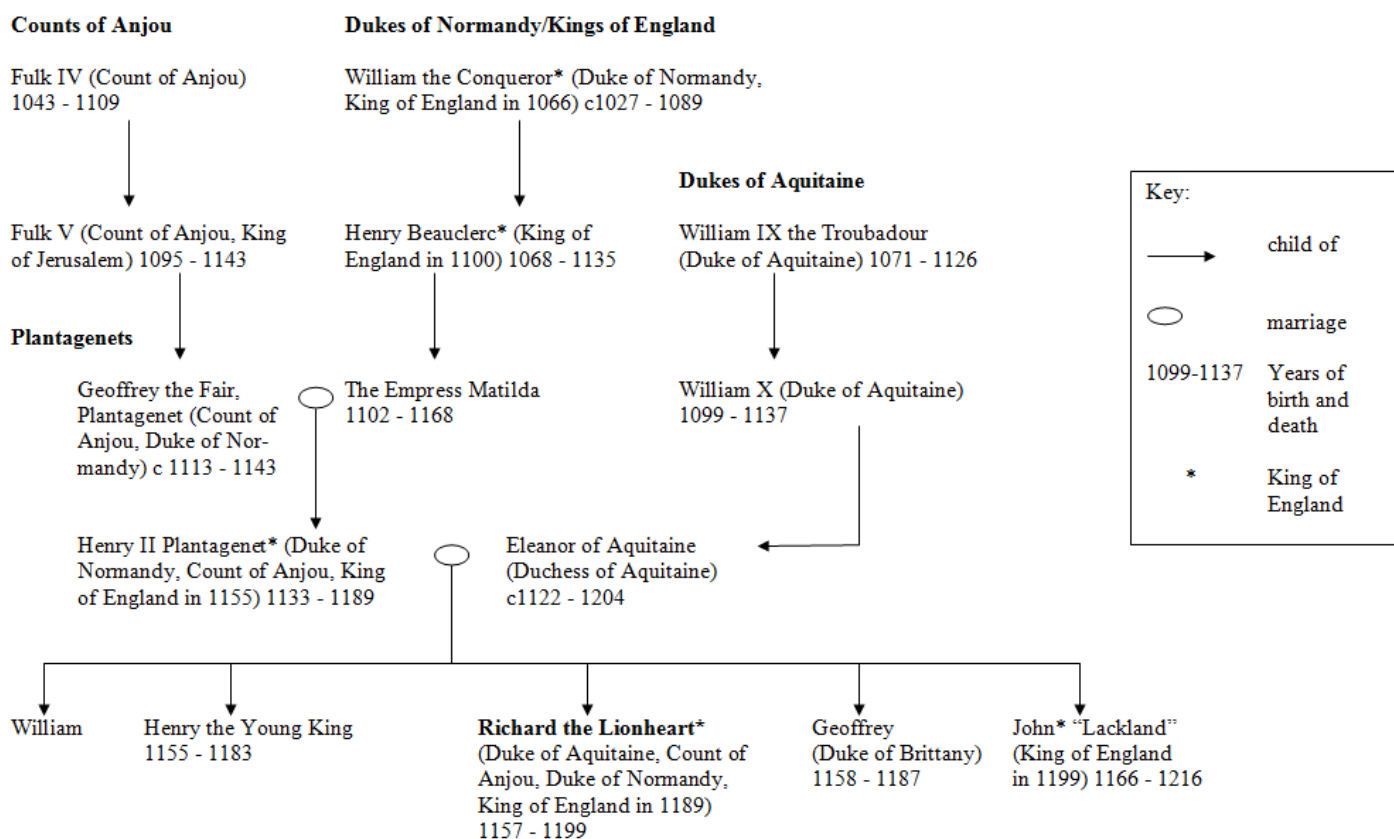


Richard of Aquitaine:

Richard the Lionheart is above all known as a king of England. However, well before coming to the throne, he was for twenty years Duke of Aquitaine. Having his roots in Anjou, Normandy and Aquitaine, his culture was that of central and southern France. It was in this kingdom that he spent the majority of his life, trying to ensure the permanence of the Plantagenet domain.

- The background of Richard, a French lord
- His ancestry:

The simplified family tree of Richard the Lionheart



The Youth of Richard Plantagenet:

Richard I of England was the third son of Henry II Plantagenet, king of England, and the famous Eleanor of Aquitaine. He was born at Oxford on 8 September 1157. At this period most of the "English" nobles in fact came from the continent. Most of the Plantagenet possessions were on the continent and they themselves were a family originating from Anjou. The national identities that we know today were very loosely applied; you were Angevin, Gascon, Breton or Welsh but not English or French, these notions being attached only to large kingdoms with unstable frontiers.

Richard was probably educated in the courts of Bordeaux and Poitiers, that is, in Aquitaine in

the domains of his mother Eleanor. Learning the arts of poetry, music and literature, his maternal language was “la langue d’oc” (Occitan). He was also instructed in “la langue d’oïl” (French), the language of his father, and in Latin. Like many young nobles in the 12th century he also learned skill at arms, particularly from the great barons faithful to his father. One of them was perhaps William the Marshal, known as the best knight of his time and tutor to Henry II’s eldest son, Henry the Young King. Richard showed real talent as a warrior.

From his youth, therefore, he was steeped in the new culture of chivalry that was spreading through the Plantagenet domains, particularly in Aquitaine. Richard probably very soon became attached to this region, in particular Poitou and Angoumois. Limousin was then experiencing a time of prosperity. The Church, providing some unity to the region, played an important role in what was a golden age for Limousin, thanks to the presence and increasing prosperity of powerful abbeys such as Saint Martial, Solignac and Grandmont. This area also saw the spread of the art of the troubadours, who glorified the new values of chivalry. The life of Richard was to a large extent conditioned by the legacy of his parents and his connections with colourful personalities.

- Richard’s parents

- Eleanor of Aquitaine, his mother:

Grand-daughter of William IX the Troubadour, duke of Aquitaine, Eleanor was born in about 1122. She grew up at the court of Aquitaine, one of the most refined of its time, which saw the birth of “fin’ Amor” or “courtly love”. Heavily influenced by this culture, she travelled all over the duchy with her family, between the courts of Poitiers and the ducal palace of Ombrière at Bordeaux.

Well known for her beauty, but also for being the heir of her father, Duke William X of Aquitaine, she was said to be “the most beautiful part of France”; for in fact, whoever married her would become the Duke of Aquitaine. Thus she was married to Louis, the son of the king of France and heir to the throne. Louis VII was crowned Duke of Aquitaine on 8 August 1137. Eleanor thus found herself at the court in Paris, much more austere than that of Aquitaine.

Several scandals and disagreements soon showed that the good relationship between Eleanor and her husband was at an end. This split became complete at the time of the failure of the Second Crusade (1148-1150). On 21 March 1152 a council proclaimed the dissolution of the marriage on the grounds of consanguinity, a matter brought up by Eleanor herself. Several weeks later she married Henry II Plantagenet, bringing him the Duchy of Aquitaine.

She gave Henry II eight children, including five sons, although her union with Louis VII had produced only daughters. From among them, Richard, her third son, born in 1157, was named as successor to Henry II, his two older brothers having died prematurely, William in 1156 and Henry “The Young King” in 1183. In the 1160s and 70s, Eleanor again lived at the courts of Bordeaux and Poitiers. From 1168 she assisted her young son Richard, designated Duke of Aquitaine by his father, in governing the duchy.

Infuriated by her husband’s infidelities and his mistrust of her influence, she incited Henry II’s sons to revolt against him in 1173. In 1174 the revolt failed; she was captured and held in captivity in various castles until the death of Henry II in 1189, despite the efforts of Richard the Lionheart to free her. Thus she supported her favourite son who was crowned King of England. When Richard left on crusade she went to fetch Berengaria of Navarre and took her to Sicily, then to Cyprus where Berengaria married Richard in 1190. Although more than 70 years old, Eleanor remained very active during her son’s reign; she in particular saw to it that the ransom was fully paid for the

release of Richard after his capture during his return from the Third Crusade. Having retired to the abbey of Fontevraud, she died in 1204, after the death of Richard the Lionheart and the crushing defeat of King John, her youngest son, at the hands of the king of France. It was one of her granddaughters, Blanche of Castile, who was later the mother of the celebrated King of France Saint Louis.

Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of the most outstanding personalities of the Middle Ages; her political role as a woman and her longevity are the principal reasons for this renown. During her lifetime she was known as a very important patron of the arts, in particular for the troubadours. She was thus one of the principal figures involved in spreading the idea of courtly love in France and England. Sometimes depicted as a woman of great intelligence and beauty, she is also accused of frivolity and manipulation, both in fact classic faults attributed to women in the Middle Ages and attributed to Eleanor by the Capetian chroniclers, enemies of the Plantagenet dynasty. Either way, Eleanor has left neither her supporters nor her enemies indifferent.

- Henry II, his father:

Henry II Plantagenet was born in 1133 at Le Mans in Maine. This county belonged to his father Geoffrey V Plantagenet, also Count of Anjou. The name "Plantagenet" came from the fact that the counts of Anjou fixed a sprig of broom (in Latin "planta genista") to their helmets since the time of Fulk Nerra at the beginning of the 11th century. Henry's mother was Matilda, daughter and heiress of Henry I Beauclerc, king of England; he was therefore also the great grandson of William the Conqueror.

In this way Henry received the Duchy of Normandy in 1150, as well as the counties of Anjou and Maine in 1151 on the death of Geoffrey. To these already considerable possessions he added the Grand Duchy of Aquitaine in 1152 when he married Eleanor. On 19 December 1155 Henry II was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey. Thus he found himself at the head of a feudal empire stretching from Scotland to the Pyrenees, the administration of which would prove to be a real challenge in a period of fragmentation of centralised power. Nevertheless, he showed himself to be up to the task. Beginning in 1155, he undertook some religious and legislative reforms and appointed Thomas Becket Chancellor.

Further to these governmental measures, which were aimed at ensuring the stability and integrity of his domains, he also pursued an expansionist policy aimed at protecting his frontiers and asserting his authority over the areas surrounding his kingdom.

Even before the start of Henry's reign, there arose the question of who it was who held lordship over the French fiefs held by the kings of England. In fact, Normandy, Maine and Touraine were all great fiefs that were part of the kingdom of France although they had fallen under the control of great lords like William the Conqueror and his sons and then the Plantagenets, all kings of England. In spite of their royal status, the kings of England owed homage to the Capetian kings of France for their possessions on the continent. Clearly, the Plantagenets, being more powerful and influential than the Capetians, took no account of this homage and the kings of France used this as a pretext for taking these Plantagenet domains back from them. So it was that in the 12th century there arose between the two royal families the conflict that would last until the end of the Middle Ages.

The end of the reign of Henry II was much less positive than the beginning. It was marked by numerous disputes and scandals. The king had difficulty facing up to them. From the 1160s his power was challenged in England, where he was criticised for his interference in the affairs of the Church. Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, was at the head of the opposition. Some knights, hoping to gain the king's approval, murdered the archbishop in his own cathedral in 1170.

The West in the 12th century was fundamentally Christian. The murder caused an enormous scandal throughout Christendom and considerably tarnished Henry II's image; he had to demonstrate his repentance by means of many acts of atonement to avoid being excommunicated.

In the years that followed, he tried to alter his will in order to provide a fief for John, his youngest son, for whom he had a great deal of affection. However, this revised sharing of the inheritance was to the detriment of his other sons, Henry the Young King and Richard, who, encouraged by their mother, rebelled in 1173. After putting down this rebellion, Henry was reconciled with his sons but kept his wife Eleanor in captivity. In the years that followed, Henry made a succession of errors that once again pushed his sons into revolt. Allied to the king of France, on 4 July 1189 they forced Henry to sign the Treaty of Azay le Rideau, in which he recognised Richard as his heir.

He died several days later in his castle at Chinon, attended only by a few knights, among whom was William the Marshal. Henry II was a colourful personality of prodigious strength but also capable of showing violent anger. When Richard succeeded him and came to the throne, he found himself at the head of a kingdom that was powerful and well run.

- Richard Duke of Aquitaine

Richard was not originally destined to be king: that is why Henry II named him Duke of Aquitaine in 1168; at the age of eleven, he thus owed homage for Aquitaine to the King of France, Louis VII.

With his mother's guidance, he learnt how to act as a powerful feudal lord. His mother encouraged him to undertake numerous journeys in order to get himself known and recognised by his vassals. At the court of Poitiers, under Eleanor's guidance, he immersed himself in the refined culture, based both on courtly love and Christian values, which held sway there. He himself wrote a number of songs. In this way, Richard very soon appeared as the model knight, brave and chivalrous. So he was imbued with the southern Occitan culture of the second half of the 12th century.

Society in the 12th century:

- Feudal Society:

In the 12th century society was dominated by a feudal aristocracy. Apart from the king, all the lords were regarded as holding their fief from a lord above them, their "overlord". They were said to be his "vassals". An overlord often had several vassals and it could happen that a vassal had several overlords. An overlord could sometimes be an ecclesiastic (a bishop or an abbot who held one or more fiefs). In Aquitaine, the lordships were often managed as co-lordships, several lords ruling one undivided fief.

- The Three Orders:

The society in which Richard lived was seen as a society separated into three orders. This system of organisation was found in a large part of Western Europe. In actual fact, these three orders were not so distinct and the reality was more complicated. In Aquitaine in particular, it acquired specific features that created its own distinct identity.

- The Clergy:

The first order was the clergy, "those who pray". Divided between the secular and regular clergy, it saw to it that society conformed to divine law as defined by the laws of God and the precepts of the Roman Catholic Church. The monks lived apart, devoting their lives to God. The

secular clergy saw to the spiritual health of the other members of society and spread the word of God. The role of the clergy was to ensure that society acted in accordance with the will of God.

By the 12th century the clergy had become powerful and influential. The Gregorian Reform at the end of the 11th century has removed the leading churchmen from the influence of the princes, who had formerly interfered in the affairs of the Church, notably in the appointment of bishops.

Some clerics, like Suger, Bernard of Clairvaux (founder of the Cistercian Order) and Thomas Beckett, had great influence at the courts of France and England. In the remainder of these kingdoms, ecclesiastical power made itself felt through the means of parishes, defined by the Church but also the principal geographical point of reference and source of identity for many. The abbeys and monasteries also held actual fiefdoms, behaving like the feudal lords. They received the tithes, an ecclesiastical tax corresponding to a tenth of what was produced by those eligible to pay.

In the 12th century, following the Crusades and the creation of the Latin States in the East, the military religious orders appeared, such as the Templars and the Hospitalers, also under the authority of the Church; they acquired enormous wealth and land, not only in the Holy Land but also in Europe.

The Christian religion left a deep mark on the civilisation of Medieval Europe. Daily life and rites of passage, like marriage and death, were regulated by religious observance and the sacraments delivered by the priests (bishops, parish priests and abbots). One lived in fear of divine punishment, interpreting catastrophes and misfortunes as punishments sent by God. The power of the Church and religion on minds is demonstrated by the building of a vast number of churches that are among the most beautiful creations of Romanesque art and the Gothic art that followed in the 13th century.

But the role of the Church did not stop there. The clergy, notably the monks, were virtually the only ones in the 10th and 11th centuries to undertake the work of preserving culture and knowledge. The monks produced copies of numerous religious texts and also classical works, particularly of some of the Greek philosophers. It is thanks to this extremely important role of the Church that we still know the great classical authors and writers of the High Middle Ages.

Ecclesiastics were also involved in politics and economics at the highest level. In Limousin, the bishop of Limoges was a powerful figure, controlling territories comparable to those of viscounts. Numerous and very influential abbeys played an important role in bringing new land under cultivation and establishing new rural communities, allowing the expansion of peasant society.

-The Nobility:

Unlike the clergy, the nobility, “those who fight”, were not a clearly defined order. To be a noble in the 12th century was to be someone who did not live by the work of his own hands but from the income from his possessions, someone who dressed in a particular fashion, someone who practised activities not open to all, such as hunting and tournaments. It was in this period that many nobles adopted a distinguishing coat of arms. The power of a noble depended upon his family and the land that he held.

In the 12th century, the nobility could be divided into two barely distinguishable classes who gradually intermingled. The first was that of the long established aristocrats who were often descendants of the Carolingian aristocracy. Its members were the great feudal lords, the counts and other dukes. The royal families were also part of this “high” nobility.

This group mingled more and more with the warrior aristocracy born out of the feudal

system. During the previous centuries, as power became decentralised and fell into the hands of the local aristocracy, the great lords surrounded themselves with a household of “milites”, that is, fighters, often on horseback, from whom evolved the knights. Gradually, these fighters, in their turn, in exchange for their service, claimed the privileges and lifestyle of the nobles. These knights and lesser barons were granted domains, i.e., land and other rights, and integrated with the old aristocracy.

During the 12th century, and even more so in the 13th, the nobility was closed to new members and took over the role of the knight which also gradually became a prerogative of the nobility. It is as a result of this that great monarchs like Richard the Lionheart were dubbed as knights: the fusion between the old land-holding aristocracy and the young warrior nobility was complete.

In society, the nobility had a political and a military role. Most of the nobles in the 12th century were feudal lords, holding land in the name of their overlord. They possessed rights on their domains, being able to raise taxes, dispense justice and recruit soldiers. They exploited part of their land directly, and entrusted some of it to tenants in exchange for rent.

The nobility was very hierarchical, from the great lords - dukes, counts and viscounts - who were able to mobilise enormous financial and military resources, and so possessed great influence, even on a national scale, down to the multitude of lesser barons, knights and lesser vassals who sometimes had no fiefs and who were on the limit between noble and non-noble. Their status and their lifestyle therefore depended on their personal wealth.

The other fundamental role of the nobility was warfare; it was the first purpose of “those who fight”. They had, therefore, as their duty to defend their subjects and the kingdom. They owed military service to the king or to their overlord who could call upon them in the event of war. With the assimilation of the knights into the nobility, a noble culture of war developed. Thus, to be noble meant to behave in a chivalrous manner, i.e., to demonstrate chivalrous values and bravery in combat and to establish one’s reputation by feats of arms. The tournament became, as a result, an activity highly regarded by the nobility.

At the end of the 12th century, even the great nobles who were descendants of the old aristocracy laid claim to a warrior status. The knight class closed itself against non-nobles more and more. Even the kings had themselves knighted. Therefore, there were great variations among the nobility, according to region and status.

- The rest of society, “those who work”:

Among the rest of society, the non-nobles, i.e., commoners, who represented about 90% of the medieval population, there was even greater diversity. The overwhelming majority of these were peasants who formed the bulk of the inhabitants of Europe throughout the Middle Ages. They constituted the working masses who sustained society by producing the basic necessities. Through the taxes they paid they were the basis of the wealth of the clergy and the nobility.

The peasant condition took many forms. The majority lived under the control of a lord, either noble or ecclesiastic. Most of the peasants were free. They had only to pay the duties and taxes that they owed to their lord in exchange for exploiting the land on which they lived. They also had to use the communal facilities (ovens, mills) built at the lord’s expense, in return for payment. They were otherwise free to go where they pleased, to leave the estate to which they were attached,

and to marry as they wished. Nevertheless, they remained subject to the lord's justice and tied labour.

Leaseholders, sharecroppers, tenants, labourers; status varied a great deal among the peasants. Most of them lived by subsistence agriculture, producing enough for their own survival and to pay their taxes. Many peasants practised crafts in addition to their agricultural activities in order to supplement their resources. They lived in villages, either isolated or grouped around a castle that served as a refuge in case of attack. Peasant houses then were very unsophisticated with simple cob walls, a floor of beaten earth and a thatched roof. Stone and chestnut shingles in some regions could indicate a higher status. The village community, consisting of several family units, was then the basis of the social organisation of the peasantry.

At the bottom of the ladder were the serfs. They were completely subject to their lord. They owned nothing for themselves and all they had belonged to their lord. At their death, their children inherited nothing. They could not leave their lord's domain, nor marry without their lord's permission.

Peasant life in the Middle Ages was harsh by modern standards. War, famine and epidemics were common. On the other hand, the numerous holidays (religious for the most part) and the increasing prosperity of the 12th century helped the situation and brought about an improvement in daily life for many peasants.

It was the inhabitants of the towns who freed themselves more and more. They began to kick against the idea of a society divided into three orders. In the course of the 11th and 12th centuries, the towns were becoming rich through commerce and the development of organisation which grouped craftsmen into trades. Becoming more and more independent, the towns were no longer willing to stay under the control of the feudal lords. The kings granted them charters which freed them from feudal power. The towns ruled themselves autonomously, with a town council at their head, while remaining subject to royal power.

- Aquitaine, Limousin and Occitan culture in the 12th century.

Aquitaine, which included Limousin, held a place apart within the wider kingdom of France. Distant from the seat of the king's power, the duchy had given birth to a specific culture, based on the Occitan language and the art of the troubadours, which doubtless influenced Richard. Although Aquitaine had not escaped from the break-up of centralised power and the division of its territory into a multitude of lordships, it, however, kept some particularities such as a legal code that was written rather than customary, and its dukes were powerful lords enjoying a lot of autonomy. Among these dukes of Aquitaine, the most famous was the grandfather of Eleanor, William IX, one of the earliest known troubadours of the Middle Ages.

The art of the troubadours was born in Aquitaine at the beginning of the 12th century. William IX was one of their precursors. It consisted of the re-telling and playing of courtly songs and poems, extolling love and the virtues of chivalry. It developed in the "courts of love", notably held by the mother of Richard the Lionheart, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

The Aquitaine of Richard was steeped in this Occitan culture which had developed in the South whereas the North of France at that time had been strongly marked by a culture that was Germanic and Norman. The South of the kingdom had experienced a deeper Roman influence during

Antiquity. Driven by the Dukes of Aquitaine and the Church, this culture had been able to develop throughout the century and give this part of the kingdom a specific identity.

Limousin in the 12th century:

Limousin had been a bishopric since the end of the Roman period. Its limits were approximately the same as those of the Gallo-Roman city state of the Lémovices. During the Carolingian period, having been itself under the authority of a count of Limoges, Limousin passed to the counts of Toulouse, then to the counts of Poitiers. It was then divided between different viscounties. At the time of Richard, because of the independence that Aquitaine had already known, many Limousin lords, including the viscounts of Limoges, did not accept the authority of the powerful Plantagenets. On many occasions, they revolted against Richard the Lionheart. In consequence, Limousin was the scene of recurrent conflict in this period.

Many knightly families held lordships of greater or lesser importance as vassals of the viscounts. Feudal society was complex in Limousin in the 12th century, as it was in the rest of the South of France at the time. Most of the lordships were held as co-lordships. Several lords and knights shared the rights of one *castrum* (castle) and the land that went with it. This resulted in the construction of several towers and knights' residences within the same enclosure. This was the case at Ségur-le-château, Lastours and Montbrun.

At this time the region experienced a real golden age, both spiritual and cultural. The episcopal town of Limoges was of a large size for the time, with its two districts, that of the castle, ruled by the viscount, and that of the cathedral, under the authority of the bishop. Saint Léonard de Noblat and Aubusson were both sizeable towns.

The Church, at the heart of the great bishopric of Limoges, played a very important role in this blossoming of Limousin. Although political power was divided between several viscounties, notably those of Limoges, Comborn and Ventadour, the Church guaranteed the unity of the territory of Limousin and its ancient boundaries. The abbeys of Solignac, Grandmont and St Martial became powerful and very rich, as a result of the increasing prosperity of their numerous possessions. They were an enormous influence in the development of the arts and crafts of the region, which is still famous today for its enamels and work in gold. It was certainly the Church in Limousin, far from the influence of the king of France and answering only to Rome, that allowed Limousin to experience a golden age in the 12th century.

Limousin enjoyed a real flowering of culture in this period. This manifested itself in the variety of types of art which were born in the region and later spread throughout Europe. Limousin was the birthplace of some of the most celebrated troubadours, like Bernard de Ventadour in Corrèze, or Bertran de Born, closely connected with Lastours.

It was in this cultural and social milieu that the young Richard was brought up; it was there he gained his first experience and there that his life as king saw so much action.