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Commercial relations between the Basque Provinces and England in the Later Middle Ages, c.1200-c.1500

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Las relaciones comerciales entre Inglaterra y las provincias vascas se remontan sin duda al siglo XIII, y posiblemente incluso al XII. La complementariedad de los bienes, junto a la proximidad de Inglaterra, su posición en la ruta principal hacia Flandes, y sus contactos con la vecina Gascuña hicieron que el comercio fuera atractivo, aunque las hostilidades políticas, especialmente durante la Guerra de los Cien Años, pusieron serios obstáculos a la relación comercial. De cualquier modo, la presencia vasca en puertos ingleses era ya intensa en las décadas de 1260-80, de nuevo en la década de 1320 y en la de 1350. Exportaban a Inglaterra principalmente hierro, vino y tinte (pastel), e importaban ropa inglesa. Los comerciantes provenían de Vitoria, Valmaseda, y varios puertos de Bizkaia y Gipuzkoa. Las naves zarpaban de muchos puertos, y para la década de 1350 se habían impuesto a los buques que provenían de Santander y del resto de la costa norte, para ocupar un posición dominante en el comercio entre Inglaterra y el norte de España. Durante el siglo XV, los intercambios continuaron entre treguas y salvoconductos, y crecieron rápidamente tras la firma de la paz en 1466. En la década de 1490, se podían contar anualmente más de 60 buques vascos en los puertos ingleses, desde Chester en el noroeste, hasta Hull en el noreste, y su importancia era clara, ya que proveían entre un 85-90 por ciento de la importación inglesa de hierro, y transportaban entre un 10-15 por ciento de las exportaciones de ropa inglesa.

Ingalaterraren eta euskal probintzien arteko merkataritza harremanak antzinakoak dira, XIII. mendekoak gutxienez, eta beharbada XII. mendean ere izango ziren. Ondasun osagarriek, Ingalaterratik hurbil egoteak, Flandeseko bide nagusian kokatuta egoteak, eta alboan duen Gaskoniarekiko loturak merkataritza erraztu bazuen ere, etsaitasun politikoak, batez ere Ehun Urteko Gerraren garaian, eragozpen handia izan ziren. Alabaina, euskal presentzia handia zen Ingalaterrako portuetan 1260ko eta 80ko hamarkadatan, baita 1320koan eta 1350koan. Euskaldunek batez ere burdina, ardoa eta tindua eramaten zuten Ingalaterrara, eta handik jantziak ekartzen. Merkataria gasteiztarak, balmasedatarak, eta Bizkaiko nahiz Gipuzkoako portu askotarikoak. Ontziak portu askotatik itsasoratzen ziren, eta 1350eko hamarkadarako Santanderreko eta ipar itsasaldeko gainerako portuei aurrea hartua zieten euskaldunek, Ingalaterraren eta ipar Espainiaren arteko merkataritza lanean gailentasuna irabazteko. Ingalaterrarekiko merkataritzak bere bidea jarraitu zuen XV. mendean, su-eten eta ibil-baimenen artean, eta biziki indartu zen 1466ko bake itunaz geroztik. Horrela, 1490ko hamarkadan gutxienez urtean 60 euskal itsasontzi izango ziren Ingalaterrako portuetan, ipar-mendebaldeko Chester-en hasi eta ipar-ekialdeko Hull-eraino, eta haien garrantziaz jabetzeko, esan dezagun Ingalaterrak inportatzen zuen burdinaren ehuneko 85-90 eramaten zutela, eta handik esportatzen ziren jantzi guztien ehuneko 10-15 bat etxeratzen zutela.

1. INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Spanish commercial relations date from at least the late twelfth century, and expanded through the thirteenth century to peak in the 1260s and 1270s and again in the 1320s. Trade continued through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries despite political difficulties in the Hundred Years War, and expanded again after the Anglo-Castilian treaty of 1466, to reach a late medieval peak in the 1480s and 1490s. Basque activity is visible throughout, and was particularly high in the late fifteenth century. The trade is not surprising: mutually attractive commodities, proximity, England's possession from 1154 of Gascony, and England's strategic position on the Channel route to the great entrepot at Bruges, all encouraged it. Only politics disrupted it.

2. THE HISTORY OF THE TRADE

Basque activity in England and English Gascony is visible from the early thirteenth century, but many English records of this period describe the merchants and ships simply as 'de Hispania', and it is not clear how many were Basque. Possibly their role was already important in the first half of the thirteenth century, since men of San Sebastián were active enough at sea to have clashed with the men of the English Cinque

Ports, and in 1237 they received a five-year safe-conduct allowing them to trade with England without harm from the Cinque Ports sailors¹. However, on the few occasions when details of home-ports and home-towns are given, it is clear that there are as many ships from Castro Urdiales, Laredo, Santander and other ports as far west as La Coruña and Pontevedra, and that most merchants came from Santiago, Leon, Salamanca, and Burgos. Ships of Bayonne were also very active in the Bay of Biscay carrying northern Spanish goods for Spanish merchants to Gascony and England². Basque activity becomes much clearer in the second half of the thirteenth century. The Anglo-Castilian treaty of 1254 and the marriage of Eleanor of Castile to the future Edward I of England brought close political relationships and greater security to the route, and despite what is sometimes said³, Anglo-Spanish trade flourished. At Southampton Spanish merchants hired houses and received tax exemptions in the 1260s⁴, and a few surviving tax returns for the 1260s and 1270s at Winchelsea (only a minor port) show considerable amounts of peaceful trade there too. These accounts are important because they show clearly that the merchants 'de Hispania' were using Basque ships. In 1267-8, alongside three ships from Castro Urdiales, at least twelve Basque ships arrived. A ship of San Sebastián unloaded wine in June; a merchant of San Sebastián in an unnamed ship unloaded iron, almonds, cider and cheese in September; then a small fleet of five ships from Fuenterrabía unloaded wine on 24 December and another from Fuenterrabía and two from San Sebastián unloaded wine on 31 December; two more from Fuenterrabía brought mixed cargoes after Epiphany. In subsequent years through to the end of the 1270s ships of Castro Urdiales predominated, but vessels of San Sebastián and Fuenterrabía still appeared⁵. Trade was also flourishing in London, which was probably the main centre for Spanish trade. Here we have no customs accounts, but records of debts to foreign merchants show that sixty-five of 208 debts recorded between 1276 and 1284 were for Spanish merchants, and in 1285 forty-four of 102 debts recorded were for Spaniards⁶. The Spaniards were by far the largest foreign group; many were from Burgos, but others came from Vitoria and Valmaseda, and it is very likely that they too were using shipping from Castro and the Basque Provinces.

The hostility between Edward I and Sancho IV in 1285 and at the beginning of the Anglo-French war in 1293 upset this growing trade with England and led to seizures and reprisals on both sides for nearly a decade. Matters improved with the Anglo-French treaty of 1303, which included Castile, and with special agreements in 1309 and 1311 for damage done to Bayonne. Surviving records of the new English customs duties on foreign merchants from 1303 show that commercial contacts had already been renewed well before the final settlement with Bayonne. At Sandwich in 1304-5 there were some thirty or forty Iberian importers, and among them at least Juan de San Sebastián and Juan de Bermeo must be Basque. In other records we see that two merchants of San Sebastián, Fernando and Andrés de Igueldo, were on their way to England in 1305 when they were driven by storm to Dorset; and merchants trading in Southampton in 1308-9, 1309-10 and 1310-11 included Lopyn and Miguel de Bermeo and Juan of Bilbao. Despite the conflict with Bayonne, Basque ships appeared in Gascony, although their numbers were not important among the hundreds of ships which arrived at Bordeaux for wine every year. In 1303-4 four Basque ships (two from Fuenterrabía and one each from Bermeo and San Sebastián) were there, in 1304-5 two (one from Fuenterrabía and one from Bermeo), and in 1306-7 three (all from Fuenterrabía)⁷.

By the 1320s trade across the Bay of Biscay had further recovered. Bayonne's normal close co-operation with Biscay was shown in 1317 when the town supported Bermeo's claim to the English king that Biscay was distinct from Castile and therefore its merchants should not be bound to pay for debts of men of Castile⁸. Trade was protected by safe-conducts and trade agreements. In 1322, 1324, and 1328 the English king granted safe-conducts to all Spaniards to trade peacefully in England, and in 1324 and 1328 Biscay negotiated parallel special safe-conducts for itself. Increasing numbers of Basque ships traded in England. At Sandwich in 1325-6 seventeen of the 70 ships carrying international trade were Spanish, and nine were Basque: five from Bermeo, two from Lequeitio, and one each from Fuenterrabía and Guetaria; of the others one was from Santander and seven from Castro. They made up 25 per cent of the incoming shipping and their cargoes of iron and high quality leather made up 46 per cent of imports. In 1327-8 and 1328-9 their activity was lower, but Basque ships still accounted for 13 per cent of the shipping, and brought 38 per cent of the goods⁹. Spaniards were also back in Winchelsea and were beginning to appe-

1. *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (hereafter CPR) 1232-47, p. 192.

2. *Close Rolls* 1227-31, p. 466.

3. GARCIA DE CORTAZAR, J.A.; ARIZAGA BOLUMBURU, B.; RIOS RODRIGUEZ, M.L.; DEL VAL VALDIVIESO, I.: *Bizcaya en la Edad Media*, 4 vols., San Sebastián, 1985, vol. II, p. 289.

4. CPR 1258-66, p. 258; CPR 1266-72, p. 169.

5. Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO) SC6/1031/19-24.

6. *Calendar of Letter Books preserved among the archives of the Corporation of the City of London, 1275-1498*, 11 vols, ed. SHARPE, R.R., London, 1899-1912, *Letter Book 'A'*, passim; London Record Office, Recognisance Roll 1.

7. PRO E122/124/11, 13; CPR 1301-07, p.349; PRO E122/136/8, 17, 21; PRO E101/158/10, 160/3, 161/3.

8. CPR 1313-17, p. 303; CPR 1317-21, pp. 53, 55.

9. PRO E122/124/29, 30. In 1327-9 the ships came from Castro (1), Bermeo (3), Motrico (1), Guetaria (2), and San Sebastián (3).

ar in western ports, where ships of Bermeo as well as of Santander and Castro Urdiales began to appear at Exeter and Bristol. Some merchants settled in London, and one of these was probably Juan de Sagassola, merchant of Vitoria. He was in England frequently from 1328 to 1334, and was a close associate of Fernando Manion, a Spaniard who certainly settled permanently in London and became a London citizen

Unfortunately this prosperity was disrupted again several times by politics during the Hundred Years War, although merchants and shipmen tried hard to keep trade going. The first signs of trouble came in 1337 when war broke out between England and France, and Spaniards found themselves arrested as suspected enemies. Subsequent grants of protection to them in 1337 and 1338 reveal at least 38 Spanish ships and over 47 Spanish merchants in English ports, mainly at Southampton and Sandwich. Of these ships 18 were clearly Basque (mostly from Bermeo and San Sebastián but also from Placencia, Lequeitio and Guetaria) and of the merchants over 21 were Basque, with groups from Vitoria (8), Orduña (5) Bilbao (4), and others from Frias, Lequeitio and San Sebastián. A large group of merchants was also from Burgos¹⁰. The English king did not, however, intend to harm Spaniards; in January 1338 he took all Spaniards trading with England into his protection, and in 1340 they were specifically included in the Anglo-French truce¹¹. Trade continued through the 1340s but was shaken again by the English destruction of the Spanish trading fleet to Flanders in 1351. Paradoxically this led to two decades of good trade as the merchants of Castile and Biscay negotiated a trade treaty with England in 1351 and made similar agreements with Bayonne in 1353¹². In the 1350s and 1360s ships of Bilbao, Bermeo, Motrico, San Sebastián and Castro can regularly be seen not only in London, Sandwich, and Southampton, but also in Exeter and occasionally at Winchelsea and Bristol¹³. In these decades Basque vessels were used to carry trade between England and the Mediterranean for Italians and also entered the wine trade at Bordeaux in larger numbers. In the mid-1350s up to nine Basque ships each year loaded wine at Bordeaux; in 1359-60 this rose to fifteen ships, and in 1360-61 an exceptional 70 Spanish ships loaded wine there. This fleet provided 20 per cent of the shipping and took 27 per cent of the wine. The 70 vessels were overwhelmingly Basque: alongside only one ship of Santander and seven of Castro, were thirteen from Bermeo, sixteen from Motrico and seventeen from San Sebastián with smaller numbers from Portugaleta, Bilbao, Lequeitio, Placencia, Ondárroa, Deva, Guetaria, and Fuenterrabía¹⁴.

A much more destructive break in commercial relations came after 1369 with the usurpation of the Castilian throne by Enrique Trastámara and his strong alliance with France in the re-opened Anglo-French war. Apart from a few supporters of Pedro I's daughters in exile in England, Spaniards completely withdrew from England and Bordeaux. However, English trade was still potentially attractive and when truces allowed trade resumed. In the 1390s and then through the early decades of the fifteenth century up to five Spanish ships a year appeared in London, and a few others arrived in Southampton, Winchelsea and Sandwich. Almost all were now Basque, from Bilbao, Ondárroa, Motrico, Deva, Guetaria and San Sebastián. Occasional ships of Bilbao or Deva also went to Bristol, but the Spanish trade there was dominated by English merchants and English and Gascon ships¹⁵. There were still, however, high risks of seizure and reprisal, and some more careful or more fearful ship-masters bought safe-conducts if they wanted to trade with England. Between 1402 and 1467 at least 429 safe-conducts were bought for Spanish ships. Not all ships which came to England bought safe-conducts, and the numbers varied decade by decade, probably in response to the level of danger at sea. In the 1420s, 1430s, 1440s in each decade between 24 and 36 ships bought grants, but with the outbreak of the Anglo-French war again in the 1450s the number soared to 113, and stayed high at 103 for the first four years of the 1460s. After that safe-conducts rapidly disappeared as hostilities declined. At least 70 per cent and probably nearer 90 per cent of these safe-conducts were granted to Basque vessels. Ships of Santander were rare. In Biscay the busiest port was Bilbao, which had now surpassed Bermeo; in Guipúzcoa San Sebastián and Deva supplied most ships for the English trade¹⁶. The English Crown clearly meant to profit from the safe-conducts, not only by their sale, but also by insisting that the ships came to England and brought revenue to the Crown through customs duties. Sometimes officials checked to ensure that the ships had come and that the Crown had profitted. In 1431-32 five ships were investigated: it appeared that one ship of Bilbao had not made any journeys to England, but the *Sta María* of Deva, master Juan de la Saw, another ship of Deva, master Rodrigo de Irarasawell, and an unnamed ship with Pedro Miguel as master, were all proved to have come to London and a ship of Motrico, master Andrés de Bourgas, had arrived at Southampton. The ships had all unloaded large cargoes of

10. *Calendar of Close Rolls* (hereafter CCR) 1337-9, pp.181, 208, 230; CCR 1334-8, pp. 404, 443, 508, 520, 524-6, 529, 537, 543, 546, 551, 554, 571; CCR 1338-40, pp. 2, 6, 342, 358.

11. CCR 1337-8, pp. 284, 379; CCR 1339-41, p. 636.

12. RYMER, T.: *Foedera, conventiones, litterae et cuiuscumque generis acta publica inter reges Angliae et alios... 1066-1383*, 4 vols, Record Commission, London, 1816-69, III. i. 228-9, 266-8, 270, 280.

13. PRO E101/80/1-19.

14. PRO E101/173/4, 182/2.

15. PRO E101/80/25, 81/8; E122/16/24, 17/1, 17/12.

16. PRO C76/86-151.

iron, with some nails, steel, and wine; each had paid customs duties between £17 and £28 into the English Exchequer¹⁷. The safe-conducts also show some of the contacts which the Basques had in London, Southampton, Bristol and elsewhere, since almost all had to have English guarantors.

Protected by these safe-conducts and some truces, Anglo-Spanish trade increased again in the 1440s and 1450s; some Basque ships continued to carry goods from Andalusia, and a few Basque ships even visited Bordeaux again. The full resumption of trade with England was greatly encouraged by the Anglo-Castilian treaty of 1466. This brought not only peace and security, but also lower customs duties because the subjects of the king of Castile were allowed to trade on the same terms as the native English merchants. When the Castilian king repudiated the treaty in 1470 under French pressure, his subjects valued the trade enough to buy collective safe-conducts. Every province from Galicia to Guipúzcoa bought one for their men, renewing it in 1472, 1474 and 1475. In return, Guipúzcoa and Biscay provided similar safe-conducts for the English to visit their ports. In 1482 trade was further protected by a formal ten-year truce between England and Guipúzcoa, which guaranteed free trade and prohibited the use of letters of marque¹⁸. Despite the Castilian revocation of the treaty in 1470, Edward IV had steadfastly maintained it and English customs collectors continued to charge lower duties; in 1480 the Reyes Católicos reciprocated by ordering Bilbao not to raise taxes against the English merchants there¹⁹. As if this was not enough, Edward was generous in grants and compensation for damages inflicted by English pirates. He granted money pensions to the provost of San Sebastián, to Sebastián de Olasabal, and to Pedro Sans de Venesse of Fuenterrabía and his son Juan, possibly in recognition of their help in these negotiations²⁰. In 1474 he granted Guipúzcoan merchants 11,000 crowns from half their own customs duties (extended in 1476 to half of customs duties from all Spanish subjects). Further grants of compensation were allowed in the 1470s to Juan Lopez de Ernyalde, Antonio de Olaysola, Juan Pérez de Cantale of Bermeo and Arnold Trussel an immigrant to San Sebastián from Bayonne. Good relations with Biscay were also maintained and in 1481 a group of Biscayan merchants were given a grant of compensation similar to that given the Guipúzcoans in 1474, to be applied once the Guipúzcoans had been fully paid²¹. Although there were still isolated problems from time to time, it is clear that hostility was decreasing and that Castilians and Basques traded in England on very favourable terms. It is not surprising therefore that the later fifteenth century brought another peak of Anglo-Castilian trade. Now the Basque role was dominant in shipping, unlike in the previous peaks in the 1260s and 70s or the 1320s, when they shared activity with ships from Santander.

From the 1460s Basque ships not only appeared in the southern ports but also sometimes sailed up the east coast to Hull as in 1465 and 1468²², and more regularly up the west coast to Chester from 1472. At Chester ships of Lequeitio were particularly active in the iron trade in the 1480s and 1490s, sometimes sending three ships a year, and they continued with a strong presence there through to the 1530s²³. Basque ships also moved strongly into Bristol, where (up until then) English merchants and ships had dominated Spanish trade. Here ships of Guipúzcoa became particularly important, providing three-quarters of the vessels. For example, in 1471 six vessels of Fuenterrabía, two of Rentaria, one of San Sebastián, and two of Bermeo traded there. In 1474-5 sixteen ships arrived: three 'de Hispania', three of Bilbao, and twelve from Guipúzcoan ports (four from Fuenterrabía, three from Guetaria and one each from San Sebastián, Pasajes, and Rentaria). Guipúzcoans became even busier in the 1480s and 1490s, and in 1485-6 twenty-two Spanish ships arrived: one ship 'of Spain', one of Castro and three of Bilbao were outshone by seven of Fuenterrabía, five of San Sebastián, three of Rentaria and two of Pasajes²⁴.

Some carried cargoes for Basque merchants, as in 1475 when the *María* of Guetaria brought 94 tons of iron, 40 bales of licorice, three hogsheads of wine and one pipe of rosin valued at £242 for the shipmaster (Beltrano de Alsolero) and his partner Beltrano de Artiaga. Some carried for Englishmen, as in the same year did the *María* of Fuenterrabía with 95 pipes of woad, 58.5 tons of iron, 3.75 tons of rosin, 5 thousand nails, 7.5 thousands of combs, 10 bales of licorice, 96 lb of saffron, 0.5 C wax, and 25 'loads' of beaver-skins valued at £716 for five Basques and 32 merchants of Bristol and London²⁵. Some ships made repeated voyages, such as the little *Magdalena* of Rentaria, master Martín Igueldo (Geldo). This took a large consignment of cloths to Spain in 1483, then in 1485 arrived on 3 March with 12.25 tons of iron

17. PRO E159/207, Recorda Trinity, m.8d; E159/208 Recorda Michaelmas, m.20, Easter mm. 10, 10d, 12d, Trinity mm.7, 8, 10. The safe-conducts are enrolled in C76/109 m.4, C76/111 m.3, C76/113 mm. 3, 4, 8, 14.

18. PRO C76/165m m.15; British Library, Cotton Ms Vespasian C xii, fos 209-10; RYMER: *Foedera*, V. iii. 117.

19. GARCIA DE CORTAZAR, J.A.: *Vizcaya en el siglo-XV. Aspectos económicos y sociales*, Bilbao, 1966, pp. 235, 362-68.

20. *CPR 1467-77*, pp. 273, 422; *CPR 1476-85*, pp.258, 278, 323.

21. CHILDS, W.R.: *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Manchester, 1978, p. 56 and notes.

22. CHILDS, W.R.: *The Customs Accounts of Hull 1453-1490*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, no. 144, 1986, pp. 77, 91 (*María* of Guipúzcoa), 125 (*Sta María* of Lequeitio).

23. WILSON, K.P. (ed): *Chester Customs Accounts 1301-1566*, The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, vol. CXI, 1969, pp. 33-62.

24. PRO E122/20/5, 7, 9.

25. PRO E122/19/11.



and 30.5 tuns of wine from Bordeaux, left for Spain with 49 cloths and beans worth £20 on 17 March, returned from Spain on 21 May with 30 tons of iron, 6 tuns of wine, and 20 pipes of woad, and left once more on 3 June with 70 cloths. Although the *Magdalena* did not appear in the account for 1486, it was back again in 1492²⁶. Sometimes groups of ships travelled together, forming a small convoy. For example, in 1471 the *Nicholas* and *Katerina* of Rentaria, masters Pedro de Edisval and Juan Sánchez, and the *Elizabeth* of Fuenterrabía, master Jaimot de Luxaro arrived together on 27 April and left on 11 May. The *Nicholas* and *Katerina* returned again on 19 August with the *Magdalena* of Rentaria (master Juan de Renamendy), and left on 3 September again with the *Elizabeth* of Fuenterrabía, leaving the *Magdalena* to travel alone on 21 September²⁷. Basque ships not only imported wine from Bordeaux to Bristol, but also broke into the southern routes to Andalusia and Lisbon: in 1475 for example, the Juan of Pasajes, master Martín de Llande, came from Seville with oil, wine, and cork²⁸. This is significant, because, although Basques had long been active on the southern routes coming to Flanders and to London and Southampton, until now Bristol ships had dominated transport between Andalusia and Bristol.

Activity rose in other ports too. In Plymouth and Exeter two to three vessels a year became four to six a year. Southampton saw an increase with a peak of thirteen ships in 1491-2. Here the Basque carriage of goods from the south was particularly evident, with well over half the vessels unloading fruit and kermes dye, but others came direct from the Basque Provinces, such as the ship of Pedro de Madriaga, which unloaded 145 tons of iron and small amounts of nails, combs, saffron, cumin, licorice, and rosin. Even at Sandwich there was slight increase to three ships a year arriving, and nine in 1473-4, although that port was long past its heyday²⁹.

The greatest increase, however, was in London. Here Basque shipping carried the trade of the merchants of Burgos, who were always important in London and were now attracted further by the reduced customs duties and by the market for their new trade in Toulouse woad. Because the London customs accounts record only the ship-master's name and not the name and home-port of the vessel, it is impossible to see which Basque ports provided most ships at London, but, given the preponderance of Burgos merchants, it is likely that there was a strong Biscayan presence and that the pattern was different from Bristol. The surviving customs accounts clearly show the scale of their trade. In 1471-2 there were perhaps 25 Spanish ships exporting cloth (the vast majority with Basque masters); in 1472-3 only 15 were there and in 1477-8 only 10, but in 1480-1 this had risen again to at least 18 ships, most of whose masters had Basque names³⁰. Trade surged in the 1480s, and in 1487-8 38 Spanish vessels arrived in London; at least five unloaded southern cargoes, but the majority unloaded northern cargoes of iron, wine, and woad. Seventeen of these arrived in early June and clearly formed part of a specialised iron fleet. In 1490-1 numbers increased further and 44 Spanish ships arrived with cargoes mainly of woad and iron. These numbers suggest that London was equal to Bruges in importance, where the number of Spanish ships reached 33 in 1486-7³¹. Unfortunately, the terms of the Treaty of Medina del Campo returned customs duties to their level of thirty years before (that is before the treaty of 1466), and Henry VII refused to relent when the Reyes Católicos pointed out that this in fact raised duties and that they had not understood this when they sealed the treaty. Moreover, the navigation law of 1489, in force from 1490, insisted that Gascon wine and Toulouse woad be carried in English ships³². Basque shipping in London therefore dropped, but it remained at a very healthy level, with 24 ships arriving in 1494-5, and 21 in 1502-3³³.

3. COMMODITIES

For both countries wool was a major export. Small consignments of Spanish wool came to England in the early fourteenth century, but the peak of 268 sacks imported to Southampton in 1308-9 was insigni-

26. PRO E122/20/1, 5, 7, 9.

27. PRO E122/19/8.

28. PRO E122/18/39, 19/11.

29. PRO E122/113/59-60, 114/1, 2, 4, 9-11, 13, 14, 16162/7 (Plymouth); E2122/40/10, 11, 35, 36, 41/6, 8, 12 (Exeter and Dartmouth); E122/142/11 (Southampton); E122/128/6, 10-12, 14-16, 129/3, 5 (Sandwich).

30. PRO E122/194/19, 20, 23, 24; COBB, H. (ed.): *The Overseas Trade of London: Exchequer Customs Accounts 1480-1*, London Record Society vol. 27, 1990, passim.

31. PRO E122/78/7, 78/9, 79/5, 80/3. For a full listing of the names of masters and merchants from 1487-8 see CHILDS, W.R.: «El Consulado del Mar, los Mercaderes de Burgos e Inglaterra», en *Actas del V Centenario del Consulado de Burgos*. Simposio internacional «El Consulado de Burgos», vol. 1, Excma. Diputación de Burgos, 1994, Tablas 4-11; GILLIODTS VAN SEVEREN, L. (ed.): *Inventaire des archives de la ville de Bruges*, section I. *Inventaire des chartes, série I. Treizième au seizième siècles*, 9 vols., Bruges, 1871-85, vol. VI, no. 1221.

32. *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, no. 34, 41; LUDERS, A., TOMLINS, T.E., et al.: *Statutes of the Realm*, 11 vols., London, 1810-28, II. 534 (Stat. 4 Henry VII cap.10).

33. CHILDS, W.R.: «El Consulado del Mar», Tablas 8-10.

ficant given England's exports of well over 40,000 sacks that year³⁴. Sometimes Basque ships were hired to take English wool to Italy, as when the *S. Pedro* and *Sta María* of Guetaria and three other Basque ships took wool from Southampton and London to Pisa and Genoa in 1353³⁵. But generally Spaniards and Englishmen had little interest in each other's wool, which they both sold to Flanders. Far more important in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century were skins and fine leathers. Rabbit-skins, cordwain and basan featured in many early cargoes, but disappeared by the mid-fourteenth century, perhaps as methods were copied in England and Flanders. Beaver-skins, however, became a small but regular import in the fifteenth century. Foodstuffs were regular imports. Corn was sent when necessary in both directions, and came to England in the great famine of 1315-17. Regular, small consignments of honey, rosin, saffron, and licorice were sent throughout the whole period. Although early fueros of Basque ports mention whales, and town seals such as that of Fuenterrabía show whales, this was not a major commercial commodity; nonetheless, occasionally whalemeat or whale fins were unloaded, as in 1275 at Winchelsea, 1325-6 at Sandwich, and 1494-5 at London³⁶.

Far more regular and important than these were iron and wine, and in the late fifteenth century Basque ships began to carry Toulouse woad on a large scale for Burgos merchants. Basque iron was always a major commodity for England. Its low phosphor content provided excellent iron for building, shipbuilding, and armaments, and contemporary writers acknowledged its importance. A French writer in the fifteenth century rejoiced that Biscay iron, which was the best in the world for ship-building, could only be obtained with difficulty by England during the Anglo-French war; an English writer in the fifteenth century wrote that Biscay had the greatest amount of iron in the world, and a sixteenth century English writer explained that Bilbao and San Sebastián sent the best iron to England at £12 the ton, while Rentaria iron was also good at £10 the ton³⁷. Iron was a regular import throughout the middle ages and is frequently mentioned in customs accounts and as cargo in cases of wreck and robbery. Customs accounts show its early importance in 1325-6, 1327-8 and 1328-9 at Sandwich, when iron imports were valued at £1,357 (27 per cent of the total value of imports there)³⁸. In 1325-6 almost all the iron was brought on fourteen ships of Bermeo, Lequeitio and Castro Urdiales; but in the two years 1327-9 Bayonne's close involvement in Basque trade was evident and seven Bayonne ships carried 30 per cent of the iron. Iron imports were even more important at the end of the middle ages, and from the 1460s imports soared. London handled most of the trade and imported 2,099 tons of Spanish iron in 1487-8 and at least 2,532 in 1490-1; Bristol imports were also heavy at 411 tons in 1486-7 and 648 tons in 1492-3. In total in the 1490s England probably regularly took between 2,500 and 3,000 tons a year, estimated at £6,000-£7,500 at customs valuation and worth £10,000-£12,000 on the wholesale market. At this time the Basque Provinces supplied 85-90 per cent of England's iron imports³⁹. The iron usually came in bulk; but some was already worked into long rods, pointed iron, plate iron, nails, shears, rakes, prongs, occasionally anchors. At the end of the fifteenth century some even came as guns, as in 1475 when 4 guns worth £1 were sent on the *Sebastián* of Guetaria to Bristol, and eight guns worth £4 arrived on a Basque carvel at Exeter⁴⁰.

Spanish wine, transported in tun and pipe casks, was a constant import and regularly appeared on English price-fixing lists. The wine was both white and red, and came both from the north and south of Spain. Unfortunately the exact origin of the Spanish wine was rarely given, but some clearly came through Basque ports. Twenty tuns of 'red Biscay' wine were imported to Southampton in 1441 by Martín Ochoa, and English merchants bought wines in Bilbao in 1458 and Fuenterrabía in 1467⁴¹. Ships with northern cargoes of iron often also brought a few tuns of wine. From time to time, especially in the 1350s and again in the late 1470s and 1480s, Basque ships also took a major role in the transport of Gascon wine to England. Only seven exported wine there in 1482-3, but five brought wine to Bristol alone in 1486 and seven in 1492; and four ships were still loading there in 1493 despite the navigation law of 1489⁴².

A new commodity which entered Basque trade in the late fifteenth century and which drew them back to Gascony was Toulouse woad. Some of this was always handled by English merchants, but from the 1470s the great Burgos merchant families became involved in the trade. Their imports to London reached 8,236 bales valued at £5,482 in 1487-8, and 10,632 bales valued at £7,088 in 1490-1. Bales of woad the-

34. PRO E122/136/8; CARUS-WILSON, E.M. & COLEMAN, O.: *England's Export Trade 1275-1547*, Oxford, 1963, p. 41.

35. CCR 1349-54, pp. 535, 544, 549.

36. CIRIQUIAIN-GAIZTARRO, M.: *La Pesca en el Mar Vasco*, Madrid, 1952, pp. 139-40; PRO SC6/1031/24, E122/124/29, E122/79/5; CHILDS, W.R.: «El Consulado del Mar», Apéndice 1 Tabla 6b.

37. CHILDS: *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 112-119; CHILDS, W.R.: «England's Iron Trade in the Fifteenth Century», *Economic History Review*, 35, 1981, 25-47.

38. PRO E122/124/29, 30.

39. CHILDS, W.R.: «Iron Trade», p. 38; CHILDS, W.R.: «El Consulado del Mar», p. 359 and Tablas 4b, 5b, 6b, 7b.

40. PRO E122/19/11, 41/5a.

41. CHILDS, W.R.: *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 126-8.

42. DUCAUNNES-DUVAL, M.G.: «Registre de la comptabilité de Bordeaux 1482-3», *Archives Historiques du département de la Gironde*, 50 (1915), pp. 1-166; PRO E122/20/5, 7, 9; BERNARD, J.: *Navires et Gens de Mer à Bordeaux vers 1400 - vers 1450*, 3 vols., Paris, 1968, III, sub anno 1493.



refore became a major cargo on the Basque ships they used, until the English navigation law forced much of the transport back onto English ships⁴³. Burgos merchants continued to import large amounts, such as the 7,570 bales valued at £5,050 in 1494-5, but then most of their carriers were English.

In return England sent mainly manufactured cloth. It was attractive enough in the later thirteenth century to encourage Spanish merchants to sail up the east coast of England to buy it, but the variety and amount which reached Spain was limited compared with the Flemish and northern French cloth in Spain. Four sorts (English black, *pardo*, grained cloth, and Lincoln scarlet) were mentioned in a list of 43 Flemish, French and Spanish cloths on a price-fixing list of 1268; and only 11 pieces of English cloth (black, white, and red say) arrived in San Sebastián and Fuenterrabía among over 3,000 pieces of cloth imported there in 1293⁴⁴. However, English cloth exports began to rise in the mid-fourteenth century and in the fifteenth century cloth became England's major export. The variety of cloths was substantial, including worsteds, blankets, kerseys, kendals, and broadcloth. Many exports to Spain were of medium quality, fulled, and dyed broad-cloth, and the cloths bought for the Navarrese royal household give some idea of the cloths which would be carried on Basque ships and through Basque ports in the early fifteenth century. These included three sorts of red (*rojo*, *bermejo*, and *granza*), murrey and dark murrey, light green, dark green, and plain green, and four shades of blue (*azure*, and light, dark and plain 'pers'); experiments produced turquoise and violet; some cloths were sombre shades of burnet, grey, black, and white; a few were 'medley' (of mixed colours) and striped. Top quality scarlet cloth was also available from England and in the late fifteenth century Castilian merchants took about 60 per cent of England's total scarlet cloth exports. Spain, both north and south, was a very important market for English cloth by that time, and in the 1480s Spanish merchants, almost all from Burgos and the Basque Provinces, took 10-15 per cent of England's total cloth exports, mainly through London⁴⁵. Sometimes belts, caps, hose, and bed coverlets were exported to Spain; occasionally alabaster carvings; very occasionally tin and lead; and sometimes beans and peas from Somerset and Bristol. The only other export to Spain of importance was grain in times of scarcity. One notable period was in 1474-5 when licences to export 17,000 quarters of wheat were granted to Spanish merchants using Spanish ships. All fourteen named ships were Basque, from Fuenterrabía (4), Pasajes (1), San Sebastián (6) Guetaria (1), Motrico (1) and Portugaleta (1); several unnamed ships were to carry grain for merchants of Bilbao; and most of the other merchants also seem to have been Basque.

4. MERCHANTS

Although the most marked Basque activity was in transport for others⁴⁶, some Basques were also merchants. Not surprisingly they were to be found among the iron exporters from an early date. Among the Spanish iron importers at Sandwich in the 1320s were a clear group of merchants from Bermeo and one or two from Bilbao. Merchants of Vitoria and a few of Valmaseda were particularly evident in London in the first half of the fourteenth century. Basques were even more numerous in London in the later fifteenth century, although they may have been more itinerant. Scores of Basques imported iron there. Many of them owned only modest cargoes, valued at £7-£10 a year, but some owned cargoes worth £20-£30, and others over £100 a year. These included Juan de Guernica (Garneca) with iron worth £137.10s. in 1490-1; and Ochoa de Rea with 73 tons of iron worth £146.13s.4d, and Martín de Marquina with 94 tons of iron worth £188.5s. and other goods worth £40 in 1494-5⁴⁷. Some Basque ship-masters were also merchants and traded to considerable values. Martín de Mounthante, master of the *Mary Pety* of Fuenterrabía, unloaded a cargo worth over £160 in his own name at Bristol in 1474; and Juan Cornelius, master of the *María* of Fuenterrabía unloaded iron worth £110 in his own name there in 1475⁴⁸. Combining trade and ship-owning brought substantial prosperity and a good example of a merchant and ship-owner, who was also a practising ship-master was Martín Ochoa de Yrive of Deva. He first appeared in English records in 1440 when he bought a safe-conduct for the *Sta María* of Deva⁴⁹, and he is probably the best example of a Basque multiple ship-owner in the English records. In 1440 and 1441 he owned the *Sta María* of Deva of 400 tons, and the *S. Jaime* of Deva of 450 tons, both large ships. In 1446 he appears to have two ships called *S.*

43. *Statutes of the Realm*, II, p. 534; CHILDS, W.R.: «El Consulado del Mar», p. 360.

44. HAMILTON THOMPSON, A. (ed): *Northumberland Pleas from the Curia Regia and Assize Rolls 1198-1272*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Records Committee Publications, vol. II, 1922, p.212; CORTES, I, 65-7; GUAL CAMARENA, M.: «El comercio de telas en el siglo XIII hispano», *Anuario de Historia Económica y Social*, I, 1968, pp. 100, 104-5.

45. CHILDS, W.R.: *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 79-81, 89.

46. For an analysis of the merchants of Burgos at the end of the fifteenth century see CHILDS, W.R.: «El Consulado del Mar», pp. 351-420.

47. For examples see CHILDS, W.R.: «El Consulado del Mar», Tables 4b, 5b, 5c, 6b, 6c, 7b.

48. PRO E122/19/10a, 11.

49. It is possible that his career is longer and that he is also the Martín Ochoa who regularly imported large iron cargoes ranging from 38 to 168 tons worth £152 - £ 672 to England on ships of Deva throughout the 1430s.

Jaime. Between 1456 and 1464 he owned at various times at least seven ships: in 1456-1459 he possibly owned three, all called the *S. Jaime* variously described as of 300, 400, and 450 tons. In 1460 he certainly owned two called *S. Jaime*, both of Deva, one of 400 tons and the other of 140 tons. In 1463 he bought safe-conducts for two called *S. Jaime* of 100 and 200 tons, and in 1464 he bought two for the *Jaime* of Motrico of 240 tons and the *S. Juan* of Guipúzcoa of 120 tons. In most cases they are described as 'his' ships and he certainly owned two and three at the same time. He may have been running a small commercial fleet. He can also be traced as a merchant for nearly thirty years trading through Southampton, Sandwich and London, importing large cargoes of up to 213 tons of iron and up to 165 tons of wine. He also dealt in Andalusia and worked in contact with Italian merchants in London. In Southampton he usually stayed with John Emery, and in return acted as Emery's factor in Andalusia. By 1456 his son Pedro Ochoa de Yriva was associated with him both as merchant and as master of the ships they used. Martín disappeared from English records after 1467, but Pedro continued to work in England at least until 1475⁵⁰.

Juan Martín of Luxaro was another merchant and multiple ship-owner who appeared in English records, although he spent less time in England. In the autumn of 1439 he was bringing his ship, the *Sta María*, loaded with his own iron to England, when it was badly damaged by storm off Belle Isle. He therefore called another of his ships from Nantes, but during transshipment, the cargo was stolen by Cornishmen. Martín listed his losses as follows: the cargo of 180 tons of iron, loaded in Bilbao and valued at £780 sterling, and 5 lb of Aragonese saffron valued at £3.6s; the ship's gear of 3 anchors (£8), 4 cables (£20), 2 'machines of the ship called bombardes' (£2), 6 cross-bows (£1), sails (£2.10s.), 4 spades (£1), a silver belt (14s.), the clothes and beds of 35 crew (£3.6s.8d.), and 2 brass pots belonging to the ship (10s.). Martín won his law-suit, but he had to sue for months in England before Parliament and the King's Council; in October 1440 he claimed to have spent £150 on legal costs so far; and even in 1442, he was still £79 short of the compensation he was granted. He also had the extra cost of buying safe-conducts for his ship which he clearly kept in England while he waited⁵¹.

Few Basques settled permanently in England, although Sancho de Orduña (Ordogne) claimed that he had been living and trading in Tower Ward in London for a year in 1459⁵², and the Burgos merchants kept Juan Seboll as a permanent agent in London at the end of the middle ages. The proximity of the Provinces and the 'nation' in Bruges probably made it possible to run smallish businesses through travelling agents and friendly contacts. The turn-round time of many ships was three to four weeks or more, which meant that merchants, masters and crew had to lodge in England for some time, and in any port they visited regularly they would therefore build up trustworthy local contacts. They allowed each other credit, ordered goods from each other, and used masters and others as agents, as in the cases of Martín Ochoa acting for Emery (above) and Antonio Duldua, master of a Fuenterrabía ship, who was entrusted with goods for delivery at Fuenterrabía for Bristol merchants⁵³.

The Basques also met increasing English activity in the fifteenth century. There are increasing references to ships and factors being sent to the Provinces, especially to Bilbao, but there is little evidence of permanent residence yet. Nonetheless, some men visited regularly and had close contacts there in the 1480s and 1490s. William Botyller, factor for William Hadden a London draper, spent so much time in Bilbao that, after Hadden's death, his executors accused Botyller of using his friends there to cheat Hadden's heirs; Robert Watson of London used as his factor in Bilbao Launcelot Thirkell of London, who worked out of the house of Juan de Salieta. But the first evidence of long permanent residence is that of Thomas Batcock, factor for Thomas Howell of London from 1517, who had a family in Rentaria, and who mentioned that his children did not speak English⁵⁴.

5. SHIPPING

Although Basques were merchants in their own right, it is clear that their most visible role was that of transporters. From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century they increasingly pushed out the shipping from the rest of the north coast, and ships from the Cuatro Villas, which had been particularly active in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, decreased sharply in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. On the other hand English shipping, always deeply involved in the neigh-

50. CHILDS, W.R.: *Anglo-Castilian Trade*, pp. 228-9.

51. *CPR 1436-41*, pp. 373, 411, 448-9, 451, 506, 538; PRO C1/45/315; E28/63 30 Apr. 1440; E28/64 24 Oct 1440; E28/70 28 Jun 1442.

52. PRO E159/236, Recorda Michaelmas, m.3.

53. PRO C1/29/368.

54. PRO C1/66/98, 111/71; CONNELL-SMITH, G.: «The ledger of Thomas Howell», *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, III (1950-1), p. 367.

55. PRO E101/158/10160/3, 161/3, 163/1, 163/4.

bouring Bordeaux wine trade, increased on the routes to the Basque ports in the later fifteenth century, but not to the extent of taking over from the Basques.

The patterns of shipping can be seen in the customs accounts and in the grants of safe-conduct mentioned above. All show the increasing Basque dominance, the steady decline in ships of Santander, and even in the end a decline in ships of Castro. They also show the range of Basque ports which were active. In Biscay Bilbao, Portugalete, Bermeo, Lequeitio, and Ondárroa were most frequently mentioned, with Bermeo gradually giving way to Bilbao in importance in the fifteenth century. In Guipúzcoa Motrico, Deva, Zumaya, Guetaria, Zarauz, Orío, San Sebastián, Pasajes, Rentaria, and Fuenterrabía are all frequently mentioned. Overall, there were differences in sailing patterns at different ports. For instance, Guipúzcoan ships were especially strong in Bristol: the surviving customs accounts for 1465 to 1491 show that 80 per cent of the 214 movements recorded there for Spanish ships were provided by Guipúzcoan ports, and 9 per cent by Biscayan ports. The four major ports supplying ships at Bristol were Fuenterrabía (68 movements), Rentaria (43 movements), Pasajes (24 movements), and San Sebastián (17 movements). Biscayan ships, however, were probably busier in London at that time, since London was dominated by the great Burgos families who often used Biscayan vessels, but unfortunately London records do not provide the names of the home-ports of vessels.

The accounts for Bordeaux show that the shift from Santander to Guipúzcoa and Biscay was already evident by the middle of the fourteenth century. In 1303-1310 Iberian vessels were negligible among the hundreds of ships at Bordeaux, but among them the ten Basque vessels from Bermeo (2), San Sebastián (1), and Fuenterrabía (7) were rivalled by the nine ships from La Coruña, Vivero, Santander, Laredo and Castro Urdiales⁵⁵. In mid-century, from 1355-58, Iberia provided only twenty-two ships, but now all but three were Basque. Then in 18 months from December 1359 to July 1361 the massive potential of Basque transport became evident. Iberia provided 86 of the 500 ships loading at Bordeaux⁵⁶, and of these 86 vessels, 85 per cent were Basque (49 were from Guipúzcoa and 24 from Biscay); only thirteen came from the province of Santander (ten from Castro, two from Santander and one from San Vicente). The two busiest ports were San Sebastián (19) and Motrico (19), and the third busiest was Bermeo (15). It is likely that the Basques would have remained very important in the transport of wine from Bordeaux, but the usurpation of Trastámara with French support and the re-opening of war between England and France severed this promising link, and very few Basques appear in the surviving accounts up to the English loss of Bordeaux in 1453. They were well-established there again by the 1480s but not on the scale of the 1350s.

The grants of safe-conducts confirm that Basque shipping was overwhelmingly dominant among Spanish vessels in Anglo-Spanish trade in the fifteenth century, and again that Guipúzcoan surpassed Biscayan vessels. Between 1402 and 1467 429 safe-conducts were granted to Spanish vessels. Of these grants 179 (43 per cent) were for Guipúzcoan vessels, at least 94 (23 per cent) for Biscayan vessels, and a further 113 (27 per cent) were for ships of Spain with Basque masters, although it is not possible to say exactly which province they came from. Ten grants were made for ships of Navarre, and only 21 grants were made clearly for vessels from the rest of Spain from Santander to Cadiz (although a few of the ships 'de Hispania' may also be from here). Where specific ports are mentioned, the busiest was Bilbao, which had now taken over from Bermeo, with 44 grants, then San Sebastián with 40, Deva with 38, and most other ports received 6 or fewer⁵⁷.

The Bordeaux accounts and the safe-conducts are also very important as indicators of the tonnage of Basque vessels. The wine loaded at Bordeaux provides minimum tonnage (for the ships may not have been full), and the safe-conducts often included the declared tonnage of vessels. In 1303-4 Basque vessels were already of good size, although they did not reach the 200-250 tuns regularly loaded by ships from England, Bayonne and northern France: the *S. Miguel* of Fuenterrabía, master Miguel Darrabilhaga, loaded 171 tuns, the *S. Spiritus* of Fuenterrabía, master Peregrinus Durango, loaded 163 tuns, and the *S. Juan* of San Sebastián loaded 160 tuns⁵⁸. Fifty years later tonnage had increased considerably: in 1356 the *Sta María* of Guetaria loaded 204 tuns; and in 1361 the *Sta María Magdalena* of Bilbao loaded 235 tuns; in the same year two ships of San Sebastián loaded 212 and 203 tuns and two ships of Castro Urdiales loaded 215 and 252 tuns. They were still smaller than the largest vessels, which now sometimes loaded over 300 tuns, but were nonetheless a good size. The safe-conducts of the fifteenth century show that Basque vessels had again increased in size, in line with the general growth in tonnage at this time. The growth was undoubtedly stimulated by the

56. PRO E101/173/4, 182/2.

57. PRO C76/106-151. The numbers refer to the number of safe-conducts granted. The number of ships were fewer, since some vessels received more than one grant. Nonetheless the numbers reflect the relative activity of each port.

58. PRO E101/158/10.

general desire for competitive efficiency, especially on the Mediterranean route, which the Basques sailed on alongside the Genoese carracks, and secondly by the need for safety in the Channel during the war. The declared tonnages show that in the 1430s vessels of 200 tons and more formed 35 per cent of those granted safe-conducts; this percentage rose to 72 per cent in the 1430s and 83 per cent in the 1440s. In these decades ship-owners paid for safe-conducts mainly for the larger and more expensive vessels, and in the 1450s when increasing danger forced more ship-owners to buy safe-conducts, the percentage of ships over 200 tons dropped to 63 per cent. However, within the increased registration, the absolute numbers of safe-conducts for ships over 200 tons rose, and it is also clear that by now there were some very big ships among the Basque vessels. In the 1450s at least 43 vessels with safe-conducts were over 300 tons; of these 18 were over 400 tons, and 2 more reached 500 tons. At this level the Basque ships were as big as anything built in the northern seas and would have sailed competitively and safely on the Mediterranean route. The largest recorded vessel was the *María* of Navarre at 550 tons; then came a small group of Biscay ships, the *Trinidad*, *Nicolas*, and *Katerina* of Biscay and the *María* of Bilbao all declared at 500 tons. Just below these come a group of Guipúzcoan vessels, the *S. Jaime* of Deva at 450 tons, and the *Sta María* of Deva and two or possibly three ships all called *Sta María* of San Sebastián at 400 tons.

Safe-conducts are also interesting because crew numbers and occasionally whole crews are recorded in them. In 1296 for example, a safe-conduct for the *Holop* of Guetaria, granted to one merchant of Bermeo and two of Valmaseda, included the master and fifteen named crew members. In this case they were mostly local men: six came from Guetaria itself, four from Fuenterrabía and two from San Sebastián, but two came from Bermeo and one was an Englishman⁵⁹. The fifteenth century safe-conducts do not list names, but do provide maximum numbers. Not surprisingly the larger the ship the larger the crew, but the records show interesting variations. A crew of 40 men could operate anything from 80 to 200 tons, and even 300 tons; conversely a ship of 200 tons could require anything from 40 to 80 crew members. The difference might be partly to do with defence, but might also be an indication of oars being carried, or of multiple masts and substantially different rigs by this time.

6. CONCLUSION

English records show that commercial contacts between England and the Basque Provinces certainly go back at least to the early thirteenth century, and are probably as old as the earliest Anglo-Spanish trading links in the twelfth century. The early English practice of describing many merchants and ships as simply 'de Hispania' unfortunately makes it difficult to identify Basque vessels and merchants, but with fuller records from the late thirteenth century we can trace them more clearly. Basque ships operated on the direct routes from northern Spain to England, and also operated between England and Bordeaux, and between England and Andalusia and the Mediterranean. Their expanding activity gradually ousted other northern Spanish ships from the direct route and from Bordeaux, but they continued to meet strong competition from English vessels. For most of the middle ages Basque activity in England centred on the south coast and especially London, but their expansion in the late fifteenth century took them into Bristol, and even up to Chester. Despite the difficult political circumstances during the Hundred Years War, proximity and mutually attractive commodities kept the trade going. Once peace returned after 1466 it is not surprising that it flourished again; that 40 to 60 Basque ships a year appeared in English ports in the 1480s and 1490s; that Spanish merchants (most of them from the Basque Provinces and Burgos) took 10-15 per cent of England's total cloth exports, and that, in return, they provided 85-90 per cent of England's iron imports.

59. CPR 1291-1301, p. 203.