

50 Defence of the Empire

The war between Richard and Phillip went on from 1194-1198 in fits and starts; usually there was no more than 3 months of fighting before a truce came along. But the general flow was steadily in Richard's favour when in 1198 they agreed to make peace. Meanwhile in England Hubert Walter ran an efficient administration that fed Richard with troops and arms.

The campaigns of 1194-1198 Normandy

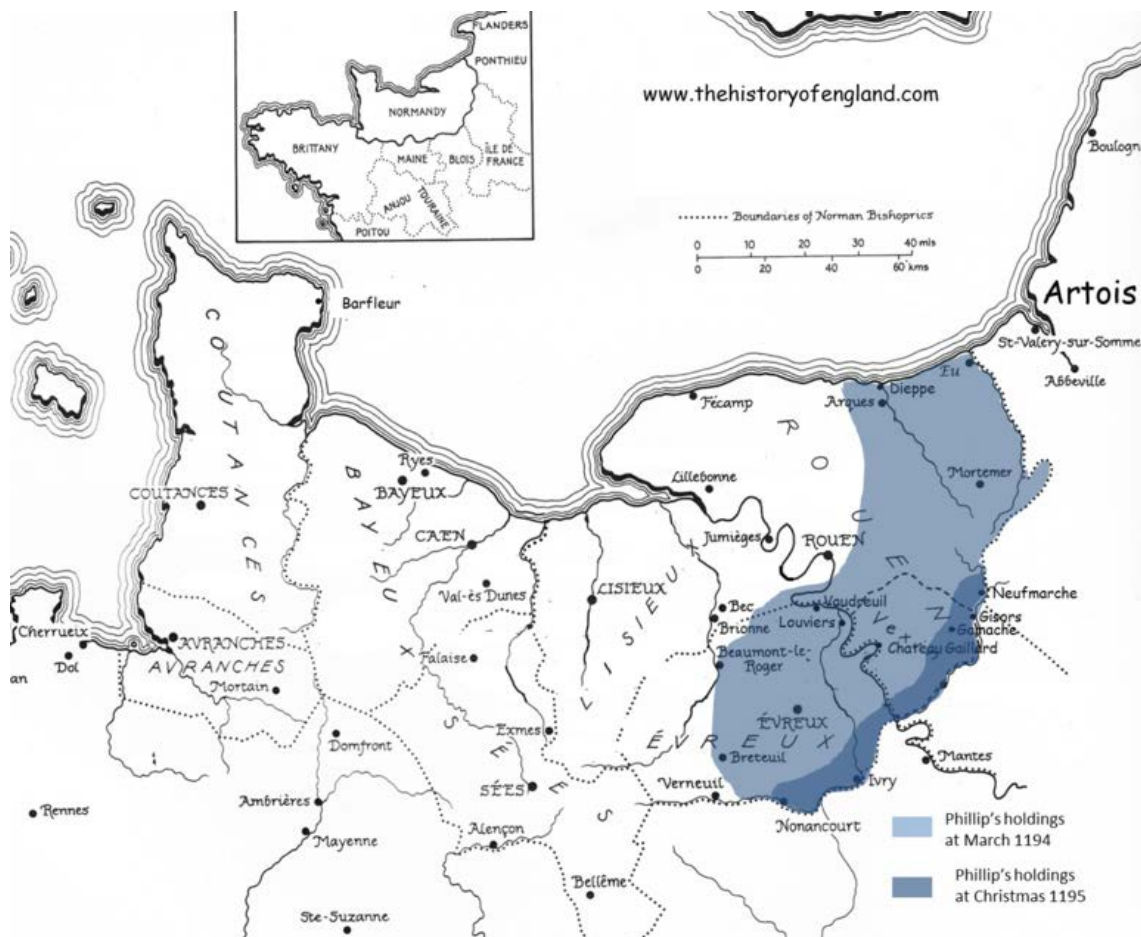
There were two main theatres of war; Phillip concentrated on Normandy and the Vexin, but also stirred up trouble on the Loire valley in Anjou, Maine and Touraine.



In Normandy, from May 1194 Phillip slowly lost territory. In the Autumn of 1194 he was forced to retreat from Verneuil, and with John's defection back to his brother's side, he lost Evreux as well.

Then he lost the support of his recently won allies, the Counts of Flanders and Boulogne, and as a consequence the Border lords in the north east of Normandy came over to Richard as well.

In 1198, Richard surprised Phillip and his army near Gisors, and won a minor victory. He cried 'Dieu et mon Droit' as he attacked 'like a starving lion attacking his prey', the phrase that was to become the motto of the kings of England from Henry Vth's days. Poor old Phillip ran like a hare for the castle at Gisors, only to have the drawbridge break under them and end up in the drink.



The South

Richard mauled Phillips at Freteval in 1194; and although again it can only count as a skirmish, it gave him a free hand in the south. When Richard's mercenary capatain Mercadier captured the Auvergne in 1195, it was pretty clear that Richard had the upper hand.

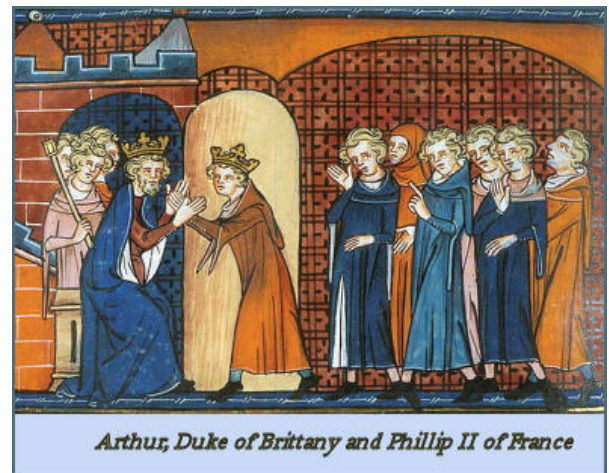


Peace at last

In 1198 peace was finally discussed in earnest. In essence, Phillip was to give up pretty much everything he had won except for Gisors. The Truce was agreed by Christmas, and while the peace treaty was being drawn up, Richard went off to settle some scores at Chalus in the Limousin...

Hubert Walter

Back home Hubert Walter was one of the Middle Ages' most competent administrators. Justiciar for 5 years, he introduced reforms to the legal system that probably led to the post of Justice of the Peace and Coroner. More importantly from Richard's point of view he kept the money and troops coming to feed Richard's war.



Castle of Gisors

51 The Foul Presence of John?

In 1199, Richard the Lion Heart died after being shot by a cook outside the castle of Chalus in the Limousin. The Empire was split between supporters of Arthur and supporters of John. Philip was for himself, with a bit for Arthur. That year was one of John's best years, where he showed that he could be effective.

The Death of Richard the Lion Heart

The legend is that Richard went to Chalus in the Limousin because a treasure trove had been found, the local lord refused to hand it over, and Richard was going down there to get his hands on it. It's much more likely that in fact this was part of a wider campaign against the rebellious Count of Angouleme and Viscount of Limoges.

Whatever the reason, Richard was on the verge of taking the castle when he went for a wander round the castle, without armour but with a shield carried by a man at arms. On the tower was a lone man with a crossbow, using a frying pan as a shield. He shot towards Richard who applauded the shot - and so ducked too late. He was hit between neck and shoulder. Back in his tent, Richard couldn't pull the whole thing out so a surgeon was called, who made even more of a mess of it. 3 days later Richard was dead.



Le château de Chalus Chabrol

The accession of John

Public opinion was split - Arthur, the son of Geoffrey of Brittany or John, son of the old king? England and Normandy declared for John; Maine Anjou and Touraine for Arthur. Aquitaine wasn't a problem - it belonged to Eleanor. John was decisive. He talked round the key nobleman of greater Anjou, William des Roches. His defection took all the wind out of Arthur's sails. John took the fealty of 15 counts - including the crucial allies, the Counts of Flanders and Boulogne. Phillip had attacked eastern Normandy and Evreux, but now realised he could make little headway - and agreed to a truce.



Silver King John Penny

52 John Softsword

As a younger man, John had been given the nickname Lackland because unlike his brothers he didn't have his own appanage. At the Treaty of Le Goulet in May 1200 he acquired the name "Softsword" - people couldn't understand why he'd signed away Gisors, parts of Berry, £20,000 and bent his knee to Phillip. On the other hand, John probably felt he'd had a good deal. Then John caused fury with the Lusignan by stealing their bride, they appealed to Phillip and Phillip declared John to be stripped of his lands. But at the start of the war, John gets off to a flyer.

The Treaty of Le Goulet, May 1200

The main terms of the treaty were

- John recognised as Henry's heir
- Phillip receives some Norman fiefs and parts of Berry and £20,000
- John's niece Blanche of Castille and Phillip's son Louis will marry, and the dower will be the disputed Gisors
- John will do fealty to Phillip

It looked like a reasonable deal. In fact, it made it clear that the Angevins were subservient to the French king, which previously had just been a form of words. But John, from a commanding position in September 1199 was weaker in May 1200; his allies, the Counts of Flanders and Boulogne had left of crusade and John probably felt himself lucky.

Marriage and the Lusignan

In 1200 John rocked up at the castle of his troublesome vassal, Aymer of

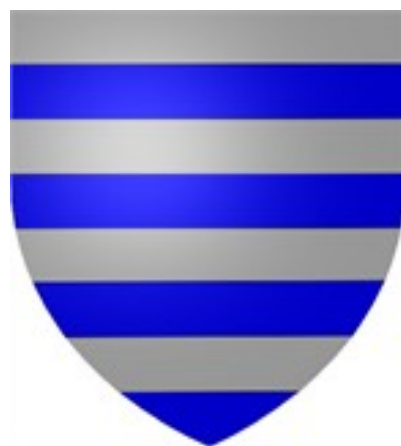
Angouleme. There he met the 12 year old Isabella of Angouleme, and was so smitten that he married her the same year at Westminster. Even in those days, marriage to a 12 year old was unusual - a betrothal would have been more normal - but the Count didn't seem to object.

Now there were perfectly good reasons for marrying the girl, quite apart from her charms. Angouleme was a powerful count, had always been a problem to the Angevins, and this brought them inside the tent. But unfortunately Isabella was already betrothed to Hugh le Brun, count of Lusignan.

John could have made it work - but he didn't. He sent sheriff's into their lands and goaded them. The Lusignans appealed to Paris for justice from John, and took up the sword. John tried to avoid giving them the justice they deserved and in the end, Phillip was able to wade in on the Lusignans' side. So in 1203 it was war again.



Angouleme



Lusignan

Victory at Mirebeau

Phillip's plan in the war was not new - Arthur to attack the centre of the empire along the Loire valley, while Phillip distracted John in Normandy.

At first all went to plan; John's army was not ready, and Eleanor of Aquitaine was forced to flee ahead of Arthur's army, taking refuge in Mirebeau.

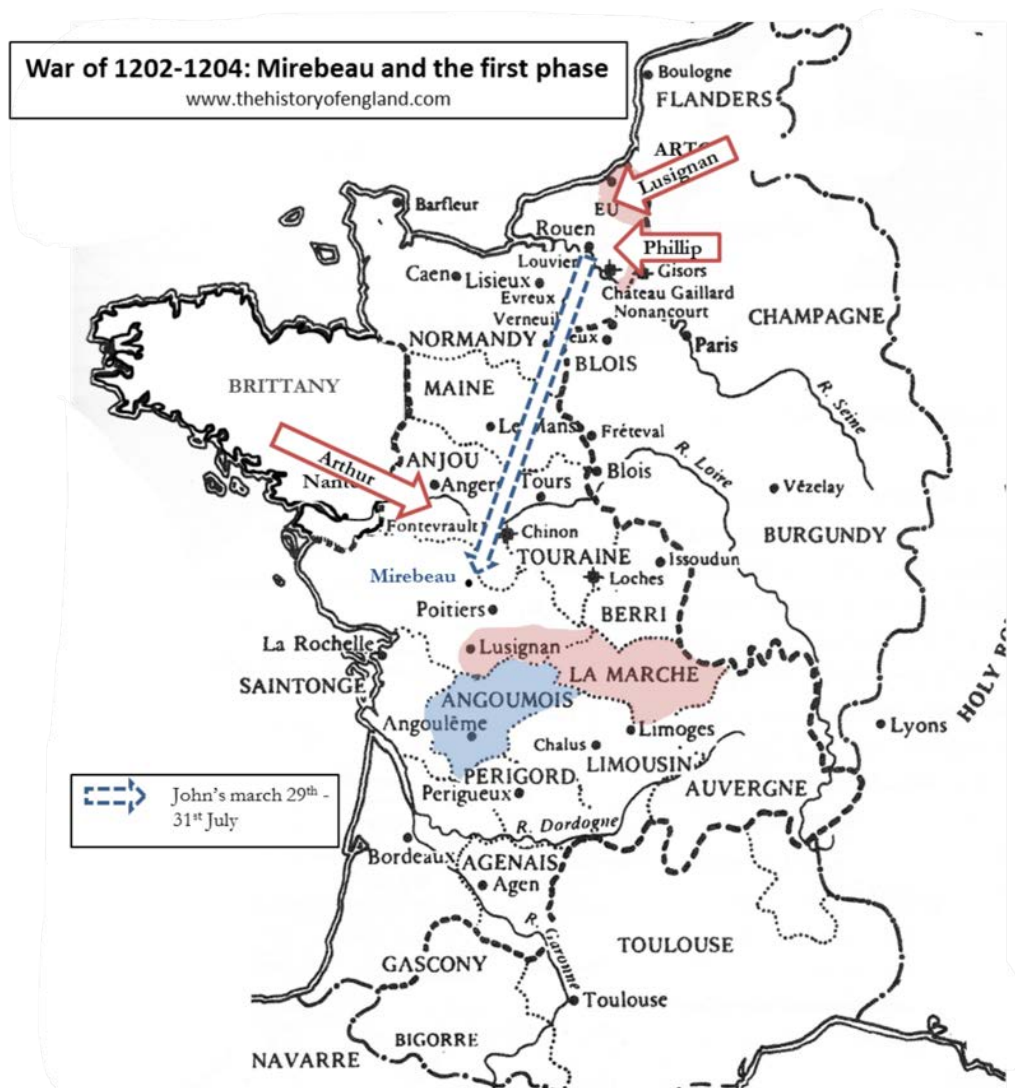
Hugh de Lusignan (Hugh le Brun) and Arthur besieged Eleanor and were confident of capturing her in a few days.

John marched the 80 miles from Rouen to Mirebeau in 2 days, picking up William des Roches and completely surprising Lusignan and Arthur at Mirebeau.

It was a complete victory. Arthur, the Lusignans and all their knights were captured and imprisoned. Here's John's letter home:

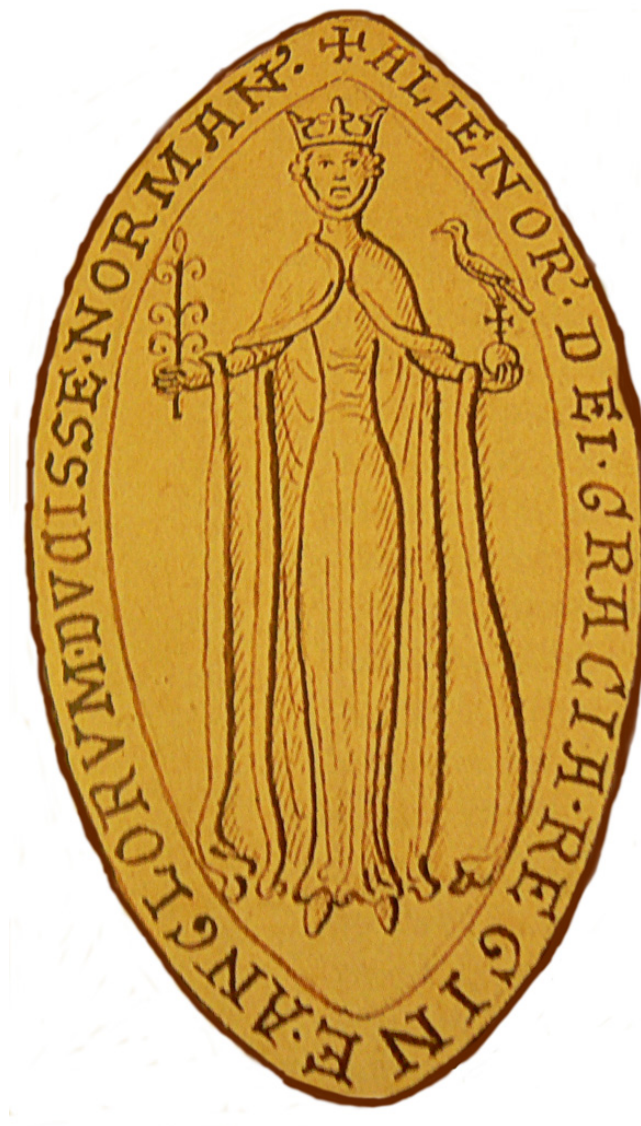
"Know that by the grace of God we are safe and well and God's mercy had worked wonderfully with us, for on Tuesday before the feast of St Peter ad Vincula, when we were on the road to Chinon, we heard that the lady our mother was closely besieged at Mirebeau, and we hurried there as fast as we could, arriving on the feast of St Peter ad Vincula. And there we captured Arthur, whom William de Briouze delivered to us, and Geoffrey de Lusignan, Hugh le Brun, Andrew de Chauvigni, the viscount of Chateleraut, Raymond Thouars, Savary de Mauleon, Hugh Bauge and all our other Poitevin enemies, and none escaped. Therefore God be praised for our happy success"

If John had not managed to upset and lose the loyalty of William des Roches almost immediately, history could have been very different. But he did. Arthur was sent to Rouen instead of being in des Roches's custody, and William rebelled, taking Maine and Anjou with him.



52a Eleanor Of Aquitaine by Mellisand Of Outremer

Eleanor of Aquitaine is one of the great names of the Middle Ages. Her life spanned almost all of the Angevin Empire, and her court at Poitiers became famous as the centre of courtly love. Much of her life was spent in conflict with her two husbands, but towards the end of her life she achieved the political influence she had earlier craved as the trusted supporter of her sons.



53 Torn Apart-The Loss of An Empire

After the defection of William des Roches the military situation was poor for John but not irretrievable. Unfortunately, John failed to provide the leadership needed. He distrusted his barons; he panicked and had no coherent strategy. When he killed Arthur, he pushed the self destruct button, and Normandy collapsed from within - the Barons no longer supported the descendants of William the Bastard.

The Murder of Arthur

It is not possible to definitively prove that John killed Arthur. But a bit like Richard III and the Princes in the tower, his failure to produce Arthur at any stage seems incomprehensible unless he did. The story is that John killed him at Rouen in a fit of drunken rage as the war turned against him. It was disastrous for John's reputation.

The Fall of Normandy

Normandy fell because John's barons no longer cared to support him. John panicked, and had no coherent strategy. He distrusted his barons, and in return they distrusted him. He put vicious mercenaries like Lupescar in control of whole regions, and surrounded himself with household knights - not powerful barons who could make a difference.

In 1203, John ran for it. It is probably true that he intended to gather support from the English Barons, but he left it too late. On 6th March, Chateau Gaillard surrendered. After a triumphant march through Western Normandy, Phillip returned to Rouen and on 26th April he entered the Norman capital.



54 Fighting Back-A Bit...

John immediately launched attempts to get his lands back - and ran into the Barons. He does run up a pretty good Navy though and we hear of Roland the Farter.

The Barons Refuse to fight, 1205

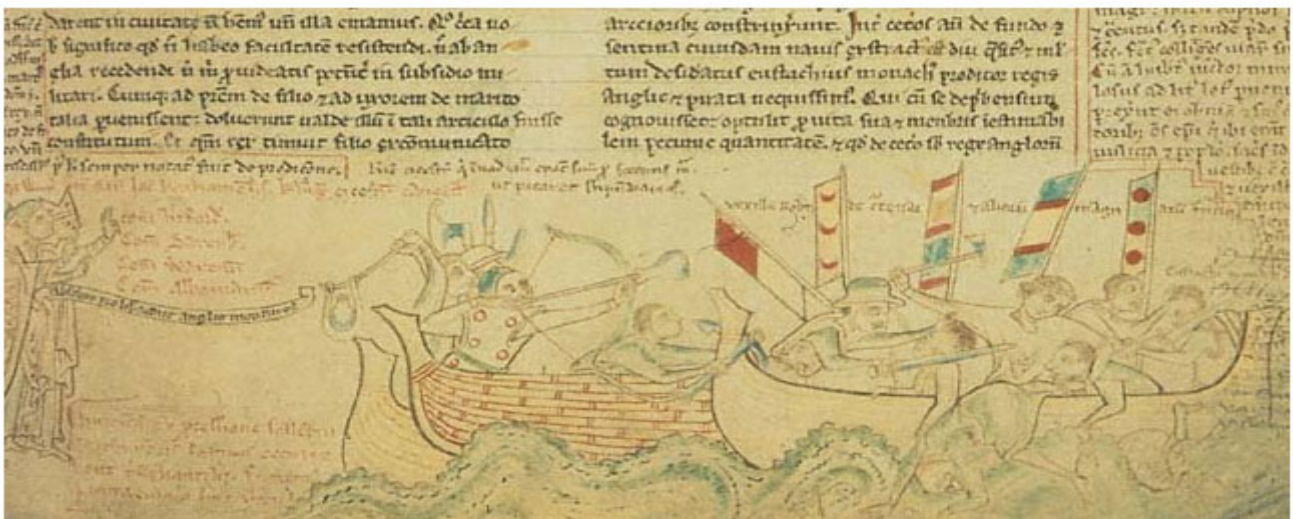
1205 gave John a sneak preview of what life would be like later. Despite his begging and pleading, the Barons would not go to France with him in 1205 to fight for the French lands. There was a genuine feeling that they should not be made to fight abroad. There was also a general feeling of distrust between King and his barons. John relied on his household knights and servants, and was too paranoid to build any trust with his great magnates.

1206 Campaign

But after a winter of travelling round England, John managed to persuade his Barons to fight the following year. And the 1206 campaign is quite successful; John manages to re-establish his authority in most of Poitou.

The English Navy

Under John, the strategic situation changed back to the way it had been under the Anglo Saxons - now the English Channel was no longer just a river between Angevin lands. To be safe, the king must control the channel. And to give him his due, John does just this. New Galleys are commissioned, squadrons formed, seamen employed, and an administration out around the Navy under William of Wrotham.



Eustace the Monk dies at the Battle of Sandwich an illustration by Matthew Paris 13th C.



55 The History of Medieval Europe Part 1

From Charles Martel and the battle of Tours in 732, through Charlemagne and Otto the Great, the first instalment concentrates on France, Germany and Italy and takes us to the shores of Gregory VIIth.

The Battle of Tours, 732

It is hotly debated as to whether or not Charles Martel's victory over the Muslim armies in central France was the occasion that caused the Muslim tide to recede. Probably it's not the cause but the event that marks it, but however you look at it the victory of probably 30,000 Franks over 75,000 previously unstoppable Muslim forces was hugely significant. Martel had prepared and trained his soldiers for this event, and his victory founded his dynasty - the Carolingian dynasty - which led to Charles the Great, Charlemagne.

The Empire of Charlemagne

Charlemagne's Empire was a conscious attempt to re-create the glories of the Roman Empire of the west. Charlemagne put as much effort into reviving learning and spreading Christianity as he did into territorial expansion. None the less his Empire was huge, as the map shows.

Charlemagne was crowned as the Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo in 800. Charlemagne's view of this event was very much that his servant, the Pope, was adding his support to his kingship. Pope Leo was trying to establish that Emperors only became Emperors when the Pope said so. This is an argument that will run and run.

Charlemagne becomes one of the touchstones of medieval Europe - just as he referred back to the Roman Empire, so future kings would refer back to the glories of Charlemagne.



Otto the Great and the Holy Roman Empire

After Charlemagne, his empire splits into three (see the small inset box map in map above). France, under Charles the Bald and his descendants, fragments under the pressure of Viking raids and communication into a series of semi-independent states. The French king concentrates on the development of his own power within the Ile de France, and maintaining some lip service to their legal supremacy over the rest of the Western Franks. In the end, it's a strategy that pays handsome dividends under Phillip Augustus.

The Eastern Franks choose a different route. Otto the Great took up the mantle of Charlemagne, and fought to maintain a new Roman, and Holy Empire. He defeated the Magyars at Lechfeld in 955, and finally put an end to the chaos. He brought the warring leaders of the German 'Stem Duchies under royal control. He chose a unique way of ruling this still huge and disparate empire. The Ottonian system relied on the church to be partners in ruling his empire. Prince Bishops would not try to establish dynasties, for example, to break away from the Empire. For over 100 years, Otto's system works beautifully, and his Empire dominates Germany and much of Italy. But it relied on control of church appointments and control of the Popes. Local churchmen, by and large, were happy enough - the Pope was not.



56 The History of Medieval Europe, Part 2

The Holy Roman Empire to the death of Barbarossa, the briefest of histories of Norway, Denmark and Spain, and the 4th Crusade. It's action packed.

The Investiture Crisis - Gregory VII and Henry IVth



Hildebrand, or Gregory VIIth to use his Papal name, was a reformer and Pope between 1073 and 1085. He firmly believed that the church should be independent from the influence of the material world, and unlike other Popes before and after him he was not prepared to compromise. He believed that the Papacy should be free of the influence of the Emperor, and indeed superior.

Henry IVth meanwhile was the descendant of Otto the Great. He believed in a system based on what he saw as the ancient right of the Roman Emperor to appoint the Pope. The system of government he inherited depended on him being able to choose churchmen he could trust to help him govern. He was utterly convinced in his right to 'invest' bishops and churchmen with the symbols of their office.

At the same time Henry IVth had to struggle with opposition from within. German Princes fought to establish their independence and liberties within the rule of the Emperor. In the struggle's most dramatic moment, beset by rebels allied with Gregory, Henry camped outside Gregory's palace in Canossa, in the robes of a penitent and pleaded to be accepted back into the Pope's favour. Gregory was forced to accept, and by so doing betrayed the rebels, who were then crushed by Henry. The Emperor established his own anti-Pope and ejected Gregory from Rome, who dies in exile in Sicily, lamenting:

"I have loved justice and hated iniquity - and therefore I die in exile"



Frederick Barbarossa, Holy Roman Emperor, 1152 - 1190



Gregory thought he had lost - but in fact the long term victory was his. The Emperor's anti-pope was never accepted, and the idea of the Emperor's supremacy over the Pope lost. Despite the outward glory of Barbarossa's reign, in fact by the end of his reign the basis of the Emperor's power was sorely eroded. Frederick lost control of the northern Italian cities. He forced himself to prostrate himself before Pope Alexander III. He held enormous power in Germany, but at the cost of a new deal with the German nobility that accepted that they were a closed, hereditary circle, with power over their own lands, while the Emperor remained elective. Under Emperors weaker than Barbarossa, the weakness of the Emperor's real power would be exposed.

Medieval Spain and La Reconquista

Spain had been largely overrun by the Arabs by the 9th Century, leaving 3 small Christian states surviving in the north - Leon in the North West, Navarre in the north and Aragon in the north east.

By 1210, as the map shows, Spain was once again largely Christian, though far from completely. Despite periodic setbacks as new Caliphates tried to re-establish the old Islamic dominance, such as the Almoravids and Almohads, disunity among the Arab states allowed the kingdom of Castille to lead the fight back. The fall of Toledo in 1085 and victory at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 would prove decisive. By 1252, the last Muslim kingdom of Granada was a vassal of Castille, and would finally cease to exist in 1492.



Byzantium, the 4th Crusade, and the fall of Constantinople in 1204

After the death of Emperor Manuel Comnenos it is hard to find a Byzantine Emperor of any great talent. But the event which tore the heart out of the Empire came not from the East and the Islam world, but from the Christian west.

The evil genius is Enrico Dandolo, the Doge of Venice. Enrico uses the fee he is owed from transporting the Crusaders to force the crusade away from the objective of Egypt to first recapture the city of Zara. Then Alexius Angelos, a man with a claim to the throne of Byzantium, and persuades the Crusaders to help him gain the throne - for a fee of course. But once in place, he changes his mind about the fee - having looked first at the state of the Imperial treasury. As a result, the Crusaders attacked and took Constantinople, and submitted it to the traditional 3 day sack.

Here's a contemporary account which gives a flavour of the sacking:

"How shall I begin to tell of the deeds wrought by these nefarious men? Alas, the images, which ought to have been adored, were trodden under foot! Alas, the relics of the holy martyrs were thrown into unclean places! Then was seen what one shudders to hear, namely, the divine body and blood of Christ was spilled upon the ground or thrown about. They snatched the precious reliquaries, thrust into their bosoms the ornaments which these contained, and used the broken remnants for pans and drinking cups,-precursors of Antichrist, authors and heralds of his nefarious deeds which we momentarily expect. Manifestly, indeed, by that race then, just as formerly, Christ was robbed and insulted and His garments were divided by lot; only one thing was lacking, that His side, pierced by a spear, should pour rivers of divine blood on the ground.

Nor can the violation of the Great Church be listened to with equanimity. For the sacred altar, formed of all kinds of precious materials and admired by the whole world, was broken into bits and distributed among the soldiers, as was all the other sacred wealth of so great and infinite splendour.

When the sacred vases and utensils of unsurpassable art and grace and rare material, and the fine silver, wrought with gold, which encircled the screen of the tribunal and the ambo, of admirable workmanship, and the door and many other ornaments, were to be borne away as booty, mules and saddled horses were led to the very sanctuary of the temple. Some of these which were unable to keep their footing on the splendid and slippery pavement were stabbed when they fell, so that the sacred pavement was polluted with blood and filth."

For Venice it was a triumph - they captured the right to the trade of the Empire. For Byzantium it was a disaster.

The Empire split into a small Latin Empire and several Greek Empires - as you can see from the map below. Although the Latin Empire lasts only 57 years, and is eventually reconquered, Byzantium never recovers its strength.



57 The Excommunicate

John took a detailed interest in administration, and made effective changes to the way things worked. Partly his interest was motivated by the need to raise money - as inflation ate away at his earnings, and his desire to reconquer France magnified his need. The break with the church from 1208 to 1213 actually helped his need for money, and doesn't appear to have materially damaged his reputation in England.

The break with Rome, 1208-1213

Neither John nor Pope Innocent III expected or wanted any trouble. The crisis was sparked by the monks of Canterbury.

When Hubert Walter died, the monks of Canterbury, jealous of their rights, secretly elected one of their number - Reginald, and off he hopped to Rome. John was livid - and forced the monks to elect John de Gray. In all the kerfuffle, Innocent III ending up imposing Stephen Langton on John as his new Archbishop of Canterbury.

Innocent had a clear view of Papal supremacy, as expressed in one of his letters thus:

"Now just as the moon derives its light from the sun and is indeed lower than it in quantity and quality, in position and in power, so too the royal power derives the splendour of its dignity from the pontifical authority."

However, in practice he would normally accept that the king's consent and approval was also required. The crisis was caused by a rather unfortunate concatenation of events.

John made the most of the crisis. He took the revenue from church lands for a while, and then when he realised he didn't have the men to administer them, made the Abbots and Bishops buy the land back. There appears to have been little reaction from Barons or anyone else to the Interdict and Excommunication. The crisis would only be resolved when other political problems forced John to seek allies.



Pope Innocent III (note the ears)



Stephen Langton



58 Tyranny and Defeat

From 1213 to 1214, John seemed to have got his problems more under control, and had built an alliance that looked to be capable of taking on Philip. There was trouble in the background caused by the tyranny of his rule and relationship with his barons, but his reconciliation with the Papacy and his international alliance held it at bay. But his hopes died on the field of Bouvines.

Reconciliation with Rome

In 1213 John was worried; he had discovered a plot led by Robert FitzWalter and Eustace de Vesci, and had to delay his attack on Wales to deal with it; there was a religious madman going around saying John would not live out the year, and the rumours were that the Pope was going to declare him deposed.

So he met the Papal legate. And not only did he agree to take Stephen Langton as the Archbishop of Canterbury, he agreed to pay back 100,000 marks to the church, and to pay homage to the Pope for his lands - so England was now a papal fief. He was also later to take the cross. All of this gave John the enthusiastic support both to allow him to build an anti-French coalition, and in the coming struggle against the barons.

Tyranny

John was truly incompetent where it really mattered - in managing his barons. All he wanted was to rule like his father and brother, but he was incapable of building trust with his barons. Here's brief list of why so many barons had grown to hate John's rule:

- he kept trying to drag them off into wars they didn't care about in France
- he taxed them mercilessly - 11 scutages for example
- He was predatory - he charged high 'reliefs' (the charge to take over your inheritance) , he fined them at the drop of a hat (you had to pay to marry who you wanted to, you had to grease the king's palm to get his 'goodwill')
- He didn't trust the barons - he surrounded himself with foreign household knights rather than relying on the magnates for advice

Bouvines and the campaign of 1214

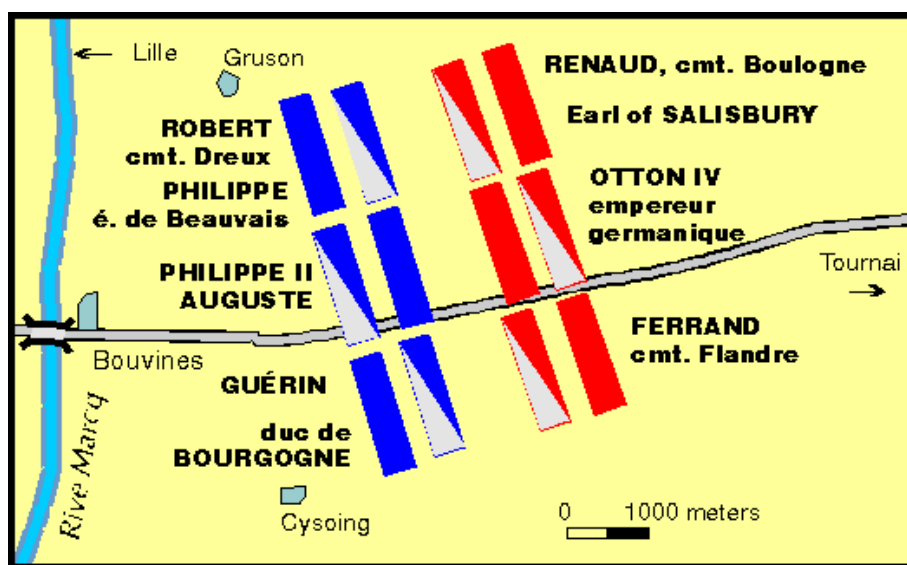


John had assembled powerful allies against Phillip Augustus - Ferrand of Flanders, Renaud of Boulogne, Otto IVth, the Holy Roman Emperor.

John invaded Poitou in south west France and did well - but in Anjou his Poitevin barons would go no further, and not attack the king of France; John was forced to retreat back to the coast.

Meanwhile on July 27th, Phillip Augustus with 15,000 men was facing the allied army in northern France at Bouvines. The allied army was in the order of 25,000 men, though the French were probably stronger in cavalry.

The traditional 3 battles of the allies were held by Renaud of Boulogne on the right, Otto in the centre, and Count Ferrand of Flanders on the allied left. Against them Philip unfurled the oriflamme, the symbol of the French king at war.



The battle started with a confused struggle of Cavalry, but on the allied left, the Flemings were defeated and put to flight, and Ferrand captured. In the centre the best infantry of Europe, the Brabanters, were pushing the French centre back. Philip counter attacked with his cavalry, only to be met by Otto and his cavalry, and in the melee Phillip himself was unhorsed. The situation was saved for France by the returning cavalry from the right wing; it was now Otto's turn to be unhorsed, and he was barely able to escape with a few attendants to run back to Germany. The battle wasn't over; Renaud of Boulogne organised a stand of 700 Pikemen, in the organisation that would cause the English so many problems at Bannockburn. From behind the group he and a group of knights made continuous cavalry charges, while the French cavalry were unable to break the screen of defending mercenaries. Eventually, 3,000 men at arms simply overwhelmed, and Renaud and the king's bastard son William of Salisbury were captured.

John signed a 5 year truce with Phillip, and in October 1214 returned to England to face rebellion and the road to Runnymede



The Oriflamme The sacred banner of the Abbey of St. Denis

59 Magna Carta and the Death of a Tyrant

Bouvines wasn't the cause of the Baronial revolt, but it probably was John's last chance to avoid it. In 1215 at Runymede Magna Carta was signed. It's extremely unlikely that John ever intended to allow the treaty to survive - and his untimely death at Newark was the biggest single factor in Magna Carta's survival.



The Road to Runymede

When John arrived back from France in October 1214 he found England close to open revolt. The combination of John's capricious rule, his Justiciar's attempt to levy a tax and the defeat at Bouvines together made a volatile and inflammable mix. John was this time simply overwhelmed. It seems very unlikely that John had any intention of sticking by the Charter - for him it was probably just a way of slowing the barons down until he could get an army together.

Magna Carta 1215

The 60 clauses of Magna Carta don't have many grand or stirring words. But somehow it manages to be massively significant, and keystone in the development of the democratic state.

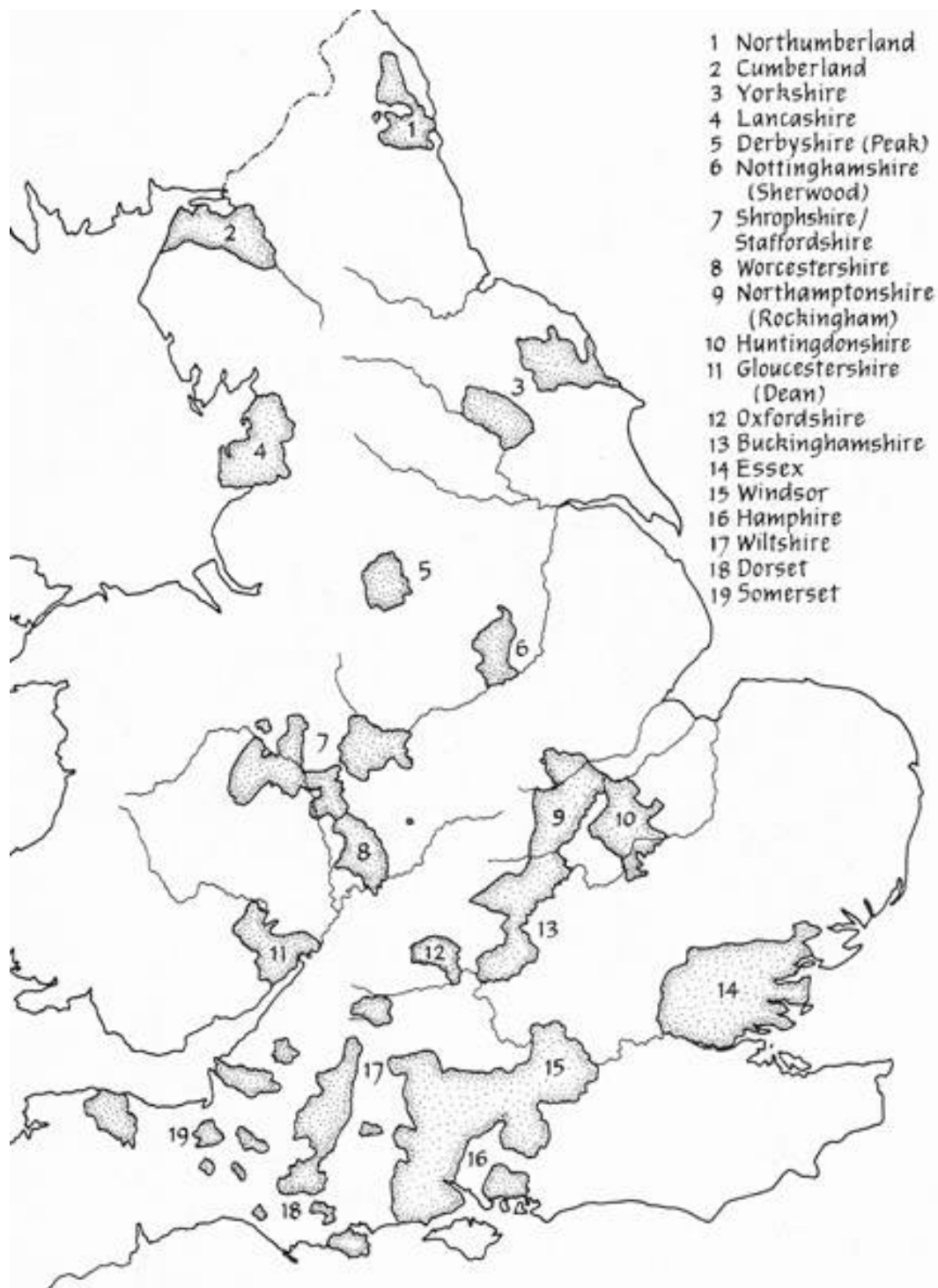
A lot has been written about **Magna Carta**, so I'm not going to repeat them here. But excitingly enough here you will find a complete text of the 1215 version of the charter. The Charter is replaced by a revised version in 1217, and then a final version in 1225 - but this is the original, the attempt at a peace treaty.

Download "The Great Charter of Liberties of King John 1215" and "The Coronation Charter of Liberties of Henry I"

And finally, to take the keenness to the ultimate level, Magna Carta is so called not because it's particularly long, but because in 1217 the smaller "**Forest Charter**" was created to deal specifically with the bits of the original charter that dealt with the much hated royal forest. Your cup runneth over!



Magna Carta



The Civil War

John did not negotiate in good faith, because frankly he had no good faith available. By September the two sides were again at war. John soon had the upper hand; he assembled his mercenaries from abroad in Kent, and took Dover castle. His loyal castellans held over 150 royal castles against the rebels. The rebels had no siege train and essentially got stuck in London.

Then in 1216, the Barons invited Louis, son of the king of France to help them. He landed with 1200 knights and for a moment it looked all over. The Earls of Surrey, Arundel and Salisbury abandoned John. But in fact John retained his freedom of action, and his castles held - his problem was that he failed to deliver a knockout blow.

The Death of a Tyrant

In October 1216, John arrived at Lynn on the north coast of Norfolk. There he caught dysentery. As he crossed the Wash to on his way to Lincoln, he famously lost some of his baggage in his hurry, though it was nothing like as much of a disaster as Roger of Wendover would have us believe.

He reached Newark where he died in the night of 18/19th October, after dictating his will. His body was taken to Worcester Cathedral by his mercenaries, where you can still see his effigy.



