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Feudal Strength!: Henry II and the Struggle for Royal Control in England

Abstract
In 1154 Henry II gained the throne of England after a long civil war between Henry and King Stephen of England. When Henry was crowned king England was in a chaotic state. The nobles had used the conflict to vastly increase their power at the expense of the king. Royal authority was at a low and the influence of the king had been greatly reduced by the war. Setting out to reassert the royal power of his grandfather Henry I of England, Henry II established massive reforms to the administration of justice and created Common Law in England. Through his contributions to the law and his military prowess, Henry was able to curb the power of the barons and regain status for the throne. In addition to this Henry clashed with the Church in matters of the law and royal jurisdiction.

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Feudal Strength!

Henry II and the Struggle for Royal Control in England

By

Jordan Paul Carr

A Senior Thesis submitted to the

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Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to express my extreme gratitude to Dr. Ron Delph whose help has been immeasurable in the creation of this work. Dr. Delph took the time over countless classes and office hours to help me develop my rough outlines into real ideas and then made those ideas better. I offer my most sincere thanks for his guidance and assistance. I would also like to thank my friends and family who politely allowed me to rattle on about this thesis and gave me encouragement during its development.

In 1154 Henry II gained the throne of England after a long civil war between Henry and King Stephen of England. When Henry was crowned king England was in a chaotic state. The nobles had used the conflict to vastly increase their power at the expense of the king. Royal authority was at a low and the influence of the king had been greatly reduced by the war. Setting out to reassert the royal power of his grandfather Henry I of England, Henry II established massive reforms to the administration of justice and created Common Law in England. Through his contributions to the law and his military prowess, Henry was able to curb the power of the barons and regain status for the throne. In addition to this Henry clashed with the Church in matters of the law and royal jurisdiction.

Henry II ruled over a vast empire that no English king before could match. Through his inheritance, military success, and political cunning he managed to wield power and influence on a level that no future medieval English monarch would. Aside from this considerable accomplishment, Henry II is fascinating for his vital contributions to English law. The establishment of Common Law would have an immeasurable effect on all future English government and administration. In reaching back to the customs founded by his grandfather, Henry I, the king created an effective and efficient royal administration that held both the nobles and the high clergymen in check.

Henry II's achievements were far reaching and immediate for the kingdom. Henry's energy and military and political skill allowed him to exercise his power even at the local level. When Henry's youngest son, John took the throne in 1199 he intended to continue his father's style of personal administration and expanding royal influence. However, when John dealt with his nobles it was often a disaster that left his barons

angry and suspicious. John was insulting and did not give his vassals the respect traditionally afforded them and his convoluted plans were usually hampered by the king's behavior toward his barons who he generally saw as a threat. Why was John unable to advance or even maintain his father's empire? The answer can be found in the personalities and behavior of these two monarchs. Henry was able to control his vassals because he appeared fair and restrained in dealing with his nobles. Henry also had the advantage of military victories that attested to his power. John was hindered by a lack of decisive combat experience and his own personality. John was notorious among contemporaries for his devious approach toward his barons. Both rulers struggled with the Church and attempted to gain dominance over the ecclesiastical influence in their kingdom. Henry II and John were also very active in the administration of royal justice and were known to take great interest in the application of the law.

In the following chapters we will examine the rise and decline of royal power through these two figures. The first chapter explores Henry's efforts to reassert royal authority and expand the influence of the crown. Next, we analyze the notorious quarrel between Henry and Archbishop Thomas Becket and the question of lay versus ecclesiastical authority. In the final chapter, the reign of King John and his eventual signing of the Magna Carta are examined. The overall theme of the expansion of royal power and the difficulties involved in this are present throughout the work from the reestablishment of royal influence to the height of Henry's power to the downfall of John and his submission to the nobles. This examination will show that the obstacles involved in controlling so large an empire in the age of feudalism were great indeed, both for Henry, who created it and for John who inherited it.

Henry II and the reassertion of royal power

Henry II (1154-1189) ruled a vast stretch of territory that included much of the British Isles and large portions of what would later become France. From the start of his reign in 1154 until his death in 1189, Henry II used his military power as well as his impressive diplomatic and administrative skills to create the Angevin Empire. A major part of Henry's reign in England was devoted to the reassertion of royal authority over the powerful feudal magnates who had gained power during the anarchy that prevailed under the reign of King Stephen (1135-1154). The magnates had taken control of royal lands during Stephen's reign, and in addition to the expansion of their land the great barons had also erected castles to solidify their power. The feudal magnates were also the source for justice for the peasants on their lands. Henry's goal of reasserting the power of the monarchy would have to involve the establishment of the crown as the source of law and justice. The difficulties of being a feudal monarch were extreme and could often prove too much for even a competent leader, yet Henry was successful in a number of areas in reasserting royal control over England, and in many cases even expanding the sweep of royal authority in the matters of law and justice, and in the crown's relationship with the church. This chapter's focus will be on the efforts of Henry to reclaim and even increase royal power in England. Through destroying the unlicensed castles and the establishment of Common Law, Henry curbed the power of the feudal barons and brought the crown back into the center of political power.

Henry Plantagenet was the son of Matilda and Geoffrey Count of Anjou. Matilda was the daughter of Henry I (1100-1135), who was in turn a son of William the Conqueror (1066-1087). This gave Henry II a strong claim to the throne of England.[1] During the reign of Stephen (1135-1154) Matilda and Henry attempted to wrestle the kingdom from the king. Stephen of Blois was the nephew of Henry I and had been brought up in his court and even knighted by the king's own hand. Upon the death of Henry I in 1135, Stephen went to England and laid claim to the throne. Stephen was crowned king despite the fact that Henry's daughter, Matilda was the rightful heir. The new king was popular and affable and at first was accepted by the nobles. Stephen was too affable, it seems as he attempted to win loyalty with lavish gifts of land and money. When the magnates realized how weak their king was they broke out into numerous private quarrels.

As dissension spread over England, Matilda saw her opportunity to assert her son Henry II as the rightful heir to the throne.[2] Over the years of strife in England the feudal lords gained land and power from both the king and his rivals. The great and lesser nobles, sensing the weakness of the central monarchy under Stephen, built castles (essentially wood and earthen fortifications with palisade walls)[3] to solidify their new lands and their independence from royal authority. The local lords were in control of the lands that had formerly been royal property and sources of revenue for the crown. In this atmosphere of chaos and unrest Henry II was crowned King of England in 1154.

Henry's campaign to capture the English throne was marked by a series of military successes against Stephen's forces. Henry experienced a windfall when, during the siege at Malmesbury, a violent winter stormed battered Stephen's army so badly that he had to withdraw.

The garrison surrendered to Henry and Stephen was in retreat. Following this victory the Earl of Leicester, one of the richest and most powerful men in England, was openly on Henry's side in the war. Henry now had the money, men, and support he needed to gain the crown. Soon after this defeat, Stephen's son died on August 17, 1153. On the same day Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry's wife, gave birth to her first son and gave Henry a potential heir. With the death of his son and the constant pressure of Henry's successful assault on his kingdom, Stephen appears to have lost the will to continue the struggle for the throne with the energetic and powerful Duke Henry. On November 6, 1153 Stephen and Henry met at Winchester and agreed on the terms of peace. Henry would be named as Stephen's rightful heir and would allow the defeated king to remain on the throne as long as he lived. By October 25, 1154 Stephen was dead and Henry took his place as king of England.

Henry and Eleanor were crowned King and Queen of the English by Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury in Westminster Abbey on Sunday, December 19, 1154. The king and queen were anointed with holy oil during the Mass and their crowns were placed on their heads. The ceremony was a most solemn one. The Church set its seal of approval on Henry and thus placed him above ordinary men. Immediately after the ceremony Henry issued the customary charter of liberties, in which he invoked the ideal of Henry I's government. The new king now prepared to reestablish the power of the crown that had been diminished by the years of civil war.[4]

The conditions were right for a man of Henry's ambition and political craft. Henry had inherited a kingdom in disarray that was ready for a strong leader to take the reigns. As professor L. F. Salzman noted:

> The Church was on his side; the greater barons cared little who was king so long as their titles and revenues were assured to them; the lesser lords and the peasantry, exhausted and impoverished by the twenty years of anarchy, welcomed a ruler strong enough to curb the lawless feuds of semi-independent chieftains. [5]

These favorable conditions allowed Henry to begin to consolidate his power and reassert royal authority over the land. No sooner was Henry crowned than he took action to settle the affairs of the kingdom. The barons that rivaled the crown's power had to be dealt with as quickly as possible. Each powerful magnate controlled his own lands and the profit generated by this land also went to the local lord. If royal authority was going to be reestablished, then Henry would have to gain access to the economic base that those former royal lands could provide. Revenue from the land was a basis of strength in the feudal system and a monarch without the substantial funding and manpower that came along with control of such lands was in a very precarious position. Henry made his way north from his Christmas court at Bermondsey in the year of his coronation, 1154, to subdue the barons and to destroy the illegal castles and strongholds that had been established during the chaotic period of Stephan's reign.[6]

For the most part the lesser barons and lords acquiesced to the king and either destroyed their fortifications or forfeited them to the king. One of the most troublesome barons from whom Henry received submission was Hugh Bigod with his vast estates in Suffolk in northern England. Henry granted Hugh the earldom of Norfolk and so impressed the baron with his strength and determination that the new earl returned to his estates and kept the peace for twenty years. Henry then traveled to York and forced William of Aumale to do homage to him and surrender Scarborough castle. There were, however, some barons that held out and required Henry to raise his forces and firmly show the king to be in charge. Among those few holdouts

was Hugh Mortimer, who attempted to muster a defense and defy the king. However, when Henry laid siege to Hugh's castles the latter man was forced to submit to royal authority. Interestingly enough, Henry treated this rebellious baron with relative mildness and allowed him to retain his lands. Impressed by this mercy Hugh would cause no further trouble for the king. The resistant barons often held out until the king was at the door and either persuaded them to surrender by diplomacy or by the point of a sword. [7]

As King Henry began the process of reasserting royal control over the land many of the barons performed homage to him and destroyed their unlicensed castles; in doing so however, they were allowed to hold on to considerable parts of their territory. Others who were more hesitant to relinquish their power were persuaded by Henry's sharp political sense or by the threat of force. Any lords who were allowed to retain crown possessions were clearly informed that they did so at the pleasure of the king and that their power was closely linked with Henry and continuing loyalty to him.[8] This was an important distinction from the practice of King Stephan and Matilda of buying loyalty with the promise of lands without a close link to the monarchy. Henry was linking those barons who were essentially independent from central authority directly to him, as their land came from the crown and could be taken away at the command of the king.

Just as Henry II had gained firm control over England, his possessions on the continent came under attack from Louis VII (1120-1180), King of France. Henry and Louis had at times been allies and at other times enemies. Before Henry had met his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204), she had been married to Louis. The rich lands of Aquitaine that Eleanor brought to her marriage with Louis were a vital part of French royal lands. But when Louis divorced

Eleanor in 1152 and she remarried Henry in May of that same year, her lands of the Aquitaine and Poitou became part of Henry's Angevin Empire. This wealthy and vast territory was a crucial factor in Henry's ability to exercise considerable influence on continental Europe. The two kings would come to butt heads several times over the course of Henry's reign. In addition to their connection through Eleanor, the two rulers were connected in another, more binding way: Henry II was the vassal of the King of France. It would have been unacceptable for Henry to directly confront his lord in battle. Consequently, one of the tactics that Henry used to accomplish his goals of consolidation and expansion on the continent was the strategic marriage alliance.

A common practice at the time, Henry sought to arrange a marriage between his youngest surviving son Henry and the oldest daughter of Louis, Margaret. This alliance would have the possibility of bringing the two kingdoms together, but the more likely goal for Henry was to regain control of the Norman Vexin castles on the border between his lands and those of Louis. This, historians reason, was in response to the new alliances with some of Henry's barons on the continent that Louie had made in order to threaten Henry's mainland holdings.[9] Louis' more cautious attitude towards interfering with Henry's territories changed in 1165 when Louis's third wife gave birth to his son Philip. With the birth of his son, the marriage of his daughter Margaret was less important to the French king and he now felt free to engage in a policy of harassment against Henry. Louis contacted the king of Scots, encouraged the Welsh to rebel, and generally drew Henry's anger. Henry and Louis went to war in 1167 and Henry was able to hand the French king several losses, including the destruction of the lands of Louis' allies.[10] Maintaining power on the continent allowed Henry to fund his campaign against the Welsh and his plan to

invade Ireland. In the feudal system land meant manpower and revenue, and Henry's conquests and marriage-alliance diplomacy facilitated some considerable land holdings.

Perhaps the most important contributions of Henry II's reign to England were the assertion of royal justice and the development of what would become known as Common Law. Law and justice in England at the beginning of Henry's reign were controlled by the local feudal lords. Punishments and laws all varied from county to county and lord to lord. If there was a dispute between the people and their local lord, it was unusual for the lord be brought to trial when he essentially owned the local court.[11] Through his legal reforms Henry found a way to directly link the lesser nobles and the common man with the monarchy, by sidestepping the local lords in the issue of local law and justice. It was clearly best for Henry that the people not be oppressed by the barons. If the barons were weakened and the people taught to look to the crown for justice and protection, even to a small degree, this would enhance Henry's power while at the same time weaken the authority of the lords at the local level.[12]

The first of the landmark documents that established the new role of the monarchy in judicial affairs was known as the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164. These assertions of royal authority sought to firmly establish how royal courts would operate.[13] Several of the constitutions gave the crown clear dominion over the lords and their courts as well as over the Church and its canon law courts. One of the areas with which the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket, took issue, with was the denial of the ecclesiastical courts to appeal to Rome and the pope. In fact, according to the Constitutions of Clarendon, many of the pope's actions such as interdicts and excommunication had to be cleared with the King of England, thus

negating much of the clergy's power in the country and increasing the power of the crown.[13] Section eight of the Constitutions of Clarendon stated:

> Concerning appeals, if they shall arise, from the archdean they shall proceed to the bishop, from the bishop to the archbishop. And if the archbishop shall fail to render justice, they must finally come to the lord king, in order that by his command the controversy may be terminated in the court of the archbishop, so that it shall not proceed further without the consent of the lord king. [15]

This section of the constitutions removed the ability of the clergy to take their disputes from the ecclesiastical courts in England to the papal court in Rome on appeal. With the Constitutions of Clarendon, Henry put the monarchy firmly at the top of the judicial hierarchy of the Church in England. Other sections of the Constitutions of Clarendon established royal supremacy in the affairs of the government even over the pope.

Section four of the constitutions stated that ecclesiastical officers could not leave the kingdom without the permission of the king. The seventh constitution protected the lay officials from excommunication by demanding that the judgment of the clergy first be brought before the king. Section eight established the king firmly as the agent responsible for addressing failures on the part of church agents concerning appeals to the courts.[16] Such stipulations greatly hindered the power the ecclesiastical ranks could bring against royal power. From the establishment of royal authority over ecclesiastical authority in administration of government, Henry gained more power for the centralized monarchy in England. With the clergy now coming under the control of the king, Henry further strengthened the position of the crown.

The Common Law that Henry established through royal justices also helped to develop the institution of a jury. The general concept of a jury was not radically new to England but the

formal institutional of it can be traced to the reign of Henry II. In cases where witnesses dared not come forward due to the rank or power of the accused, a jury of twelve trusted men of the community were ordered to be summoned to attempt to determine the accuracy of the accusations. These witnesses would be familiar with the matter in dispute and answer questions to determine the truth as they knew it.[17]

The Assize of Clarendon, created in 1166, was another important element of the establishment of the Common Law. The Assize was aimed at the feudal lords and their courts and the establishment of a permanently fixed institution of a royal court.[18] The concept of a jury was further formalized in the Assize of Clarendon. The use of a jury was another mechanism whereby royal authority could penetrate society at the local level, while at the same time working to curb the power of the barons, even over their own tenants. In the Assize of Clarendon could be found a clear establishment for a formal jury sanctioned by royal power via the sheriffs.

> By the Assize of Clarendon it was ordered that the sheriffs and itinerant justices should make careful search for evil-doers throughout the country. Twelve men of good standing from each hundred and four from each township were to declare on oath what men in their district were known or suspected to be robbers, murderers, thieves, or harbourers of bad characters. All such were at once to be arrested and brought before the nearest justice and compelled to purge themselves by the ordeal of water.[19]

This new declaration dealt a major blow to the power of the feudal magnates' courts. The king now had influence to wield in his own courts. If a subject felt he was not getting a fair trial in his lord's feudal court he could purchase a writ that would allow him to transfer his case into the royal court.[20] This gave people a way to receive justice outside of the local baron's court which functioned both to weaken the barons' and strengthen the king's relationship with the common

people. An additional development of the royal courts was the compromise that ended a suit, known as “final concords” or “fines”. These compromises were usually amounts that were paid to the parties involved as well as to the royal court, and went into the crown’s revenue. [21]

The Constitutions and Assize of Clarendon helped to establish Common Law throughout England. A uniform system of procedures for the administration of justice throughout the kingdom was a dramatic change from the localized feudal system that had come to dominate the realm by the early twelfth century. The concept that an Englishman in one town could get the same justice as an Englishman in a town across the country was crucial in helping to making the king matter in England again. Common Law provided the common people with a direct connection to their king. As the lower ranks of society began to rely on the royal offices rather than the local magnate, Henry’s hold over his realm was strengthened by the institutionalizing of royal authority. Common Law also played a role in unifying England, as the rebellious barons were quashed and brought into line with the king, and the chaos of the previous reign was replaced by the order and centralized authority of Henry II. Royal justice also was a boon for Henry in terms of income from procedure, writs, and fines that went into the royal coffers. From this increase in income came another of Henry’s important reformed institution in the form of the Royal Exchequer.[22]

The exchequer was the crown’s treasury and had been organized under Henry I, the grandfather of Henry II. The sources of revenue from farms, legal procedure and fines, went into the treasury and were used by Henry to fund his military campaigns both on the continent and in England. The sheriffs appointed by Henry were in charge of administering the king’s lands and part of their office included collecting the king’s income from the territories that they

controlled.[23] The funds from the exchequer allowed Henry to rely on mercenaries rather than possibly disaffected or disloyal vassals.[24] Free from dependence on his vassals, Henry was thus able to act more independently from his liegemen. Henry need only keep the mercenaries paid to keep them loyal, as opposed to the vassals who would often have interests other than those of their lord. Royal funds also allowed for the maintenance of the crown's military power and strength. Henry could levy taxes and draw on the military obligations of his vassals to raise a substantial force, but it was his ability to raise mercenary soldiers that gave the king the military might that he needed to maintain his control over England and the many less-than loyal barons on the continent.[25]

At the start of his reign as King of England in 1156, Henry II was faced with a country that was ravaged by civil war and a severely weakened central monarchy. The great feudal magnates had gained much power by usurping royal authority and lands. Ecclesiastical courts were thought to be beyond the domain of the king. The law of the land was literally that of the local feudal lord, who acted as judge and jury for the peasants on his land. Castles without the license of the crown had sprung up all across England and symbolized the uprising of the great barons during the chaos of the previous ruler King Stephen. When Henry took the throne in 1156 it appeared clear that he had several goals in mind that he would implement. First among these goals was to curb the power of the great barons and destroy the illegal castles that these feudal lords had constructed to consolidate their own power. Next, to make the clergy subordinate to the authority of the king and royal courts, and diminish the ability of the pope to interfere in issues that Henry felt should be handled in courts in England. The last goal was to re-establish a strong centralized monarchy that mattered politically and militarily. By the end of

Henry's reign it was clear that he had accomplished all these goals and created a strong, centralized royal authority and returned the monarchy to its former position of dominance that it had enjoyed under his grandfather Henry I.

With the power of the local lords greatly reduced and the establishment of Common Law, Henry II had raised the authority and influence of the English monarchy back to its place before the civil war. However, there was still friction between the clergy and crown over the royal administration of justice. At the heart of the matter was whether the king or the Church would dominate England. From Henry's attempts to place the clergy under the authority of the monarchy would come the great clash between ecclesiastical and lay power. This struggle would manifest itself in the quarrel between Henry and his chancellor Thomas Becket. Thus far we have examined Henry II's efforts to reassert the power and authority of the crown. The next chapter will analyze the obstacles Henry faced when he attempted to reestablish the control over the Church to which his grandfather, Henry I, and even William the Conqueror, had held claim.

Endnotes

[1] John T. Appleby, *Henry II, The Vanquished King*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962, 9.

[2] Appleby, 12-13.

[3] Appleby, 44.

[4] Appleby, 33-40

[5]L. F Salzman, *Henry II*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1967, 14.

[6] Appleby, 43.

[7]Appleby, 42-45.

[8]W. L. Warren, *Henry II*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1973, 59-62.

[9] Lindsay Diggelmann, "Marriage as Tactical Response: Henry II and the Royal Wedding of 1160," *English Historical Review* 119/483 (2004):954-955.

[10] Warren, 108.

[11] Joseph Biancalana,, "For Want of Justice: Legal Reforms of Henry II," *Columbia Law Review*
88/3 (1988): 436-438.

[12] Salzman, 18.

[13]"Constitutions of Clarendon", In Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages. Ernest F. Henderson ed. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896, 11-16.

[14] Salzman, 66.

[15] Henderson, 14.

[16] Salzman, 177.

[17] Salzman, 180.

[18] "Assize of Clarendon", In Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages. Ernest F. Henderson ed. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896, 16-20.

[19]Salzman, 184.

[20] Warren, 334-335

[21] Salzman, 198-200.

[22] Salzman 190-193.

[23]Warren, 274.

[24] Salzman, 194.

[25] Warren, 275-275.

The King and His Bishop

During the latter half of the twelfth century Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury from 1162-1170, was embroiled in controversy with his lord, Henry II, King of England. At the heart of this controversy was the question of supremacy between church and state. From Becket's point of view Henry was attempting to destroy the authority and prerogatives of the Church and make it an extension of his own power in England. From Henry's position the Church had claimed jurisdiction in areas that he believed fell to the crown, and he would not have any part of his realm out of royal control. The struggle between ecclesiastical and royal authority came to tragic head when agents of the king assassinated Becket inside his church on December 29, 1170. Becket's death was the culmination of a bitter dispute between the representatives of royal and religious authority, and at the heart of this conflict was the issue of royal versus ecclesiastical authority in crucial areas of English civil and political life. Evidence of this far ranging conflict between royal and church authority can be seen in Gregorian reform both inside and outside England, in the disputes between church and royal courts, and in the Constitutions of Clarendon proposed by Henry II in 1164.

In order to understand this conflict, one must first look to the cultural climate in late medieval Europe which led to the clash between Becket and the king. During the eighth century the Carolingian empire was established and with it came the beginning of feudalism. Politically this meant that territories were given to followers of the Carolingian rulers, whether lay or clerical, in return for their services.[1] From this nascent feudal system the Church became entangled with the secular government and the monarchy began to exercise considerable power over the Church and the lands connected with it. However, the eleventh century brought great

change to the relationship between church and state in Europe. It was during this century that the religious revival that became known as the "Gregorian reform" developed and brought the issue of lay control of the Church and the rights of the lay authorities to the forefront of controversy.[2] During Pope Gregory VII's reign (1073-1085) the customs of church and state were challenged. The reform and spiritual rebirth that developed at this time also gave rise to the notion of the clergy as an entity separate from secular government.

On the European continent the reform brought a tension that was seen throughout different kingdoms. This was the great ideological struggle in Western Europe that occupied both secular and ecclesiastical institutions. The twelfth century was an important time for the influence of the papacy and its ability to influence the secular world was at a high point. As David Knowles stated:

> [The twelfth century was] an age in which both Catholic faith and discipline had a greater influence upon the minds and actions of men than at any other time in the middle ages, imposing sanctions and ideals upon all, whatever their practice might be...While kings and administrators were going their way along roads worn by centuries of custom, the papacy and its followers were declaring a rigid set of disciplinary laws without, at first, any consideration of what was practicable and acceptable or equitable.[3]

Most of the conflict between lay and ecclesiastical authority focused upon papal authority, celibacy, and cannon law. The concept of celibacy hindered attempts by powerful families or individuals to make Church offices hereditary. Papal authority and cannon law constituted the establishment of a firm stance on church affairs and a singular voice with which to direct that stance. With these new concepts that rejected the customs of the past, the papacy and the clergy in general increased the independence of their offices. Yet the idea of laws not derived from customs was especially difficult for the rulers of the Germanic parts of Europe to accept.

Following the influence of this new reform movement, the papacy asserted itself and began to play a more independent role against secular involvement in papal politics and ecclesiastical appointments. In fact, Gregory VII dramatically demonstrated his view of papal power over temporal authority when he made the Emperor Henry IV (1050-1106) stand barefoot in the snow waiting for absolution at Canossa from January 25-27, 1077. While the emperor would eventually become powerful enough to challenge Gregory after this humiliation, he could never undo the changes that Gregory's reforms had made in the Church and the progress toward the Church as a separate power structure in society.[4]

This independence based on the papacy would not be seen in England until after the Norman invasion in 1066. Under the Saxon kings of England, from about 600 -1066, church and state had become intertwined with one another. Yet England had remained largely unaffected by Gregorian reform and the English Saxon clergy had little exposure to Rome, with the exception of pilgrimages and the few English bishops who had attended synods of reforming popes.[5] The influence of the papacy was further diminished by the distance between Rome and England, as well as by the limited contact between reforming influences of the Gregorian reform and the English clergy. The lack of a strong centralized clerical authority among the Saxons most likely aided William the Conqueror when he took over England after the battle of Hastings in 1066.

Upon securing his rule in England William (1066-1087) set about parceling out his newly conquered land to his men. King William needed to legitimize his authority and he saw that the church could aid him in that goal. Following the custom he used in Normandy, William appointed bishops and established a mechanism that allowed him firm command of the country while at the same time placing the Church almost entirely under the monarch's control.[6]

William's attitude toward the papacy's role was clear: the king and not the pope was to be in charge of the Church in England, and exercise the power of ecclesiastical appointment. Under William and his successor William II (1087-1100), no papal legates were allowed to enter into the country nor were English bishops to visit Rome without the king's consent. This allowed William to integrate the Church into the feudal network he introduced into England, and resist what he saw as the papacy encroaching on his royal powers.[7]

William's second son and successor, Henry I (1068-1135), continued to preserve the power of royal authority in England. Henry I maintained the practice of his father in most areas, with the exception of investiture and allowing papal legates entry into England. Investiture was the bestowal of the insignia of church office upon the ecclesiastical candidate by the king, and his acceptance of homage from the clergyman before consecration.[8] Henry I was forced to abandoned this power but retained feudal homage by his clerical vassals. The king still had the power to influence the elections of ecclesiastics and the elections continued to take place in the royal chapel. However, papal legates and letters were still not allowed into England without license, nor were English appeals to Rome allowed without royal permission. Henry I was able to maintain almost all of the powers and practices of his father, King William, without sacrificing anything other than lay investiture, which he could stand to lose in exchange for the homage of the clergy. These church officials were also major landowners and important sources of revenue as tenants of the monarchy.[9] Henry II would look to these precedents set by Henry I when he gained the throne after the instability and weakening of royal authority during the reign of Stephen (1135-1154).

After Stephen took the throne in 1135 rival claims from Matilda, the daughter of Henry I, soon brought civil war to England. As the country descended into anarchy, royal authority became weak and the king was unable to assert power over the feudal magnates or the church. During Stephen's reign the church made some notable gains in legal jurisdiction and privileges. Stephen was distracted by civil war and was less able to resist the claims made by the church than were his predecessors. The ecclesiastical courts in particular were able to widen their power as the royal courts became inefficient. Church courts appeared more efficient, cheaper, and faster than did their royal counterparts. Ecclesiastical courts gained enough prestige that at one point the king himself was called to judgment before the court, which was composed of clergymen who by tradition should have been under royal authority. Clergymen also began to defy Stephen and traveled to Rome to meet with the pope and his agents.[10]

Stephen was unable to resist the growth of the church's power for several reasons. First, it was Pope Innocent II (1130-1143) who had recognized Stephen's controversial claim to the throne. Stephen felt he could not outright challenge the institution that had helped to establish his rule. Also ecclesiastical elections had slipped out of Stephen's control and bishops frequently crossed the channel with or without royal permission. Soon legates and bulls were coming into the country and appeals to Rome were going out, again with or without the king's permission. Compromised as Stephen was by the civil war and by his questionable title and position, he had neither the will nor the influence to resist the Church and its accumulation of power.[11]

In 1154 Henry took the throne after Stephen's death and set about restoring the customs, royal power, and authority that had been exercised under his grandfather Henry I. The new king

had an extraordinary task in front of him. The conditions in England at the time were summed up well by historian Z. N. Brooke. Brooke stated:

> The barrier built up by the first three Norman kings to preserve intact their own authority over the Church and to prevent papal intrusion had been broken down in the reign of Stephen. Henry II's determination was to build it up again, and, in ecclesiastical as well as in secular government, to ignore the precedents of Stephen's reign, which he regarded as anarchy. His task was harder in that the papal authority was in existence; he had to abolish a practice, while his predecessors had only to oppose a claim.[12]

Henry II was not immediately able to reassert royal authority due to the debt he owed the church at his accession, and in particular to Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury. Henry had utilized the support of many of the powerful bishops, Theobald included to gain the English crown. It would have damaged Henry's standing to undermine his supporters so soon after taking the throne. The new king had to proceed with caution towards the church and he did so until the death of Theobald in 1161. Then Henry saw his chance to reassert the "customs" of his grandfather and William the Conqueror. To do so, the king realized that he needed a trustworthy ally in a position of power in the church. His friend and chancellor Thomas Becket (1162-1170) seemed the logical choice and Henry appointed Becket to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. Henry, however, would soon find that the man he picked for the archbishopric would not be the tool for royal authority that the king thought he would be.

For Henry, the promotion of Becket seemed a natural and logical step in order to further secure his rule in England. As a native Londoner, Becket had knowledge of English affairs and points of view that Henry lacked. Details about English social conditions and administration were often unfamiliar to Henry, and Becket as chancellor had provided valuable insight into

these areas. Henry no doubt anticipated Becket aiding his king in the same way in English ecclesiastical affairs and as archbishop.

There had always been an underlying tension between the secular and ecclesiastical powers and Henry believed he had an answer to this problem in Thomas Becket. Becket seemed to offer Henry a way to assure harmony between church and royal power by uniting the top offices of chancellor and archbishop in one man, a man on whom Henry felt he could rely.[13] In fact Becket had shown himself to be an ally in Henry's attempts to win back the ground lost to the Church courts during Stephen's reign.[14] Yet there also exist stories of Becket warning Henry that if he were appointed archbishop he would not remain a confident of the king, and in fact would become a great rival to Henry. Becket's outward reluctance, if true, might have predicted the eventual conflict between himself and the king. But Henry was a man of considerable energy and very persistent and in the end Becket accepted his promotion to archbishop in June, 1162. Thereupon the new archbishop almost immediately began to resist Henry in his attempts to curb the authority of the Church.[15]

It appeared that from the moment Becket took the position of Archbishop of Canterbury his thinking and goals underwent a great change. Becket's actions in the early months after his consecration show a transformation from a luxury-loving chancellor and loyal agent of the king to an anguished convert with great reverence for the church and a genuine belief in his duties as archbishop.[16] These duties included holding court and passing judgments in the ecclesiastical courts. By all accounts Becket took his new role as archbishop very seriously and he discharged his office with genuine interest and zeal. Richard Winston described Becket's conduct during the first few months he was in office:

> Thomas took very seriously the judicial duties that now devolved upon him. He held court frequently. On most days, as soon as Mass had been celebrated he left the church and entered the hall where cases were brought before him. [...] As a judge, says Herbert, he was the fairest of men. Moreover, he introduced an innovation that stirred as much amazement as his new humility and piety: he dispensed justice without charging a fee, refusing to accept the gifts that were the universal perquisite of a lord sitting in judgment over his inferiors.[17]

The energy that Becket showed was not necessarily at odds with Henry's plans for Becket and his position. Henry was not, as some writers have suggested, using Becket and his appointment as some sinister scheme to destroy the Church.

Among Becket's first actions upon taking his new position was to reclaim all land and revenue for Canterbury that had once belonged to it. He pursued any and all claims that Canterbury had and began to build up his position economically and to assert the influence of his office. In August 1162, just a few months after assuming his duties as archbishop, Becket and Henry began to butt heads over the appointment by Becket of a clerk to a parish church of Eynsford, which was already claimed by William of Eynsford. When William removed Becket's nomination by force Becket excommunicated him. At this point Henry pointed to the custom that went back to William the Conqueror, which held that none of the king's tenants-in-chief could be excommunicated without first consulting the king. Becket eventually gave in and absolved the king's officer. The next year Becket again resisted Henry when the king proposed direct payment by the clergy into the treasury for the sheriffs. Becket flatly refused to pay. The argument grew heated but it appeared that Henry gave way and the matter was dropped. Becket's challenges to Henry's authority must have made the king angry as they came from a close friend and confidant. The effect on Henry's followers was even more significant because from that point on many of the leading barons were hostile to Becket, and even some of the

bishops were alienated.[18] These initial conflicts foreshadowed the more serious quarrel which was to come between Henry and his archbishop.

In the months leading up to January 1162, a series of notorious crimes committed by clerks had drawn Henry's attention to the church courts and the need for royal reform. When Henry insisted that the accused clerks be tried in the royal courts Becket opposed him. After one incident Henry demanded that a clergyman who had stolen a silver chalice from the church of St. Mary-le-Bow in London, be turned over to the royal courts and Becket again refused. This time, however, Becket attempted to please the king by ordering the man to be branded. This upset Henry even more because an ecclesiastical court had no right to inflict such a punishment, since by canon law an ecclesiastical court was never to draw blood in its punishments. Becket angered Henry still further when the archbishop took it upon himself to impose banishment for a clerk. Such a punishment was encroaching on the royal prerogative. The separation of royal and Church courts as well as the concessions made during Stephen's reign contributed to the unsatisfactory state of justice in Henry's England.

In addition to the right to try all criminal charges that involved a man in holy orders, Church courts in England also demanded exclusive judicial rights to all matters concerning ecclesiastical property and persons. Ecclesiastical courts also claimed that any matter involving a breach of faith was within their authority. This claim meant that theoretically at least there was no measurable line where the Church did *not* have authority. Since ecclesiastical courts also unable to impose punishment that shed blood, punishments usually stopped short of imprisonment because this would require the bishop to build a prison and feed the prisoners. This left fines as the main punishment for Church courts.[19] It was the comparatively weaker

sentences of the ecclesiastical courts that Henry saw as the great inequality between the royal courts and their Christian counterparts. For example, more than a hundred murders were said to have been committed by men in holy orders during the nine years that Henry had been on the throne yet few of these men had received any—let alone severe—punishment.[20]

Royal courts by contrast were now firmly under the king's control and had been revamped by Henry. As detailed in the previous chapter, upon becoming king Henry had reformed the royal courts and had used them to reestablish the order in his kingdom. Typically, in lay courts punishments were more severe, including blinding, castration, and death, all punishments unavailable to the Church courts. Henry's belief was that all clerks accused of crimes should be turned over to the royal courts upon their degradation from holy orders to stand trial and receive suitable punishment for their offences. To Henry this was the only way that appropriate punishment could be administered to the "criminal clergy". For Becket, this practice would result in trying a man twice for the same crime because he saw the ecclesiastical courts as equal to the royal courts.[21]

At a meeting at Westminster Hall in September 1163 Henry, fed up with the resistance to his attempts to curb the authority of the Church, asked the bishops if they were prepared to observe the royal customs. The bishops led by Becket replied that they would, "saving their order", meaning to Henry only when it suited them would they observe the royal customs. As the argument grew more intense news of the trouble soon reached Pope Alexander III (1159-1181). The pope urged moderation and convinced Becket to relent to the king. Henry had been insulted and Becket had to undo the insult. The king arranged for all his barons and the archbishop's supporters to meet at Clarendon and hear Becket's recantation.[22]

Clarendon was a favorite hunting-lodge of Henry's and seemed an unlikely place for one of the most significant events of Henry's reign. The meeting took place on January 13, 1164. Henry and his barons confronted Becket and his bishops on the issue of court supremacy. After eventually reaching an agreement with Becket, Henry demanded that the customs be set down in writing. These written customs became known as "The Constitutions of Clarendon". Among the constitutions were many that concerned the Church, but not all were controversial. Six, however, were seen by the churchmen to encroach upon the rights of the Church.

The issue of advowson, or the right to fill a vacant ecclesiastical position, was addressed in the first article of the constitutions. This was a common practice of Henry's as he could place allies or at least people he was able to control into position that who would then offer him revenues and influence within the church. The text of Article I read:

> If a controversy concerning advowson and presentation of churches arise between laymen, or between laymen and clerks, or between clerks, it shall be treated of and terminated in the court of the lord king.

Article I implied that the king considered the cases to be of real property while the Church saw them as matters of the soul. In Article III Henry essentially established the royal authority as having primacy to the ecclesiastical courts. The bulk of the text instructs how the clerks were to be brought to the justice of the king.

> Clerks charged and accused of anything, being summoned by the Justice of the king, shall come into his court, about to respond there for what it seem to the king's court he should respond there[.] [The accused must also appear in an ecclesiastical court but an agent of the king must be present to see how the case is being tried.] And if the clerk shall be convicted, or shall confess, the church ought not to protect him further.

Articles IV, VII and VIII were aimed at limiting the Church's ability to interfere in royal affairs and making appeals to Rome respectively. The articles essentially target the clergymen's intervention in issues of the government and details how appeals to the pope were to be controlled by royal authority. The articles read:

> It is not lawful for archbishops, bishops, and persons of the kingdom to go out of the kingdom without the permission of the lord king. [...] And if it please the king and they go out, they shall give assurance that [they will not] seek the hurt or harm of the king or kingdom.
>
> No one who holds of the king in chief, and no one of his demesne servitors, shall be excommunicated, nor shall the lands of any of them be placed under an interdict, unless first [consulting the lord king]
>
> Concerning appeals, if they should arise from the archdean they shall proceed to the bishop, from the bishop to the archbishop. And if the archbishop shall fail to render justice, they must come finally to the lord king, in order that by his command the controversy may be terminated in the court of the archbishop, so that it shall not proceed further without the consent of the lord king.

The other constitution that caused controversy was the twelfth; it concerned the administration of vacant archbishoprics and bishoprics. These, the constitution asserted, should be administered by the king and the revenues were to go to royal authority as well. This article also detailed that new nominees for church positions must do homage and fealty to the king and recognize him as their liege lord.[23] Article XII was concerned mostly with securing a source of income Henry could use during a vacancy in an archbishopric or bishopric. Henry had a strong case for claiming that these clauses represented the practice of his grandfather's days.[24] Nonetheless, all of these articles were deemed unacceptable by the archbishop.

Both the fourth and eighth clauses discussed above were customs asserted by William the Conqueror but which were now wholly incompatible with the Gregorian conception of the

Church of which Becket was a firm believer. The concept that Becket most objected to was what he perceived as judging a man twice for the same crime. To Henry's way of thinking, his proposal was not for a double trial but rather for an augmentation of sentence. Becket did not agree and dramatically declared "It would be to bring Christ again before Pontius Pilate."[25] Clearly, the task was difficult if not impossible to convince him to concede to Henry's proposal. Other bishops and barons tried to convince the archbishop to accept the Constitutions and eventually Becket acquiesced. Almost immediately, however, he seemed to regret his decision and it became clear that he would not honor the promise he gave at Clarendon.[26]

Among Becket's claims for the Church was that of papal supremacy in matters of the church, and a large role for ecclesiastical courts. However, as mentioned earlier, the line between church affairs and those of royal administration were blurry at best. Thus Becket's claim represented a threat to the king's authority and his ability to administer royal justice. To Becket it was wrong for laymen to encroach on the rights of the Church. Ultimate authority, then would be found in the canon law and within the ecclesiastical courts. Becket would not accept the king diminishing the influence of the Church and its authority in England, nor his attempt to have ecclesiastical persons judged in a secular court. Becket's constant opposition to Henry meant that the king could not rule as he wanted with Becket in his way.[27]

Following rumors of assassination plots and Henry's stripping Becket of his office, Becket fled England in October of 1164. On the continent Becket met with Pope Alexander III in his papal court at Sens. Becket brought with him a copy of the Constitutions of Clarendon that had caused such controversy. The pope obviously found most of the document objectionable and commended Becket for resisting the constitutions. But the pope was also in a

difficult position. He was not only under obligation to Henry for past loyalty, Pope Alexander also continued to need Henry's support since he was still threatened and in exile from Rome. Further complicating matters was Becket's uncompromising position and forthright opposition to Henry which was alien to the diplomatic pontiff.[28] After all, it was Alexander who had tried to intervene at a distance during the meeting at Westminster back in 1163 and urged mediation upon Henry and Becket.[29] On the other hand Becket seemed to be battling for the Church and suffering danger and hardship because of it.

The pope condemned the Constitutions as expected but he still was unwilling to clearly favor one side or the other. There was a certain vagueness in his phrases which left him room to maneuver. Henry was not directly confronted but Becket and his supporters could still claim support from the pope.[30] So the archbishop settled into his exile and gathered further ammunition from canon law and papal bulls for his battle with Henry. He took up a campaign abroad by sending Henry a series of letters that constantly reminded the king of his resistance. Becket even went so far as to excommunicate five of Henry's men and publicly threatened Henry with excommunication himself if he did not give satisfaction for the damages done to the Church. Eventually the pope absolved Henry's men and began to grow tired of this exile's stubbornness toward negotiation. The pope was attempting to maintain the peace and Becket's unwillingness to compromise began to wear on the pontiff.[31]

After several failed attempts at reconciliation and much pressure applied to Becket, the two former friends met on July 22, 1170 at Freteval, south of Paris. The two men greeted each other and avoided specific references to their conflict. The king agreed to reinstate Becket and allow him to take up his duties as Archbishop of Canterbury again. In December, 1170 the

archbishop returned to England. The peace was not to last long, however, as Becket pursued his enemies and his own agenda once back in England. He issued orders of excommunication against several new victims who had slighted him, and renewed those against bishops whom he felt had wronged him during his exile.[32] When news of Becket's new sentences of excommunication reached the king it was the last straw. Henry's famous Angevin rage burst through uncontrollably and he roared within earshot of his entourage, "Will nobody rid me of this turbulent priest?" Four men of his household chose to take him at his word and left secretly for Canterbury. When Henry discovered the men's absence he quickly assumed their intentions and sent a party to stop them. But they were too late.

On Friday, December 29, the four knights arrived at Canterbury. Gervase of Canterbury recounts what happened next:

> [Upon entering the church and ransacking it the knights call out] "Where is the archbishop?"... [The assassins find Becket and it is clear they were there to kill him] As for me, I willingly embrace death, provided only that the church obtain liberty and peace at the price of my blood.".... Fitz-Urse hastened forward, and with his whole strength he planted a blow upon the extended head. [The knights then killed Becket and left].[33]

It is fascinating that at the moment of his death Becket made his most selfless act in the interest of his church and of his followers, when throughout his time as archbishop, he had been so stubborn and unwilling to negotiate, even when it might have benefited the Church and the other bishops. After his loss of conviction at Clarendon and flight into exile and the ill-tempered and relentless stance he exhibited during that exile, Becket rose to true greatness at his death. Becket's death and the manner of the slaying brought him acclaim throughout the Christian world. Reports of miracles soon followed after his death and on March 12, 1173, Becket was canonized by Pope Alexander.[34] The murderers of Becket were held up in popular culture as the

archetypes of villains which martyrs faced. Contemporaries placed them in the same ranks as Judas and the Devil. The brutality and rather senseless motivation of Becket's murder helped to spread his fame and create the myth of saintliness around Becket and his martyrdom.[35]

For Henry this was perhaps the worst outcome that could have occurred in his quarrel with Becket. The king appeared grief-stricken, yet it appears that his sorrow was genuine for the death of a former friend and for the situation in which Becket's death plunged him. In order for Henry to clear his reputation and avoid harsher punishment from the pope he had to swear to several undertakings during the months following Becket's assassination in 1171. First he had to swear obedience to Pope Alexander III. Henry also had to provide two hundred men for one year for the defense of Palestine and to go on crusade himself within three and a half year. He was to restore to the see of Canterbury all of its lands, churches, and possessions, just as they were at the time of Becket's exile. He further had to restore all the property that he had confiscated from Becket's kin and those who had supported Becket. He was to allow appeals to Rome in cases of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, though the king might ask assurance that no injury was intended towards him. Henry also promised to abrogate the customs established during his reign that were damaging to the Church.

Interestingly enough, within these demands of Alexander there was no explicit renunciation of the "Constitutions of Clarendon". After Henry restored order in England and his domain overseas, further negotiations between the king and the papacy developed during 1175-76. These meetings resulted in a victory for Henry. Investiture by the crown was a significant gain for the king that would allow him influence within the church without coming into direct conflict with the ecclesiastical elections held by the clergy. In addition, the murderers of clerks

were now to be tried in the king's court and deprived of all possessions in addition to any previous sentence. Henry had won clear victories in terms of royal jurisdiction and authority. Following the negotiations, no clerk was to be taken before secular judges for any crime or forfeiture save against the forest laws, or in the matter of lay service for a lay inherited land. This was a compromise for both sides because while the king could not prosecute the clerks on most issues, he was allowed jurisdiction in those limited areas. The king agreed not to hold the lands of vacant bishoprics long, save for exceptional circumstances, and to allow canonical elections in his chapel. In this aspect, the pope succeeded in limiting the power of the English king. For vacant bishoprics had been a convenient source of revenue for royal coffers.[36]

An interesting side note to the quarrel between Becket and Henry was the remarks made by Becket's successor, Richard of Canterbury. Richard complained how the Church had retained the right to try clerks and men accused of committing crimes against its clerks in its own courts. Richard observes:

> If a goat or a sheep is stolen or killed the guilty man is sentenced to be hanged; but the murderers of a priest, or even a bishop, are merely sent off to Rome.[...] The King would like to have the right to punish these dreadful crimes, but we at the risk of our eternal salvation, insist on reserving this right to ourselves.[...] But we deserve all this and worse, because with foolhardy lust for power, we usurp a jurisdiction which properly belongs to another and to which we have no right whatsoever.[37]

This was a poignant comment coming from Becket's successor, considering that Becket had made the rights of Church courts so important in his role as archbishop. It would seem the very thing that Becket fought so determinedly for would only serve to bind the hands of both the king and the ecclesiastics who wished to administer appropriate punishments.

Ostensibly the death of Becket was caused by the angry words of the king. Yet in reality the conflict between Henry II and Thomas Becket had its origin back during the reign of William the Conqueror, when King William began to assert his authority over the religious institutions of England. Royal control over the church and its personnel began to weaken under Stephen's reign, fueled in no small part by the Gregorian Reform movement that drastically altered the Church and increased the power and influence that the papacy had in Europe. This expanded papal authority clashed directly with Henry's attempts to reestablish and increase royal influence and power. Clashes between Henry's growing royal administration and Church rights and customs became the back-drop for the murder of Becket and his martyrdom for the Church. The conflict was also a clash between two equally stubborn, intelligent and arrogant men who each championed their own interests to the point where compromise was impossible.

Endnotes

[1] David Knowles, *Thomas Becket*. Palo Acto: Stanford University Press, 1971, 58.
[2] Knowles, 59.
[3] Knowles, 60.

[1] David Knowles, *Thomas Becket*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971, 58.
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[16] Pain, 75.
[17] Pain, 76-81.
[13] Winston, 128.
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[20] Pain, 91.
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[23], *Constitutions of Clarendon*, in Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages. Ernest Henderson ed. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896, 13-14.
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[26] Pain, 110.
[27] Winston, 173-174.
[28] Pain, 153.
[29] Knowles, 86-87.
[30] Pain, 153-154.
[31] Pain, 170-189.
[32] Pain, 233-234.
[33] Gervase of Canterbury, *Thomas Becket's Death, from History of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, in *The Church Historians of England*, trans. Joseph Stevenson, London: Seeley's, 1853, 329-336.
[34] Pain, 256-258.
[35] Tancred Borenius, "The Murderers of St. Thomas Becket in Popular Tradition," *Folklore* 43/2 (1932): 191-192.
[36] Knowles, 152-154.
[37] Pain, 261-262.

King John

In 1215 John, King of England (1199-1216) was forced by his feudal lords, high clergymen, and wealthy burghers to sign the Magna Carta. This document severely diminished the powers of the king over his barons and damaged the prestige of the king. Earlier in King John's reign he and Pope Innocent III had butted heads over the election of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury after the previous archbishop died in 1205. Following this dispute England was placed under interdict and the king was excommunicated in 1209. John was eventually forced to submit to the papal demands. In doing so John acknowledged that he held England as a feudal fief of the pope. After the signing of the Magna Carta the English monarchy was dramatically changed and greatly reduced. How could such a fate have befallen the English throne after Henry II (1154-1189) had done so much to increase royal power in England? Was it simply that John was an incompetent administrator? Judging by the records and King John's actions, this was not the case. In fact John's administration has been compared favorably by many historians to that of his father. That being said, the question remains: Why was John unable to maintain royal authority in England despite the recent gains in his father's reign? Here, we will pay special attention to the roles that the rebellious barons and the powerful Pope Innocent III played in the loss of monarchial authority in England. Compounded with these factors, this chapter will also examine how lack of success on the battlefield contributed to John's downfall. It was the influence of the pope, the local magnates, and poor a military record that were the ultimate causes of King John's drastic reduction in power.

John took power in England in April 1199 after the death of his brother Richard. John made sure to shore up his support upon taking the throne. The most pressing issue that faced John in England was the financial disaster that Richard had left for him. John faced rising wages for the mercenaries that had formed the backbone of Henry II's armies. If the new king was to defend his domains from the barons who still felt they were owed the lands, castles, and privileges they had been denied since Henry's reign, he would need to increase his revenue and quickly. In placating the magnates John would have to appease them with revenues and castles. If he did this however, the royal income would decrease, and giving offices and castles to these possibly hostile barons would greatly lessen John's ability to resist them if they proved to be rebellious. The English barons were by no means weakened to the point of submission when John took power. Most barons held at least one castle and these fortifications, along with the knights that came with command of a castle, were vital factors in wielding power in feudal England. John needed these barons on his side or at least under his control.[1]

John developed a policy for dealing with his barons. While this policy did not differ dramatically from his predecessors' approaches toward the English magnates, it did have the spine of John's own particular brand of devious nature. The historian Sidney Painter summarizes John's approach:

> The general policy adopted by John toward his barons was simple, obvious and much the same as that of his predecessors. The lords he considered truly dangerous were to be weakened by every possible means, the more moderate dissidents were to be appeased as cheaply as possible. Then the power of the barons considered reliable was to be built up and their fidelity reinforced by gratitude. When possible the lords whose power was to be increased to act as a counter-balance against those whose were believed to be dangerous were to be barons of secondary importance. But John's deeply suspicious nature and his greed made the effective execution of this policy almost impossible.[2]

John seemed to always regret the power he had to give the magnates, and this suspicion was reflected in his dealings with the feudal lords. The king's policy was not so radically different from those royal approaches used in the past, but John allowed his suspicious nature to influence the complex business of playing the barons off one another.

One of John's actions that angered the barons was the manner in which the king dealt with the families of the magnates. For instance, in 1212 King John had twenty-eight sons of Welsh chieftains hanged because their fathers had broken faith. While the taking and possible execution of hostages was by no means uncommon in the medieval period, the number of hostages executed was significant. The menacing threat of dead family members did not set well with many barons, especially after this incident.[3] Another example of John's rather rough handling of the barons' families can be found in the experiences of William de Briouze. Early in John's reign Briouze had been one of the few barons that John had seemed to trust and he had helped to build up the earl's power in England. However, the fickle nature of the king soon resulted in the monarch turning on his once trusted ally and ruining Briouze and eventually running him out of England. In 1211 Briouze died in exile while his wife and one of his sons starved to death in one of John's prisons. The stir that this story caused was reflected in its appearance in every chronicle of the period.[4]

Along with the poor treatment of their families, many barons took issue with the shabby treatment they received from the king personally. At the beginning of John's reign, the king attempted to appease many of the barons to solidify his rule. One major exception to this was the Earl Ranulf of Chester. As one of the most powerful lords in England, Ranulf posed a very serious threat in John's eyes and because of that the king made every attempt to annoy and

hinder the earl. A few of the earl's scattered land holdings were denied him and given to other lords. This really only served to anger the earl and to some extent insulted one of the few barons whose continental holdings were of any significance.[5]

This conflict with Ranulf was a good example of the king taking the conventions of monarchial power to devious extremes. When John played the earls of Chester and Leicester against one another, there was an underlying insult to Earl Ranulf of Chester. John attempted to keep his barons in check by playing them off of one another without regard for personal animosity or rivalry. Such careless treatment of the nobility led to hostility and distrust, an atmosphere that would not serve the king well in the future.

In the first years of John's reign when he was appeasing the great barons, Ranulf received nothing. The Earl of Chester was in fact deprived of some scattered lands which most likely served only to annoy him rather than significantly weaken him. The worst affront to Ranulf was delivered when John gave the shire of Richmond to Earl Robert of Leicester. John may well have believed that this action was necessary to balance his two vassals' growing power. To put two such bitter rivals at odds created suspicion and resentment on the part of the earls toward John.

Ranulf was the only English baron with a legitimate claim to lands in Normandy and the houses of Chester and Leicester had fought bitterly over territories in the past. To force the two houses to compete was more than a simple balance measure; it was a direct snub to Ranulf. Whatever the king's goal may have been, it was dangerous to insult his vassal who had claims to the valuable lands on the continent. While it was not unheard of for feudal lords to balance their vassals against each other, John gave no consideration to the rights the barons thought they were

entitled to as vassals. The king awarded lands and castles as he saw fit without any real regard for the men who held claim to these lands.[6]

The king's relationship with the English barons as a whole is a difficult picture to bring into focus. As previously mentioned, John did not invent any new tactics for dealing with the magnates; he simply applied existing practices more harshly and more ruthlessly than before. While little specific evidence exists to support this, there was an estrangement between king and barons as early as 1204 or 1205 that went beyond a few barons being snubbed by the king. There appears to have been a general lack of confidence in John and a growing suspicion of the king to which he himself had no doubt contributed, with his callous handling of his barons. It is clear that John was never really at ease with his barons as very few were ever on friendly terms with him. John constantly worried about who would desert him if King Philip of France should attack England. This tension was symptomatic of John's feelings toward the majority of his barons and helped to keep his vassals ill at ease and anxious.[7]

The king's distrust of his great nobles was not all just flights of fancy and vague, undefined suspicion. The barons did little to disguise their discontent with the king and his administration, as they had seen their power sharply curtailed under the hand of the Angevin government. Since the failure of the 1173 rebellion against John's father Henry II, the magnates had lost many of the castles that had been in their families for generations. As these were among the most important markers of baronial status and power, the loss of these castles stuck in the minds of the barons and was not to be forgotten. In addition to these losses, the magnates had been systematically excluded from all positions of power and influence in the royal administration of the realm. Even their privileges as feudal lords were subject to review by

servants of the king. It must especially have angered the barons to have been reviewed by men whom they considered to be their social inferiors. Added to these concerns was the fact that it was well-known that the king, always short of money, would not hesitate to take advantage of a young son or a widow left in control of a fief. These grievances had not yet crystallized into formal demands or articulated complaints, but the feudal lords were growing increasingly uncooperative, quarrelsome, and resentful.

The grumbling of his magnates was not entirely ignored by John. In fact, in order to rally support for his claim to the throne, promises were made to the lords that every man would recover his rights. Evidently, most barons did not feel that they had been given what they considered their rights because the rumblings of discontent continued throughout the land. In 1201 when John summoned the barons to cross with him over to the continent to shore up royal claims in Normandy, they refused. Instead, they gathered together and declared in a joint statement that they would follow the king only after "he restored to each of them their rights". John, in his hard-handed fashion, took hostages in retaliation. The barons came to heel but one can assume that the change in the attitudes of the magnates was only due to political expediency and not a genuine acceptance of the king's refusal to restore their rights.[8]

This conflict with the magnates exemplified the difficult position in which John found himself. Many of the grievances that the lords held were based on past administrations. To some extent John's hands were tied by the actions of his predecessors as well as by the threat of an imminent invasion by Philip II of France. While John perhaps deserved the blame for not finding a remedy to his poor relations with many of his nobles and certainly for aggravating the situation with his suspicion and heavy-handed tactics, it cannot be denied that John was also

being forced to pay the cost of the rule of those who came before him. His father Henry II had made a powerful enemy in the French king and had reduced the power of many of the magnates in his drive to restore the strength of the monarchy in England. John's older brother Richard had done little to help the situation during his reign. Richard had been captured while on crusade and had shouldered England with the tremendous burden of paying for his release. Upon taking the throne John had inherited a hostile and powerful royal enemy on the continent and barons at home eager to regain their former prestige and influence. Along with these considerable problems, the English monarchy was in desperate need of revenue to support itself and its agenda.

In addition to these numerous hostile or at least uncooperative lords, John also had to deal with a papacy that had greatly expanded its influence under the leadership of Innocent III (1198-1216). The battle between Innocent III and John would in many ways be similar to the earlier quarrel between Thomas Becket and Henry II. This battle between church and state, however, would see very different actors in the roles of royal authority and papal supremacy. Innocent III was a powerful and capable leader and in a much stronger position than the unfortunate Archbishop Becket of Henry II's reign.

In July of 1205 Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury died. The election of a new prelate was a matter of great importance as the Archbishop of Canterbury was not only primate of all of England, but also by long custom one of the king's closest advisors. In addition, the archbishop was one of the greatest tenants-in-chief of the crown. He was holder of a great temporal barony, as well as the leader of an influential body of bishops. Because of these positions, the archbishop was entitled to a prominent place in the king's council. For all these

reasons it was of great interest to the king who was elected to this position of immense power in the realm. The ideal situation would be if clergy, the pope, and the king could all agree and choose the same man. This, however, was a rarity and the election of the archbishop was often a source of great friction between the king and English clergy. Upon hearing of the Archbishop Walter's death, John contacted the prior and the canons at Canterbury and asked them to promise him to hold off elections until November 30th. Some of the younger canons, however, voted secretly to proceed with the election and breaking their promise to wait, chose the sub-prior Reginald as their new abbot and archbishop. The hope of the canons was that they could keep the election secret from John until the pope could confirm the election and their candidate. When Reginald arrive in Rome however to receive his pallium, Innocent III found flaws in his letters and told him he needed time to consider the matter and investigate the validity of the election.[9]

In the meantime word about the secret election had reached John, who promptly arrived at Canterbury to ensure that the canons elected his choice for archbishop, John Grey. John then sent a letter to the pope that was meant to explain the confusion and show that Grey was indeed the official candidate for archbishop. After a waiting period of almost a year, the pope gave his verdict in the spring of 1207. Both elections were voided and the pope nominated a third candidate, Cardinal Stephen Langton, who was consecrated on June 17, 1207. The pope assured the canons present in Rome that they did not need to ask the king's consent for elections made at the Apostolic See. He then ordered that by virtue of the English canons' vow of obedience and under threat of excommunication, they elect Langton. Without waiting for a reply from John, Innocent installed Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. When news arrived of the pope's

decision the king flew into the rage to which members of his family seemed particularly prone. John objected strongly and saw his royal authority under attack. He cited the extensive monetary contributions from England to Rome and threatened to cut these off if the pope continued to interfere. Innocent, for his part, declared that as pope, he had ultimate authority over the Church of Canterbury. The election had been made and Innocent had no intention of reversing the decision. The pope intended to see this election through to the end.[10]

For his part, John had behind him nearly three hundred years of unbroken precedent for the maintenance of royal prerogative. Innocent III had the power of the day behind him. In addition, Innocent saw the potential that this election could have on the future of the Church and for similar challenges to papal authority throughout Europe. This issue became yet another test for dominance between Church and royal or state authority in England. The election of Langton would become a battleground over which of two authorities, the pope or the king would dominate in the vital area of major ecclesiastical appointments. These appointments and the power to control them would have great political, feudal, and spiritual repercussions.[11]

When it became clear that John had no intention of accepting Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury, Innocent III put England under interdict in 1207. This sentence would last for just over a year and have a rather unexpected result for John and his relationship with the papacy. Under this status all religious life essentially ceased. John Appleby describes the situation in the country:

> The interdict stopped all religious services. Children were baptized privately: confessions were heard at the church door; and sermons were preached only in the churchyard. The dying were shriven and given the Viaticum [last rites], but they could not be given Extreme Unction, for no bishop could consecrate the Holy Oils. With these exceptions, all the functions of the Church were suspended. The Mass, the center and heart of Catholic life,

> could not be celebrated, except for the renewal of the Viaticum, when the priest was permitted to celebrate behind closed doors with no one save a single server present; Holy Communion, the spiritual food of the faithful, could not be distributed; no services of any kind could be held in any church; marriages were contracted at the church door without the usual blessing; bells could not be rung, and the dead were buried like dogs in unconsecrated ground.[12]

Such was religious life in England under the interdict. John's reaction to the proclamation of interdict was swift and violent. He sent his sheriffs and other officers throughout the land to order all priests to leave the kingdom immediately. Early in 1208 the king confiscated all property belonging to the Church and diverted the revenues to the royal treasury. However, the removal of priests by force was not enforced as the agents of the king most likely wanted to avoid the sentence of excommunication for laying violent hands on the clergy. Thus, with the exception of the bishops that fled, most clergymen stayed with their congregations.

Financially, both John and, at least indirectly, the whole kingdom benefited greatly from the interdict. This was because of confiscation of ecclesiastical properties brought so much money into royal coffers that there was actually no need for general taxation. With all the vacant bishoprics' revenue going to the crown John was able to find the financial stability that had been such a major concern at the beginning of his reign. In addition to the financial security that John enjoyed, overt dissatisfaction by the magnates was insured against by the king's customary taking of hostages from his barons.[13] It was becoming clear by 1209 that John was not going to yield under the interdict and that if the papacy were to achieve its goals in England it would have to utilize its most feared weapon: excommunication.

In late 1209 the pope finally did excommunicate John, thus cutting him off from the Church and making it unlawful for any Christian to associate with him or give him food, drink,

or shelter. Moreover, John's soul was damned in the world to come. This sentence seemed to hold little weight with John, however, who simply carried on as usual but with perhaps less regard for morality. Pope Innocent then sought to ensure the observance of his pronouncement by extending it to all those associated with the king. Most importantly, Innocent absolved John's subjects from their oaths of fealty and allegiance to the king. This last point was enough to encourage the more discontented barons to resist John but it did not shake loose his control of the kingdom.

Finally, in January 1213, Innocent authorized King Philip of France to invade England and depose John from his throne. With the two countries poised for battle, John was informed of a large number of barons who had secretly pledged fealty to the French king. Preferring to negotiate rather than fight, John capitulated to the pope's demands and made his submission on May 13, 1213. He swore to abide by all the commands of the pope and to allow Stephen Langton safe passage into the country along with the exiled bishops. In return the archbishop and bishops were to give security on oath and in writing that they would not make any attempt against John's person or crown as long as he afforded them safety and kept the peace.[14] John had now settled his dispute with the papacy but had no guarantee that Philip would abandon his plans to invade England. In order to attain this security the king conceived of a scheme for placing himself under the direct protection of the pope. If this plan succeeded it would make Philip's invasion a sacrilegious attack on the pope's own domain. On May 15, 1213, John resigned his crown and performed the act of feudal homage and allegiance to the pope. John even declared this in a charter of concession to the pope. Included with this charter was the form of the oath of fealty. It reads as follows:

> I, John, by the grace of God, 'king of England and lord of Ireland, from this hour forth will be faithful to God and St, Peter and the Roman church and my lord pope Innocent and his Successors who are ordained in a Catholic manner: I shall not bring it about by deed, word, consent or counsel, that they lose life or members or be taken captive, I will impede their being harmed if I know of it, and will cause harm to be removed from them if I shall be able: otherwise as quickly as I can I will intimate it or tell of it to such persons as I believe for certain will inform them. Any counsel which they entrust to me through themselves or through their envoys or through their letters, I will keep secret, nor will I knowingly disclose it to anyone to their harm. I will aid to the best of my ability in holding and defending against all men the patrimony of St. Peter, and especially the kingdom of England and the kingdom of Ireland. So may God and these holy Gospels aid me.[15]

In this manner John made England a papal fief and freed himself from the present danger of an invasion. This tactic had little practical effect on the government of England, but allowed John to carry the day in an ingenious and unprecedented way.

The controversy with the Church having been settled, John again turned his attention toward Philip and the lands that had been lost on the continent. In February of 1214 John invaded the continent with the intention of defeating Phillip and regaining the lands that had fallen to the French monarch. John's army was made up largely of mercenaries, for the barons mostly refused to join the expedition and very few of the magnates even sent knights or support of any kind. John did, however, have a plethora of royal funding for his army and an ally in Otto of Brunswick (1175-1218), his nephew and Holy Roman Emperor. The allies would attack Phillip on two fronts and regain land and destabilize the French monarchy.

John and his army landed in the Duchy of Aquitaine and began to bring the territory under his control. He then moved north to Poitou, where he met with initial success and some of the weaker Poitevin nobles joined him. In an attempt to draw Phillip into something of a vise, Emperor Otto attacked the French simultaneously in the northeast. However, right in the middle of besieging some of Phillip's strongholds, the Poitevin barons refused to fight a pitched battle

and abandoned John. The campaign began to collapse from lack of support and a lack of coordination of its parts. In an open field near the village of Bouvines, in Flanders, on July 27th, the French and imperial army under Otto met. The battle quickly deteriorated and the French army carried the day. Phillip was now firmly in power in France and Otto lost his throne. John, defeated from a distance, was forced to withdraw from the continent and return to England

The vital continental possessions John was now forced to abandon permanently included Normandy, Maine, Anjou, and Brittany. While the English king had lost these lands as early as 1205, any reasonable chance of regaining control over them was gone with this new defeat in 1214. These territories did not constitute the entirety of John's continental claims, Aquitaine was still a thorn in Phillip's side for instance. However, the English king could no longer hold any realistic hope of overcoming the French king and regaining his lost lands. John's allies were defeated and he could not mount another costly attempt on the territories with a hostile barony back in England.[16]

King John was not a ruined man after 1214, but in defeat he was certainly less awesome in the eyes of the barons than he would have been in triumph. John again appeared to lack that essential of feudal leadership qualities: the ability to win battles. The king had left for the continent while the magnates' frustrations were at their peak. When he returned in defeat in October 1214, those barons ready to mutiny saw their chance. John had humiliated England with his defeat and loss of lands and the barons were fed up with a ruler that they felt was hindering their power. Most troubling of all for the feudal lords however, was that their king could not seem to win a decisive victory. The king had been denied his continental lands and now appeared humbled before his disloyal vassals. Soon John's strained relationship with his

magnates and humiliating defeat would lead to an outright rebellion among the dissatisfied barony.[17]

Upon John's return to England the barons resisted the king's efforts to levy fines against those nobles who had not joined the royal forces on the continent. The English nobles saw their opportunity to fight for their rights as they interpreted them under the charter of Henry I. This charter was the basis, however vague it was, for limiting the king in the exercise of his feudal authority. Stephen Langton was responsible for showing this charter to the barons the previous year and he had taken a leading part in indicating the objectives that the rebellious lords should seek. While Langton later turned his attention toward convincing the king to arrive at an understanding with his vassals, this guidance given to the nobles indicated John's friction with the high-clergy was still significant.[18]

The disaffected barons assembled at Stamford during Easter Week, April 19-26, 1215 with a great show of force and presented the king with their demands. Stephen Langton was chief among the arbitrators between John and his rebellious nobles. The archbishop presented the king with a list of the laws and established customs that the barony accused him of violating and the ultimatum that if the king did not observe those laws and confirm his promise under his seal, the nobles would force him to comply. The negotiations broke down into open conflict and John attempted to rally any loyal barons to his side while the rebellious nobles established their base of operations in London.

The citizens of London had sent out invitations to the barons to come there immediately and the barons arrived and entered the city without meeting any resistance. The rich citizens favored their cause and the poor ones were both afraid and unable to make any protest. Wealthy

Londoners apparently had no loyalty for a powerful royal authority that taxed their fortunes and hampered their trade with ports abroad.[19] The richer citizens of London provided the nobles with economic support for their campaign against the king. John was now in a disastrous position as the number of nobles who had abandoned him left him no effective way with which to defend himself. The king was forced to discuss peace terms with his barons and hear their demands.[20]

Turning against John, the barons forced the king to sign the Magna Carta in June of 1215 at Runnymede just outside London. The Great Charter was a listing of the rights that the feudal lords, high clergy, and wealthy townspeople wanted protected. The document was also a listing of their major points of contention with both John's reign and the previous reigns that had created the precedents by which John acted. Discontent over the curtailing of the rights of the nobility as well as anger at a crushing tax burden were two major themes expressed in the Magna Carta. Article 52 was an excellent example of the magnates' concern for the restoration of their rights and properties. Here John declared:

> If anyone has been disseised or deprived by Us, without the legal judgment of his peers, of lands, castles, liberties, or rights, We will immediately restore the same, and if any dispute shall arise thereupon, the matter shall be decided by judgment of the twenty-five barons mentioned below in the clause for securing the peace. With regard to all those things, however, of which any man disseised or deprived, without the legal judgment of his peers, by King Henry Our Father or Our Brother King Richard, and which remain in Our hands or are held by others under Our warranty, We shall have respite during the term commonly allowed the Crusaders, except as to those matters on which a plea has arisen, or any inquisition had been taken by Our command, prior to Our taking the Cross. Immediately after Our return from Our pilgrimage, or if by chance We should remain behind from it, We will at once do full justice.[21]

It was just this kind of assertion of the barons' rights and liberties and protection of lands and bases of power that the Angevin monarchs, including John, had been trying to prevent. The

strengthening of the royal authority was directly connected with the weakening of the great magnates' powers. Now, with the reestablishment of the rights of the barons the royal authority was at a major disadvantage. This was perhaps John's greatest defeat, for he was essentially forced to give up much of his power as king and feudal lord over those men who were supposed to be loyal vassals.

The Magna Carta was full of the technicalities of feudal law and, it is essentially a charter of the liberties aimed at securing the rights of the upper classes against a powerful ruler. It did not contain any descriptions of abstract concepts like the 'rights of all men' or any high-minded ideas of that nature. The charter was basically designed to stop the abuses of feudal custom that the Angevins had used to keep their vassals down. But more importantly, the charter became a code of law that came to symbolize that the king's government should not operate to the determent of his barons. As far as King John was concerned it marked a condemnation of rule by arbitrary will. The charter that John was compelled to sign greatly limited the power that the English monarchy could exercise over the great barons, clergy and burghers of the realm. Specifically, the king's ability to raise money was brought under the influence of the barons, and this would have vast implications for future English kings.[22]

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King John's legacy has changed over the course of time. For a period it was popular to see John as a dismal failure and even an incompetent leader. But turning to legal and administrative records, this perception begins to soften as it becomes evident that John's administrative talents were far superior to those of his brother. In fact it could be argued that the

king had the same knack for administration and the application of English law that his father Henry II had. While John's reign was perceived to be more personal and his presence may have contributed to a more oppressive feeling, many of the contributions to the efficiency of the central government which occurred in John's reign remained important and relevant to England even after his reign was over. During John's reign the charter rolls, patent rolls, and close rolls begin to be preserved. John had a devotion to administration and to the law that manifested itself in ceaseless activity. The king's unending tours of the country and his personal attention to even the smaller details of administrative process resulted in an efficiency in the centralized royal government that had not been seen since Henry II's reign. The perception of King John's abilities is often overshadowed by his less than amiable person characteristics. However it cannot be denied that John made significant and lasting contributions to the law and royal government during his administration.[23]

The reasons for John's failure are complex and numerous. There was a powerful and talented leader in control of the papacy. Innocent III had every bit the keen legal mind that John did and he also had the ambition and political savvy to expand the Church's influence into England like no pope before. The king also inherited a massive financial crisis from his brother Richard's administration. Along with this monetary crisis were the magnates with grievances from the past and who had significant power and motivation to rebel against their king. In addition to these considerable problems was the ever-present threat of invasion form the French King Philip, who waited for any opportunity to exploit weaknesses on the part of England and the king himself.

John failed to maintain royal authority and power, this much is clear. The reasons, however, are not incompetence or lack of political skill. John's political skill and knack for the administration of law was comparable to those of Henry II. But Henry was also able to expand the Angevin Empire because he was a successful fighter and could manipulate his rivals both diplomatically and militarily. John on the other hand appeared weak militarily and his rivals felt that they could defy him and not be punished by the force they would have been subjected to under Henry's administration. This lack of military prowess joined with John's prickly personality traits added up to a large group of magnates that neither feared nor respected him. All of these problems, coalescing over the course of John's reign, simply proved too much for him to deal with effectively.

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[1]. Sidney Painter, *The Reign of King John*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1949, 17-20.

[2]. Painter, 24.

[3]. W. L. Warren, *King John*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, 181-182.

[4].Warren, 184-185.

[5]. Painter, 25-26.

[6]. Painter, 25-28.

[7]. Warren, 105-109.

[8]. Warren, 109-110.

[9]. John T. Appleby, *John King of England*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959, 130-132.

[10]. Appleby, 144-149.

[11]. Sidney R. Packard, "King John and the Norman Church," *The Harvard Theological Review* 15/1 (1922): 15-17.

[12]. Appleby, 152.

[13]. Appleby, 160-162.

[14].Appleby, 190-193.

[15]. John's Concession of England to the Pope, in Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages. Ernest Henderson ed., London: George Bell and Sons, 1896, 430-432.

[16]. Warren, 218-224.

[17]. Warren, 225-226.

[18] Appleby, 222.

[19] Appleby, 231.

[20] Appleby, 234-235.

[21]. A. E. Howard, *Magna Cara Text and Commentary*, Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964, 46-47.

[22]. Warren, 232-240.

[23]. C. Warren Hollister, "King John and the Historians," *The Journal of British Studies* 1/1

(1961): 5-9.

Why did the empire that Henry II created disintegrate under King John's administration? As the preceding chapters have shown, the variations of the two reigns were marginal in most aspects except for the behavior of the king and the military successes enjoyed by the king. Henry was able to curb the power of his nobles because he was politically cunning and militarily powerful. John stirred up much animosity among the great barons and the high clergy through his devious and insulting behavior toward the nobility. While his father was able to expand his control of continental possessions, John was defeated by his enemies abroad and undermined by his vassals at home. Both kings showed great interest in the law and administering justice within their kingdom. Politically and in matters of administration, Henry II and his son John can be compared favorably. John's failure to expand or even maintain the empire of his father was due in large part to the accumulation of threats from hostile nobles, a powerful and influential papacy, and a determined royal enemy in France.

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