

The Val d'Aran in Maps of Catalonia

There are many inaccuracies in old maps and a few of them are deliberate, a few genuine mistakes but most of them reflect the state of knowledge of the area at that time. It can be interesting and instructive to try to find the reason for these.

There is one to be found in the maps at the end of the seventeenth Century which show the Val d'Aran. This is the upper valley of the River Garonne and the surrounding mountains. It is a very attractive valley of some 30 miles length and the whole area is about 50 miles by 25. The main line of the Pyrenees is east from the Massif of Maladetta across the National Park of the Aigues Tortes and the Val d'Aran is North of this area. It then turns North across the Pass of Donauqua which is ^{the} main communication between the valley and the rest of Spain except for the road ~~to~~ tunnel above Viella. The border between France & Spain at the river exit involves no pass at all. Thus the area though politically in Spain is really geographically in France.

Little is known of the early history of the valley. From the tenth Century Aran changed hands several times and was under different Pyrenean Counts :- Toulouse Ribagorça, Pallars and the Comminges. In 1175 a Treaty was signed under which Aran was taken into Catalonia by Alfons II of Aragon and

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T of Catalonia. This was at the wish ~~and~~
of and for the protection of the inhabitants.
In the Albigensian crusade the Kings of
Aragon lost their Occitan possessions and
a few years after in 1265 the people of
Aran again chose to remain under Catalonia
by a special petition. The Valley was held
by France from 1283 to 1313 when it was
given back to the Kings of Aragon & Catalonia.
It was again invaded by France in 1410
but not kept and there was another unsuccessful
attempt in 1470 and again in 1473.

The French captured Aran in
1643/4 during the Rebellion of Catalonia and
war against Spain, but after the pacification
of Catalonia it reverted to Spain. The possession
of Aran was not discussed in the Treaty of
the Pyrenees in 1659 but Soler in
"La Val d'Aran" says that the French historians
have never forgiven the Archbishop of Toulouse
Pierre de Marca for having omitted it in this
Treaty.

In spite of forming part of the Spanish
State Aran was in the ~~diocese~~ ecclesiastical
diocese of Comminges until 1804

My husband & I collect old maps of
Catalonia and we noticed that on one which we had the
Val d'Aran was shown as being in France. We examined
our other maps and any other reproductions we could
find and the result was as shown in the table
one of the illustrations for you to see with photo-copies
of some maps. Early and late maps are mostly
correct but those of some forty years are
mostly incorrect.

The British Museum were not aware of this and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris were not aware either but very kindly initiated some research which confirmed our ~~fr~~ observations. Sanson showed the Val d'Aran as being in France in a map of Aragon, Catalonia & Valencia dated 1653 and again in a map of Catalonia dated 1660. Other Cartographers and publishers followed Sanson's error some for about ~~100~~⁵⁰ years.

The mistake was corrected in a map by Nicholas de Fer of 1694 "Les Frontières de France et d'Espagne" Tant deca que de la les monts Pyrénées. It is marked "Vallé d'aran au Roi d'Es." and "source de la Garonne dans les Terre d'Espagne"

It appears to us rather surprising that a Cartographer so eminent as Sanson should make such a mistake with a frontier of his own country and not at all inaccessible. It is tempting, particularly in the light of the history of the area to think that some political motive was the reason. Richelieu was always very interested in the Franco-Spanish border and had an obsession with the possession of Roussillon and Perpignan. We have searched at some length but have been unable to prove any political motive.

Maps of Catalonia

Showing the Val d'Aran

In Spain

Ortelius	1601 - 1612
Mercator - Hondius	1632
Mercator (Keere)	1632
Blaeu	1635 - 1662
do (Aragon)	1650

Boucheant	1695
Roussel & La Blotière	1716
d'Anville	1719
Vaugondy	1752

In France

Sanson	1653
(Aragon, Catalonia & Valencia)	
Sanson (Aragon)	1663
de Wit	1680
Otters	1680
Visscher	1695
Allard	1703
Valk	1704