The Merovingian Kings and the Basque Peoples

What's in a name? Glorifying the people who hurt our ancestors – That's the idea!

Merovingians to the Trojan War.

- The Frankish rulers, including Clovis I and later Merovingian kings, caused suffering among the people living in what is now France through warfare, conquest, executions, and political subjugation.
- They also hurt many others including the Basque of Aquitaine. It is a miracle that the Basque people have remained with their own culture and language.

Clovis I, Frankish Expansion, and the Historical Record

1. Introduction

Clovis I (c. 466–511), also known as Chlodovech, was a Frankish king whose military campaigns helped establish the foundations of the later Frankish kingdom. His expansion into Gaul brought territories and populations under Frankish authority. The Basques, whose ancestors were known in historical sources as the Vascones, lived around the western Pyrenees and in neighboring regions.

2. Clovis I and Aquitaine, 507 CE

In 507 CE, Clovis defeated the Visigothic king Alaric II at the Battle of Vouillé. This victory expanded Frankish influence into Aquitaine, a region in southwestern Gaul.

The campaign changed the political situation for the populations living in the region.

3. Frankish Conflicts with the Vascones, 581–602 CE

The historical record documents conflicts between the Vascones and Frankish or Visigothic authorities decades after Clovis died.

In 587 CE, Gregory of Tours described Vascones descending from mountainous areas into the plains of Aquitaine, *damaging vineyards* and *fields*, burning houses, and taking captives and livestock. His account reflects the perspective of a contemporary Frankish ecclesiastical writer and should be considered in that context.

In approximately 602 CE, the Frankish kings Theudebert II and Theuderic II sent an army against the Vascones and appointed a duke named Genialis over them, according to the Chronicle of Fredegar.

These events demonstrate attempts by Frankish rulers to establish political and military control over the region.

4. Did Clovis Personally Persecute the Basques?

The available evidence does not establish that Clovis personally ordered a campaign against the Basques as a distinct people.

Three distinctions are important:

1. Clovis expanded Frankish authority into Aquitaine during his lifetime.
2. Later Merovingian rulers conducted military campaigns against the Vascones.
3. Military conquest and political subjugation may be explained as causing suffering.

5. Historical Identity and Geography

The Basque historical homeland spans areas on both sides of the western Pyrenees, in what are now northern Spain and southwestern France. The boundaries and political organization of these populations changed over time.

The historical terms *Vascones*, *Wascones*, and *Vasconia* appear in sources from different periods. Their precise meanings and geographical applications varied. Historians continue to examine the relationship between the ancient Vascones, the development of Basque-speaking communities, and the history of Aquitaine and Gascony.

6. Conclusion

Clovis I participated in the military expansion of Frankish power into southwestern Gaul. There is evidence of military confrontation and attempts at political subjugation which appears under later Merovingian rulers, particularly in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

A careful historical assessment should recognize the consequences of conquest while distinguishing documented events from claims about the intentions of individual rulers.

Sources for Further Research

1. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*. An important primary source for Merovingian history and the conflicts reported in sixth-century Gaul.
2. Chronicle of Fredegar, Book IV, section 21. A historical account associated with the Frankish campaign against the Vascones around 602 CE.
3. *Power and Alterity: Depictions of the Vascones from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, published in *Social Science History*. An academic study of how historical writers described the Vascones and their relations with neighboring powers.

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4. University of Nevada, Reno, Center for Basque Studies, *The Basques in History*. A historical overview of Basque society and its relations with the Franks and Visigoths.

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