15e siècles: les ducs, l'argent et les hommes* (Paris, 1987), 2, 663-664.

²⁷ Mathias Tranchant, 'Échanges et concurrences entre Nantes et La Rochelle à la fin du Moyen Âge', in Frédéric Chauvaud and Jacques Péret, eds., *Terres marines. Études en hommage à Dominique Guillemet* (Rennes, 2006), 51-56.

to exercise in favour of such decisions of which the Castilians were the main instigators²⁸, but they were undoubtedly in keeping with those already taken by the Duke and which they had requested. The treaty of 1430 was subsequently regularly renewed and the advantages granted were extended (in 1452, Castilians were exempt from a tax of one denier by pound). As of the 1450s, the Burgos and Medina del Campo families set up in Nantes where they formed a fully fledged community. The same surnames can be found in Bordeaux, Rouen, the Netherlands and England²⁹. These networks brought Nantes into the Atlantic trade circuits at a time when the relations established between Nantes and Bilbao boosted the city's development. However, tensions occasionally arose due to political vicissitudes. The Brittany war of independence was a delicate period: in 1487, the property of Castilians living in Nantes were pillaged and the stage was transferred to La Rochelle where they took refuge for a time. In 1493, the stage was re-established in Nantes³⁰. It would therefore seem that Nantes neither built nor controlled an economic zone dominated by its business men. Its commerce was largely in the hands of traders external to the city, some of whom were Castilians sensitive to the strategic position of the Nantes crossroads. However, by means of the ducal interventions which the Nantais obtained, they helped establish measures which represented a regional policy aimed at procuring advantages to their benefit³¹.

The taking into consideration of a vast section of the French and Castilian Atlantic coastline and the comparative study of the relations which the main port towns cultivated with the zones forming their river and sea access routes, including secondary ports located in these zones, primarily demonstrate the considerable diversity of situations not to mention the number and size of ports. We can also observe the existence of regional port systems functioning according to different principles. To the north of the Gironde estuary, La Rochelle and Nantes supervised secondary ports brought under their economic dependency by exerting a strong commercial and financial pull upon them but without controlling them from the legal, fiscal or military viewpoints. With varying degrees of success Bordeaux, Bayonne and Libourne conducted a determined policy to place small neighbouring ports beyond the suburbs of their city suburbs under their jurisdictional and fiscal authority both upstream and downstream. In relative terms, Bilbao developed a similar policy of control over the lower stretches and the mouth of the Nervión and the major routes leading to the city, while extending its economic influence in the direction of Castro Urdiales. The other ports of Guipúzcoa, Biscay and Cantabria not only appear to have been capable of imposing themselves beyond the boundaries of their jurisdiction, but were also able to defend compliance with their loading and unloading privilege in the face of neighbouring port cities and small ports falling within their jurisdiction. By the late Middle Ages, this had resulted in an active seaboard, but one which, with the exception of Bilbao once again, did not present the kind of clearly defined port hierarchy emerging on the French coastline during the same period.

²⁸ Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu, Michel Bochaca, and Mathias Tranchant, 'Aspects du commerce franco-castillan à la fin du Moyen Âge: la progression castillane dans le golfe de Gascogne', in Jean-Philippe Priotti and Gui Saupin, eds., *Le commerce atlantique franco-espagnol: acteurs, acteurs, négoces et ports (XVe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Rennes, 2008), 33-48

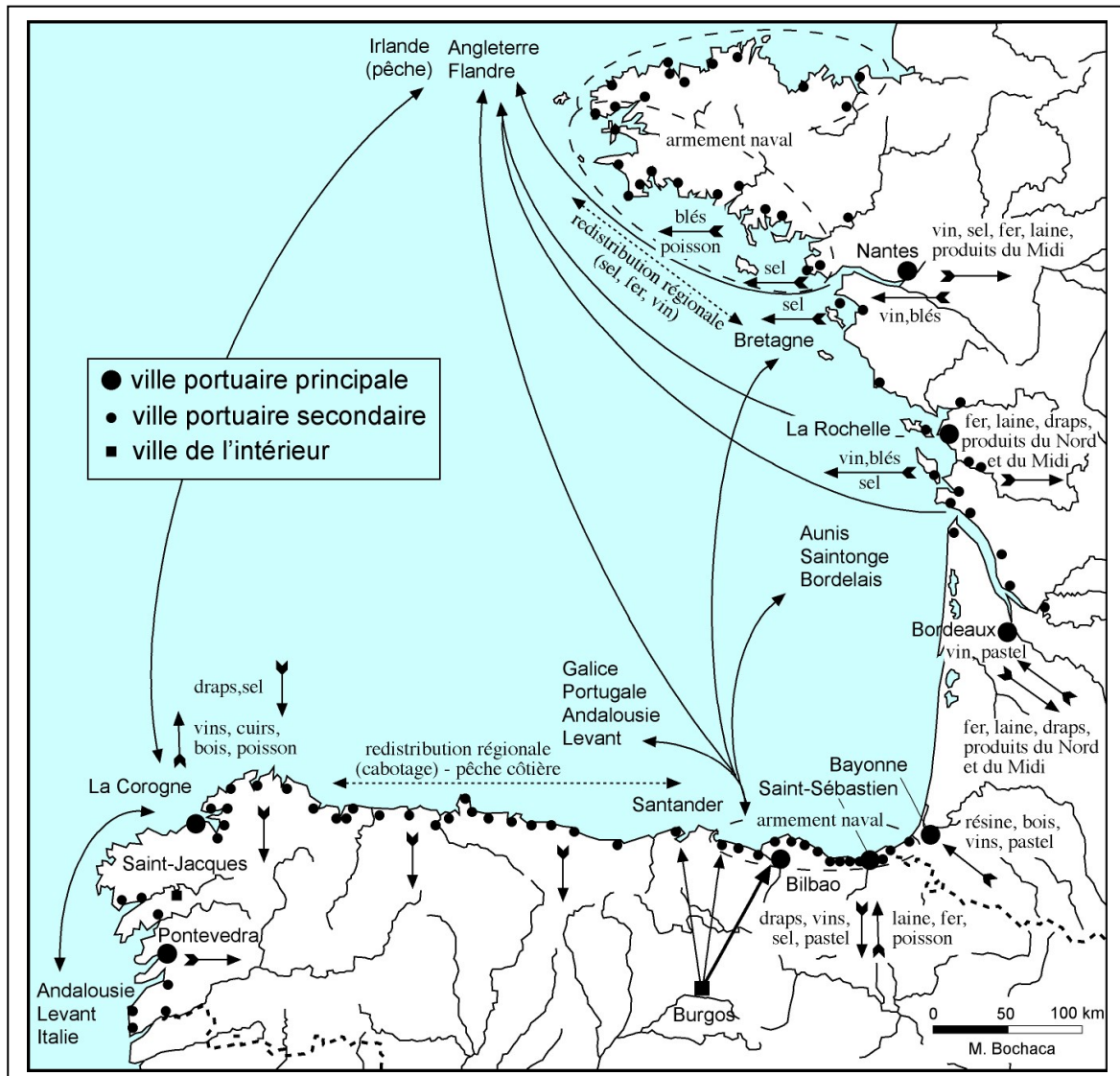
²⁹ Hilario Casado Alonso, *El triunfo de Mercurio. La presencia castellana en Europa (Siglos XV y XVI)* (Burgos, 2003).

³⁰ Laurence Moal, 'Le rétablissement de la bourse d'Espagne à Nantes par le roi de France en 1493', *Bulletin de la société archéologique et historique de Nantes et de Loire-Atlantique*, 145 (2010), 127-152.

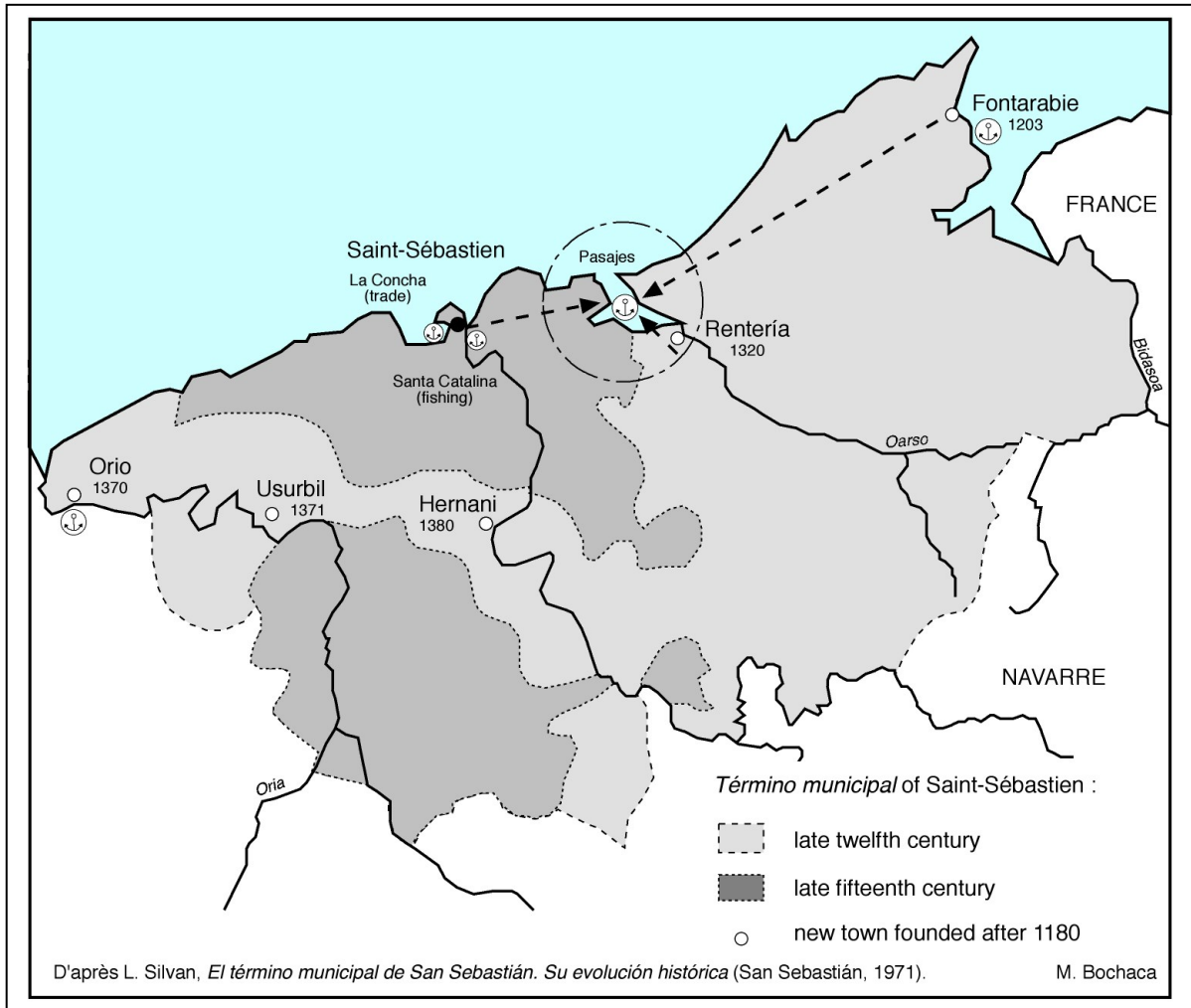
³¹ On the regional issues concerning privileges granted, Michel Bochaca, 'Libourne et le commerce du sel', 235-243.

Map legends :

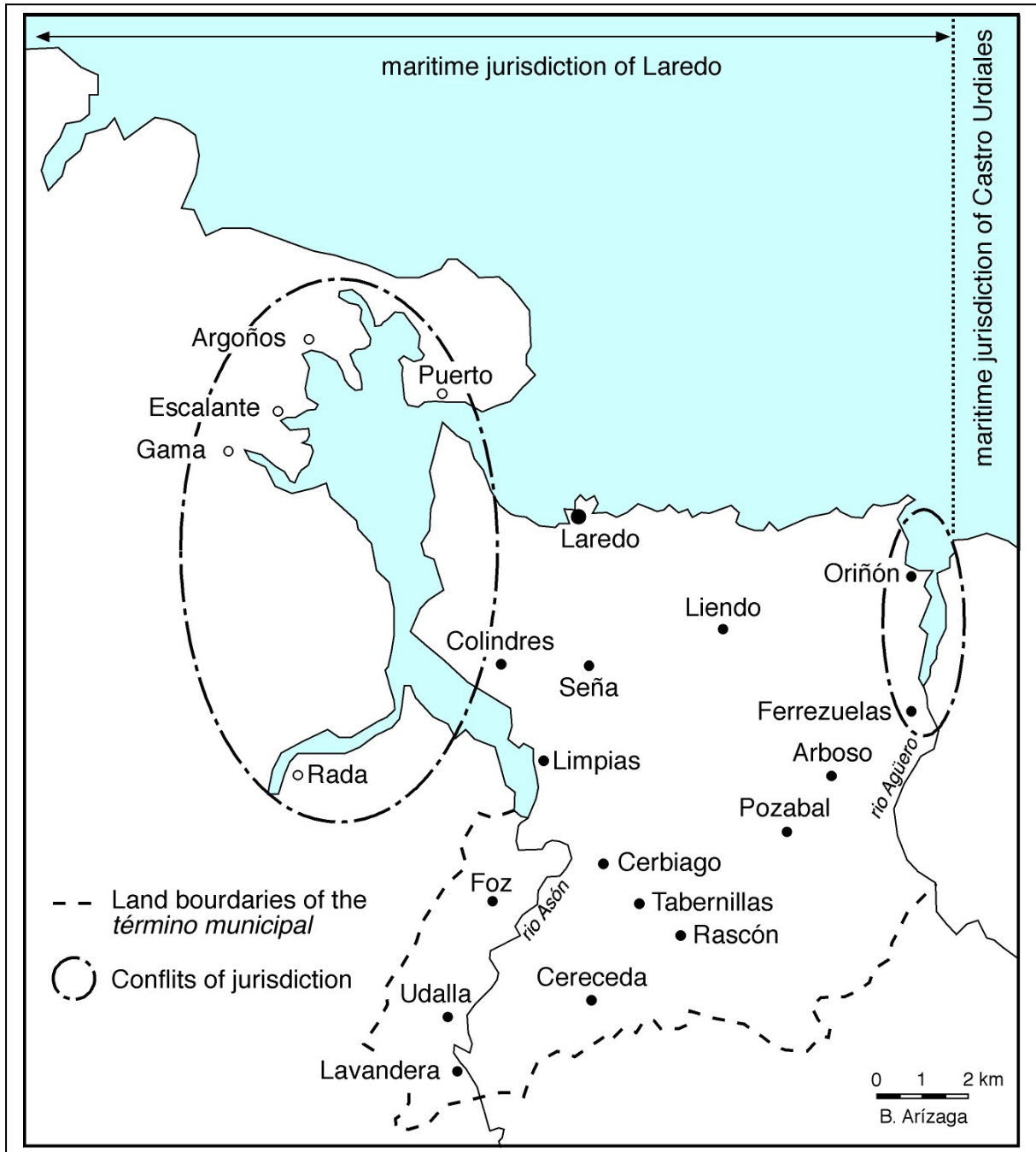
1. Ports and commercial traffic in the Bay of Biscay at the end of the Middle Ages



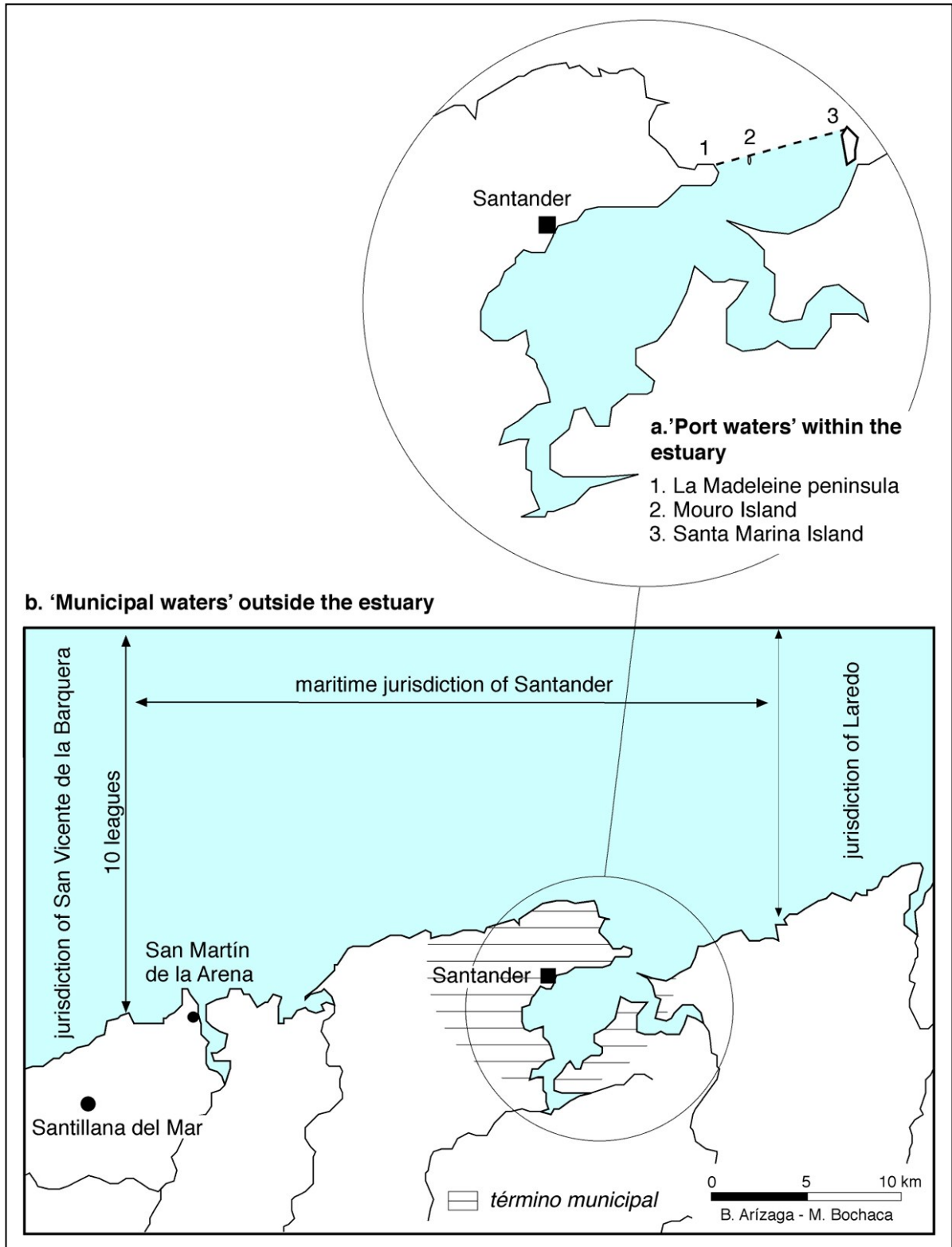
2. Jurisdiction of Saint-Sébastien



3. Jurisdiction of Laredo



4. Jurisdiction of Santander



5. Jurisdiction and hinterland of Bordeaux, Libourne and Bayonne

