**Was the Lionheart a Poor Ruler? (**[**People**](http://www.medievality.com/people.html)**)**

Immortalized in legend, book, and song are two brothers both kings of England, they are John and Richard. The tale of Robin Hood portrays these siblings as opposite dichotomies of kingship. Richard being the chivalric ideal, exemplifying all praiseworthy kingly traits a hero to his people is Richard a medieval role model for greatness and glory. John, however, a mean, petty ruler apt to kick a man when he's down and trod upon the weak. In reality Richard did embark upon an honorable crusade fighting for the glory of the cross, a defender of all Christendom. John earned his reputation by having an adversary murdered in his dungeon without the paltry due process of the middle ages. Modern historians take a different viewpoint, Bishop Stubbs of the nineteenth century said that Richard was "an unscrupulous and impetuous soldier who's cardinal trait was the love of warfare." While John was instrumental in the eventual development of democracy when he signed the Magna Carta. This paper will establish once and for all that John was a worse king than Richard was and the folklore reflects the reality.

From the beginning there were naysayers, chroniclers who found Richard's taxes unreasonable but Richard of Devises and Geoffrey de Vinsauf made him out to be a hero. For centuries, Richard was thought of as an ideal monarch displaying only the great qualities of the warrior king. In the seventeen and eighteen hundreds academia really began to manufacture historians, these were harder to please than the masses who ache for stories of an action figure. William Stubbs was a strong voice in the condemnation of Richard as a brutish fighter who had little skill at statecraft. One must remember that these Victorians judged Richard as a nation builder specifically of England as a nation state rather than the ruler of the Angevin Empire. After the changes in society brought about by the counter-culture historians started to tear down the traditional great men of history. Richard was not spared in this assault and many current textbooks have derogatory information or blurbs such as this "Richard was an attractive man and a thoroughly bad monarch... War was his one delight, and his only interest in England was as a source of funds for his crusade and his bitter was with Philip Augustus." It is not until recently that historians have been beginning to look again and declare that Richard was a good king in actuality.

Ralph V. Turner and Richard R. Heiser have tried to disprove what they feel is the establishment view of Richard's reign. They assert that historians still find Richard a less than stellar ruler due to Victorian era judgments of his kingship. They try both to explain how he should be judged according to the values of his time and that he was actually an accomplished statesman beyond his military endeavors. They put a good emphasis upon his being monarch of the Angevin empire not merely England because many judged him purely for his effect upon the formation of the English nation state which was not a conscious goal of his during the time of his reign.

This paper seeks to bring completion to this debate by establishing a clear criterion for judgment and then evaluating the brothers' performance. The heroes of the past are remembered as men of power and can be judged through control of land, the size of their kingdoms as a measure of power. With this view one can and this paper will assert that Richard the Lionheart was a far better king because the Angevin Empire, the realm they were both born into, did not decline as a result of his actions. Even more that it was a direct result of John's failures that the empire was crushed.

Almost one millennium deep into the past there were no nation states in Europe. France and England were divided by language, king, and water but they did not have the coherent identities that sprung up during the one hundred years war. The counts, dukes, and other various nobles held as much if not way more power than the kings. The slow struggle for power was like the politics of Greece in the age of the polis, city-state. Many little rulers with many little armies each trying to get ahead somehow "In an age when governance was a joint enterprise of prince and feudal nobility." Until one man was able to forge an empire, this man was Henry II king of England.



The idea of an Angevin Empire was an old but surreal concept when young Henry was born unto the count of Anjou. In the Angevin court Henry heard countless times the history and tales of his ancestors. "[the court] unwittingly encouraged the telling of histories that served to anchor people in the past and provide them with an identity in the present." In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was already being circulated a cycle of epic poems about one from whom Henry had descended, Geoffrey Greymantle. Geoffrey Greymantle was likely one of the first architects of an Angevin state. Geoffrey put forth great efforts to expand Angevin holdings in France, he spread his influence throughout Nantes, Maine, Rennes, and Vendome. He proceeded through asserting claims from his lineage, practiced intense diplomacy and alliance forging in order to extend into Maine, and worked diligently at arranging beneficial marriages to expand the power of the Angevin Empire. The legacy of the illustrious Greymantle lived on through many Angevins and it was expected that the head of the family would take actions to increase the power of their heirs; a commonplace ideal of the medieval aristocratic family, but none the less important in the development of a medieval empire. "The activities of Count Geoffrey Greymantle, Henry II's great, great, great, great, grandfather, provide a good example of the origins of the idea of the Angevin Empire."

All the way up to Henry's father did the Angevins work and grow and venerate their great leaders who won them further power. Henry the first succeeded in actually becoming king of England and Normandy. One would find this an amazing step on the path to Angevin power and it was. Henry the first had a very different empire than Richard and John's father; it was a centralized state with a strong monarchy. The Angevin empire up to that time had been more of a loose confederation of nobles in the same family that married together and shared a common goal and legacy; some times there were conflicts within the conglomeration but because of the lack of authority it never was ripped apart by them. "The Angevin counts seemed to appreciate that the failure to produce heirs, the development of personality conflicts, the intervention of premature death, and numerous other unforeseen problems were far too likely to undermine any but the most rudimentary and flexible pattern of organization." Henry the second's empire was conceptually like that of Greymantle. Loose and large, it sprawled and formed through separate but constant successful power mongering on many fronts. It was administered by one man but in the veil of many separate offices: in England Henry was king of England, in Normandy the duke of Normandy, and in Anjou the count of Anjou. It is important to understand that the Angevin empire was a fundamentally different kind of empire than the more mundane and common governments of medieval realms and was ruled as such. "The Angevin idea of empire was a broadly conceived, flexible, and multifaceted network of family connections."

Henry was the heir of Geoffrey Plantagenet and thus from his father inherited the territories of Maine and Anjou as a vassal to the King of France. From his mother Henry was born into even more power; he gained Normandy by birthright as the son of Empress Matilda. From her Henry might have become king of England directly through succession but this was not to be. His mother's cousin Stephen I usurped the throne of England, but this did not stop Henry's eventual ascendancy. Henry was not averse to using his very manhood to further his power; he married and bedded Eleanor of Aquitaine, an ingenious decision that solidified his future coronation. With Eleanor came the regions of Aquitaine and Gascony, rich territories the addition of which placed Henry firmly into the position of most powerful ruler in France. Henry then had to complete his task of reclaiming his birthright as king of England, which his mother was so anxious for him to achieve. In 1153 he landed an army in England of three thousand footmen and one hundred and forty horses. Mere months later the usurper signed the Treaty of Wallingford effectively making Henry king of England as well. He was crowned in December of 1154. During his reign he became lord of Ireland and even occupied parts of southern Scotland. "The Angevin Empire had its genesis in Henry's actions and policies during the years between 1152 and 1156." This vast realm that stretched across the channel and spanned multiple languages and cultures should be known as the Angevin Empire. Angevin is merely a form of Anjou and one might recall that Anjou was a key province in the empire and had lent its name to Henry as well as Plantagenet.

Thus was the empire formed and named, a mighty power in the western world though always beset by conflict and war. By 1217 all the territory of the empire in France had been lost to the Capetians, the Magna Carta had been signed stripping an unprecedented amount of power from one of Henry's descendants. "John was forced to accept the demands of the barons" Worst of all, the Capetians even ruled England for a very brief period; this in itself is a major indication of the fall of Henry's dynasty and end to his empire. In 1215 the nobles of England invited Prince Louis of France to take the throne of England from John, they did not believe he would abide by the terms of his famous charter. The spear-point of their rebellion was a French army that invaded England and occupied London. It cannot be disputed that the Angevin Empire once glorious was ruined and defeated by its long time enemy the Capetian French.

There are a number of ways an empire can descend from its glory into utter ruin and disaster. It could decay economically, run out of money and thus fail. An empire may be conquered, defeated upon the field of battle and destroyed. Worst an empire could be smitten by the wrath of the omnipotent God who governs the fate of all great or small, or in from a more secular view, it could fall out of favor with the papacy. The Angevin Empire could have fallen prey to any of these catastrophes but clearly the blame can laid upon John the usurper and not Richard the Lionheart.

The financial difficulties of the Angevin Empire were unimagined and contributed to its fall. There is no part of running an empire that doesn't require more funds and basically no problems that couldn't have been solved by more money. It is unquestionable that the empire could have been saved had it an infinite well of capital flowing from its coffers.

Richard, although not to be blamed for the eventual fall, did expend a significant amount of his subject's financial resources. One of the great costs upon his crown was his glorious crusade. An adventure of epic proportion that earned the monarch untold honor and glory as well as advancing his name into its current state of reverence. Richard's father Henry had considered going on crusade and had levied England's first crusade tax known at the time as "Saladin's tithe." "Mr. Eyton ... asserted that the English tax realized thirteen thousand pounds, of which six thousand was extorted from Jews." When Richard came to power he needed to equip his army so he spent his father's depleted treasury and expanded the tax significantly to raise more funds. There are varied estimates but most would argue that between Richard and his father the tax raised about one hundred thousand marks from England. He had to go further, though, to be secure in his quest to free the holy land; he went as far as to ransom William the first of Scotland for ten thousand marks. Richard had to go further he began to sell government offices to the highest bidder. This system might seem corrupt but it was effective at raising funds, and one must remember this is in the time when the church granted indulgences, a monetary value on the remission of sins by way of redeeming years in purgatory for cash price. Thus Richard was only acting in a similar manner to the institution of his moral guidance. Some sources claim that Richard made those who held offices pay to keep them as if he got to sell them twice. He even on occasion would forcibly take certain nobles as hostages and ransom them to their vassals. "Stephen de Marzia, seneschal of Anjou, under the king lately deceased... was dragged in chains to Winchester, where being made a gazing-stock to angels and to men, emaciated with woeful hunger, and broken with the weight of his irons, he was constrained to the payment of thirty thousand pounds, for his ransom." The great king has even been quoted saying that he would have sold the city of London if there had been anyone rich enough to buy it. "The king disburthened all, whose money was a burthen to them, such powers and possessions as they chose being given to anybody at pleasure; wherewith also on a time an old acquaintance in the company joking him, he broke off with this evasion, "I would sell London if I could find a chapman." Such is the kings own confession that he tried to squeeze all the money he could out of England to attempt his crusade.

Richard did not spend much of this money on non-military activities; the "sinews of war are infinite money". Contemporaries regarded this as the honorable duty of a king rather than an economic mistake, and he was appropriately glorified as a result. "On that day he performed the most gallant deeds on the furious army of the Turks, and slew numbers with his sword, which shone like lightning; some of them were cloven in two from their helmet to their teeth, whilst others lost their heads, arms, and other members, which were lopped off at a single blow." (Richard of the Holy Trinity, 270) The beginning and end of Richard's reign show that when he was not crusading in the holy land, he was at war in France. Both before and after he left, he came into conflict with Philip of France. These wars had their cost as surely as wars in Iraq have thrust the twenty first century superpower, the United States of America, into decline and poverty. While he was doing this, the great king was also reworking the systems of taxation in England enforcing a larger fairer bureaucracy rather than tax collecting sheriffs who were in effect heirs to biblical Romans. "Richard's reign was therefore a vital period for English state finance, and was in apparent contrast to the developments of his Capetian rival." While taxing the great king was also helping England progress into its glorious future.

Richard's bloodlust was not the only action of his administration to decrease the finite depths of the coffers of his realm. The warrior king had the misfortune of falling in the hands of Leopold V, duke of Austria. Not surprisingly this was very bad for the empire; Leopold handed the lionhearted king over to the Holy Roman emperor Henry, who demanded a ransom for his release. Richard's mother Eleanor of Aquitaine, being the kind and loving woman that she was, ground one hundred and fifty thousand marks out of Aquitaine and Anjou for the ransom. "To gather sufficient funds to pay for Richard's ransom, the government had been empowered to introduce a series of aids, carucages, scutages and tallages." If that wasn't too much of a burden upon Richard's subjects, his foul brother John extorted about eighty thousand marks out of England to try and entice the Holy Roman emperor to delay Richard's release. "The pattern of family hostility that can be discerned in the relations between Henry II and his sons and of the latter with each other had a deleterious political impact upon the Angevin Empire." John of course was exemplifying his erroneous prioritization of his own personal power within the family over the power of the family as a whole resulting in unnecessarily encumbered the coffers of the crown. Needless to say, this excessive and superfluous taxation was bad for the empire in almost every respect.

John needed to fight the Capetians just as much as Richard and needed assets to continue the war. Unlike his older brother embarking on crusade, John chose not to be ridiculous when he needed to obtain more wealth. He did not make insane deals with aristocrats selling offices and territories, London was one of John's favorite haunts and he had no intention of vending it to a high bidder. John amassed resources with old-fashioned consistency; he taxed his subjects heftily, grinding his heel into the bleeding backs of the peasantry. Henry II, father of both Richard and John was levying less than twenty thousand pounds per year to give an idea of normal taxation, one chronicle suggests that John had a hundred thousand pounds. That may have been a gross exaggeration and it should be remembered that there had been significant inflation during the interim period between the reign of Henry II and John the usurper. Nick Barrat asserts however, "It is clear that John more than made up for inflation during this period, and accordingly his exploitation of all sources of revenue in the counties must have seemed even harsher in these economic circumstances." This means pretty straightforwardly that John was overtaxing his subjects, a terrible choice for the future of the empire. This must have drastically affected the populous' decision to make the Magna Carta and invite a foreign army into England. "It is highly likely that John's attempts to maintain his financial position in this period represent the greatest level of exploitation seen in England since the Conquest." John taxed the country more than his brother, he didn't go on crusade but he exasperated the problem of the ransom: John had more of a negative impact upon the financial aspect of the fall of the Angevin Empire.

On the military front Richard obviously was not as lacking as his brother. The simple truth is that territories in France were not lost to the Capetians during the reign of the Lion because he won battles. Beyond his tactical ingenuity Richard was a warrior embodying the virtues of chivalric bloodshed. "King Richard now having placed his army in two divisions, suddenly charged the Turks, and with his followers, penetrated and routed the foremost rank. Such was the fury of his onset, that they fell to the ground almost without a blow; and be pressed so hard upon the fugitives, that there were none left to make further resistance, except that several of those who fled turned back and shot their arrows behind them." He was successful both in the physical manifestation of violence and the tactics of troop movement and formation on the battlefield, and proved himself to understand the subtleties of managing armies on the macro-level. As a direct result of Richard's prowess as a soldier the Angevin lands in France were defended from Capetian annexation.

John's military achievements are somewhat less stellar and support the position that he lost the empire that his father left to his brother. As is to be expected the French king Philip was still doing his bloody best to crush the Angevin legacy in France when John ascended the throne. Philip was against John from the start, fomenting rebellion and waging war. Unlike his able older brother, John fought the wars but could not snatch the fruit of victory. In effect he lost the bulk of the empire to Philip after Richard died fighting to keep it. Philip supported John's younger relative Arthur's claim to the throne until John signed the Treaty of Le Goulet. The treaty, while recognizing John as king of England, held harsh terms of vassalage regarding the other Angevin territories in France and effectively only left John as Duke of Normandy rather than Angevin emperor. It was then that the wars started; to realize the vision that Philip had written into the treaty he had to establish real power on the ground with military force. John's armies could not protect Normandy, Anjou, or Gascony, and even most of Aquitaine fell to the soldiers of Philip Augusts within a short two-year period known as the War of Bouvines. This loss was a drastic step in the destruction of the Empire, and although it could have been reversed, was the writing on the wall that showed the world a weak monarch in the process of failing in his duties. "The cohesion of the Angevin Empire therefore depended on the political, diplomatic and military prowess of its ruler, and John's deficiencies in these areas meant that the Angevin Empire ultimately foundered."

One might argue that no hand of a king could have saved the Angevin Empire and it was doomed by destiny to fail and be conquered. This will of fate and the almighty is not wholly random and unpredictable. The Angevin relationship with the pope affected the loyalty of its subjects and its overall power in the grand scheme of European politics even if there wasn't really divine writing on the wall. One must remember while we might find such ideas trite at the time the pope had real power and represented more than he does today. Again, under scrutiny it is the fault of John and not Richard if the Angevins were smote by unforeseen wrath. On the one hand Richard went on Crusade, his devotion and piety is beyond question. It is stated numerous times in chronicles that he performed actions with divine aid. Pope Innocent could want nothing more than the kings of Christendom to lead Christian armies and thus his relationship with Richard was cordial at worst.

John on the other hand probably did incur the rage and retribution of this powerful deity or just his manifest visage in our plain. Beyond John's actions while Richard was serving the cross, which do show a lack of respect for the holy duty John came into direct conflict with the pope. Mortals have little chance of understanding the purpose of the divine but there is one who has a little more insight than the rest, he is the pope, it is a terrible gambit to fall afoul of him, John however, did. John engaged in the classic medieval dispute over who should appoint clergy, the king or the pope. Unfortunately for him, his adversary was Innocent III, the most powerful medieval pope. In 1207 the pope imposed the interdict upon the kingdom forbidding England the holy sacraments. For a myriad of reasons, this was bad for the empire: it slowed the collection of taxes, exasperated unrest, and undermined John's authority. By 1209, John was excommunicated, which is even worse for the same reasons made manifold. Finally, John had to submit; he was brought back into the fold of Christianity for the price of an annual tribute to the papacy. Thus more wealth and power slipped from the Angevin Empire as a result of John's actions along with the clear disapproval of God's only voice on earth.

It could be argued that the entire fall of the empire spirals around one decisive battle in France, the Battle of Bouvines thus it should be examined deeper. The defeat in the county of Flanders in 1214 is the blow that toppled the precariously arranged building blocks of the Angevin Empire. John's clash with his eminence Pope Innocent III helped guide his demise; the pope had a strong hand in the formation of alliances in the region. In the end it came down to classic English and their allies against the French and their own web of diplomacy's yield of allies. John had worked hard to gather supporters, and when the armies took the field he had recruited Otto IV, Holy Roman Emperor, William, Earl of Salisbury, Renaud, Count of Boulogne, and Ferrand Count of Flanders each with their respective hosts to take the field against the French. Overall the Angevin allies fielded an estimated twenty-five thousand soldiers against Philip II of France's paltry fifteen thousand men at arms. John's original strategy had been to keep his forces fighting in the south to draw the French away from Paris; with this distraction the main army of Otto IV could march on Paris from the north and seize the cultured city from Capetian hands, just as Augustine would pluck his ripe pears from the tree of sin. Unfortunately this strategy was not flawlessly carried out; the Germans were slow from the start so John had to do more fighting than he was comfortable with against the Philip's formidable Frankish knights. After a few encounters with Philip, the family's nemesis John demonstrated his capacity for cowardice and returned to Aquitaine. This allowed Philip to bring his forces back north to face the Imperial host and its Flemish support; their delay had combined with John's weakness on the field of combat to reduce John's brilliant stratagem to a miserable failure. Philip got to fight each half of his enemies one at a time without losing Paris or paying for a siege.

Philip, hurrying northwards, honorably took the offensive and offered Otto battle on July 27th. Both armies drew up opposite each other with cavalry on the wings, the infantry massed in the center for support. Both commanders placed their personal cavalry corps in the center to support the infantry. The battle opened with a French cavalry charge from their right flank; there was picturesque knight versus knight melee that dominated the French right and the Imperial left wings. Although they covered themselves with glory, these chivalric warriors were not the decisive combatants, the infantry would have to decide the turn of events. The German and Flemish infantry were professionals with pole-arms, an extremely effective weapon allowing the Holy Romans to emulate the phalanxes of antiquity. The French infantry on the other hand were militia raised from nearby towns, all in various states of armament and experience. Needless to say, when Otto advanced the large body of his infantry into the French lines, his soldiers crumpled the French resistance, being better trained, better armed, and more numerous. After decimating the French infantry with pole-arms, the Flemish footmen came upon Philip himself with his bulk of knights. Philip and his cavalry were in danger of being overwhelmed, being vastly outnumbered by the host of pike-men they now faced. Philip, unperturbed ripped and read a page from his previous rival, the Lionheart himself, and charged his cavalry into the opposing foot. Although they were fewer in number, the French knights were heavily armored riding down lightly armored soldiers, like iron tanks crashing into a spiny wall of flesh. The pike is a weapon not only designed for a schiltrom but also well suited due to its reach to unhorse a mounted assailant. King Philip himself was knocked from the saddle during the heat of combat, but at this crucial moment his knights rallied around his banner and he regained his mount.

Unfortunately for John and Otto, as the Imperial wings concentrated into the French center, the French left wing cavalry significantly outflanked their adversaries and crushed the Imperial right wing and capturing the Earl of Salisbury. The infantry on the right flank led by Renaud de Damartin displayed valor worth remembering as they made a last stand forming up a circle of spears to resist the French knights although they were eventually overcome by the armored riders.

In the center the Imperial infantry was pushed back and the two fronts of French cavalry fell upon the Holy Roman emperor himself and his Saxon retainers. It is said that Otto fought courageously for a time with a great war axe, hewing Frenchman amongst the thronging melee. In time the overwhelmed emperor's horse was slain and he received many blows. Before he could be captured by his mounted foes the Saxon chivalry came to his rescue and he remounted. Unlike the harsh and mighty Philip II, Otto IV took this opportunity to soil himself and run from the battle. When Otto fled the scene the larger better-equipped army that John was depending upon to achieve the ultimate victory fell into disarray and lost its will to fight. With its resolve broken the Germans, and their allies began to break and the battle was lost.

For all the financial rape that the Angevin Empire suffered as a result of Richard the Lionheart's reign, his little brother's was arguably worse; it is quite clear to many that it was solely the fault of John that the empire fell, so poorly did he govern. It was during John's reign that the empire collapsed and the evidence of its absence became apparent. It is under his watch, his responsibility that his father's work was shown to have been for naught. "Richard I devoted his energies to fighting to preserve his continental possessions for his successor, although he accepted a possibility of partition within the Plantagenet family. King John pursued his projects for recovery of the empire that he lost in 1204 so single mindedly that he pushed his English barons into rebellion." John needed to win the Battle of Bouvines and he didn't, a paramount failure that destroyed the empire no blame can be placed upon the pristine honor of Richard who is shown to be an exemplary ruler and king unto his people. Would that America now could have such a one in its seat of power.