

## Claude Opus 4.6

April 23, 2026

I have a question about the history of Tarascon in the late fourteenth century. Can you find any information about a man named Nicola de Spindola who had a position of authority, probably connected to the port, in Tarascon in 1387? Please restrict your search to academic sources and provide links to any secondary literature that you find.

Investigated obscure medieval Provençal historical figure and archival sources

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Let me search for this — it's quite a specific figure, so I'll try a few different angles.

Unearthed relevant medieval records and pursued genealogical connections

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This is getting interesting — I've found the Spinola family in Provence in exactly this period. Let me dig deeper into the specific individual.

Untangled historical identity confusion between medieval Provençal officials

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Now let me search for the specific individual and the Hébert chapter more closely.

Unraveled historical confusion between two medieval Provençal officials

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Jonathan, this turned out to be a really interesting question with a somewhat complex answer. I wasn't able to find a "Nicola de Spindola" as such, but I did find what appears to be the underlying historiographical tangle — and it's directly connected to your period.

The person who held authority in Tarascon in 1387 was almost certainly Baldassare Spinola (also rendered as Balthazar/Baltazar de Spinolis), a Genoese nobleman from the powerful Spinola family. Charles de Duras dispatched him to Provence as a captain of fortune from one of Genoa's greatest noble lineages, with the mandate to take possession of the county and receive the homage of its subjects. Charles de Duras appointed Baldassare Spinola as seneschal of Provence, and he governed in that capacity from 1382 to 1387 — the very year you're asking about.

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The name "Nicola de Spindola" appears to be a product of a well-documented historiographical confusion. As Michel Hébert explains in his chapter on Baldassare Spinola, Antoine de Ruffi, in his history of Marseille in 1642, described Charles de Duras as having sent a "Nicolas Spinolis Neapolitain avec une bonne armée" to take control of the region. Hébert notes that the confusion with Niccolò Spinelli, the Neapolitan seneschal of Provence from 1370 to 1376 and chancellor of the Kingdom of Sicily, is evident. In other words, Ruffi merged the first name of the earlier official (Niccolò Spinelli, a Neapolitan jurist) with the surname of the later one (Baldassare Spinola, the Genoese captain), and subsequent sources may have perpetuated this garbled form — "Spindola" being a common orthographic variant of "Spinola."

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As for the connection to the port: Tarascon was fundamentally a river port town, and the seneschal's authority would have encompassed the toll and port operations. The income extracted from Tarascon consisted mainly of tolls paid on people and goods shipped up, down, or across the river, and despite having fewer than 5,000 inhabitants at the end of the fourteenth century, it still provided the Count with the fourth highest income. A treaty was

signed in 1387 according to which the castle in the town should not be rebuilt — this was part of the aftermath of Tarascon's involvement in the civil wars of the Union d'Aix.

Medieval Histories

Medieval Histories

Here are the key academic sources with links where available:

The essential article: Michel Hébert, "Baldassare Spinola, sénéchal de Provence (1382-1387)," in *Un Moyen Âge en partage* (Presses universitaires de Rennes). Available at: <https://books.openedition.org/pur/236387> — this is the piece that specifically untangles the Spinola/Spinelli confusion and provides the regesta of Baldassare's acts.

Hébert's monograph on Tarascon: Michel Hébert, *Tarascon au XIVe siècle: Histoire d'une communauté urbaine provençale* (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 1979), 285 pp. Review at: [https://www.persee.fr/doc/anami\\_0003-4398\\_1981\\_num\\_93\\_151\\_1951\\_t1\\_0100\\_0000\\_2](https://www.persee.fr/doc/anami_0003-4398_1981_num_93_151_1951_t1_0100_0000_2)

Hébert's newest book (which may also be relevant): *Supplier le prince, 1382-1406: les communautés provençales et l'État angevin* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2025).

On the toll/port operations: William D. Paden, *Two Medieval Occitan Toll Registers from Tarascon* (University of Toronto Press). Available at: <https://utppublishing.com/doi/book/10.3138/9781442629349> — this covers the toll registers from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

On Niccolò Spinelli (the source of the "Nicolas" confusion): Giacinto Romano, *Niccolò Spinelli da Giovinazzo, diplomatico del sec. xiv* (Naples: Pierro e Veraldi, 1902). Also cited in the Hébert chapter: Fernand Cortez, *Les grands officiers royaux de Provence au Moyen Âge* (Aix-en-Provence, 1921), pp. 80–82.

Can I ask where you encountered the name "Nicola de Spindola"? If it's from a primary source in the ACA, it would be interesting to know whether it reflects the Crown of Aragon's own rendering of this figure — which might tell us something about how information about the Provençal civil wars circulated in Aragonese chancery circles.

Yes, let's go further with this. The name Nicola de Spindola appears in a letter from Violant de Bar to the Seneschal of Beaucaire dated April 24, 1387. So this is not a historiographical error but instead something about how information about how Provençal civil wars circulated in Aragonese chancery circles. The letter makes it clear that Violant had been informed about Catalan merchant ships being held by Nicola de Spindola in the port of Tarascon. Do you think that this Nicola might have been another member of the Spinola family? Or perhaps Baldassare also could have been referred to by the name Nicola?

Apr 23

Examined multiple hypotheses regarding Spinola family identity and medieval name transmission

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This is a really significant find — a contemporary Aragonese chancery document naming this figure changes the question entirely. Let me search for more context on the Spinola family's presence in Provence and the Crown of Aragon's relationship to the Provençal situation in early 1387.

Investigated Spinola family genealogy and medieval naming conventions

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This is a really compelling document, and the fact that it's a contemporary source from the Aragonese chancery rather than a later historiographical garbling changes the analysis significantly. Let me think through the possibilities with you.

The most likely scenario: a subordinate Spinola kinsman acting as port official. The Spinola were an enormous clan with dozens of active branches in the late fourteenth century, and when Genoese magnates took on military-political commissions abroad, they commonly brought relatives and clients with them. Baldassare arriving in Provence in 1382–83 with a military force would almost certainly have installed trusted kinsmen in key revenue-generating positions. The port of Tarascon, where river tolls were the single most lucrative source of comital income, would have been exactly the kind of post assigned to a family member. A "Nicola de Spindola" serving as the official controlling the port — detaining ships, collecting tolls, enforcing embargoes — would fit this pattern perfectly. The Spinola genealogies are well documented and do include multiple Niccolòs/Nicolas across different branches in the fourteenth century.

The name form "Spindola" itself is telling. It's an Iberian rendering. The Portuguese and Castilian variant "Espíndola/Spíndola" is well attested, and Catalan chancery scribes would naturally have adapted the unfamiliar Genoese "Spinola" into a form that made phonological sense in their own language. This argues strongly that the Aragonese chancery was working from oral reports — likely from the Catalan merchants themselves — rather than copying from a Provençal written source, which would more likely have preserved "Spinola" or the Latinized "Spinolis."

Could this be Baldassare himself, misnamed? I'd consider this less likely but not impossible. Violant's chancery was well-informed about Provençal affairs — she had family connections to the French court through her father Robert de Bar, and was presumably receiving intelligence from multiple channels. But the information was coming through intermediaries (the aggrieved Catalan merchants, possibly the Seneschal of Beaucaire's own correspondence), and in that chain of transmission a "Baldassare Spinola" could have become confused with the more widely known "Niccolò Spinelli," the earlier seneschal, especially if the merchants didn't know or care about the personal name and simply reported that "a Spinola" was holding their ships. The chancery scribes, perhaps aware of the earlier Niccolò Spinelli's reputation in Provence, might have supplied "Nicola" as the given name. This would mean the Hébert-documented confusion between the two men had its origins not in seventeenth-century historiography but in the real-time fog of fourteenth-century diplomatic communication.

The political context makes the detention of Catalan ships very interesting. April 1387 is an incredibly volatile moment. Pere IV had died just three months earlier (January 5), Joan I was establishing himself, and in Provence Baldassare Spinola's Durazzo-aligned authority was collapsing as Marie de Blois and Louis II of Anjou consolidated their position. Detaining Catalan merchant ships at Tarascon could reflect several things: straightforward toll enforcement or piracy; a desperate effort to extract revenues as Baldassare's position crumbled; or even a deliberate political provocation aimed at disrupting Crown of Aragon commercial interests at a moment of royal transition.

And the fact that Violant wrote to the Seneschal of Beaucaire — the French royal official on the Languedoc side of the Rhône — rather than to anyone in the Provençal administration is itself significant. It suggests she recognized that the Durazzo-aligned officials in Tarascon were not going to cooperate, and that the French crown (which had intervened against Baldassare Spinola's forces as early as 1383) was the more effective interlocutor. This also demonstrates Violant leveraging her French connections in the first months of Joan I's reign — exactly the kind of diplomatic agency your dissertation is examining.

For further research, I'd suggest looking at a few things. First, Hébert's chapter in *Un Moyen Âge en partage* (<https://books.openedition.org/pur/236387>) includes a regeste of Baldassare's acts that might mention subordinate officials. Second, his new 2025 monograph *Supplier le prince, 1382–1406: les communautés provençales et l'État angevin* (Classiques Garnier) might cover the transition period in more detail. Third, Paden's toll registers (<https://utppublishing.com/doi/book/10.3138/9781442629349>) would be worth checking for names of toll officials in this period. And finally, the Deza genealogy — Massimiliano Deza, *Istoria della famiglia Spinola descritta dalla sua origine fino al secolo XVI* (Piacenza, 1694), which Hébert cites — might help identify a Nicola Spinola active in this generation of the family.

Have you been able to identify the specific ACA register this letter comes from? It might be worth checking whether there are other letters in the same register concerning Tarascon or the Rhône trade, which could help clarify whether "Nicola de Spindola" appears more than once and in what capacity.

Claude is AI and can make mistakes. Please double-check cited sources.