

Why did the nobility desert John & support Philip?

Treason by the Norman barons (or at least their indifference to John's struggle against the French) was a major factor in the loss of Normandy.

Sidney Painter claimed the basic cause was "the unenthusiastic if not actually treasonable behaviour of the Anglo-Norman baronage."

- Norman nobles were willing to come to terms with Philip
- Leading English barons claimed they could hold their Norman lands from Philip & their English lands from John without any conflict of interest! (even William Marshal claimed this)
- Norman bishops felt no loyalty to John either (even Walter of Coutances, archbishop of Rouen – even though he belonged to a family of Angevin royal servants who owed their good fortune to Henry II & his sons).
- Lords from the Loire valley & Poitou followed suit

Kate Norgate explained John's "restless movements, his unaccountable wanderings, his habit of journeying through bye-ways, his constant changes of plan" by his fear of treachery & his inability to trust anyone.

Why did this happen?

John's Fault

- ❖ Many blamed John directly for this. By the autumn of 1203 relations were so bad that **William Marshal** said to him, "Sire, you have not enough friends. You have not been careful to avoid irritating people. If you had, it would have been better for us all." Other chroniclers believed he had been infatuated with his child-bride and was unable to get out of her bed to defend his collapsing empire – others saw him as lazy & indecisive.
- ❖ John was trapped in a **vicious circle**:
 - John's jealousy & suspicion undermined his nobles' loyalty
 - The nobles deserted him
 - Their desertions fed John's suspicions!

By autumn of 1203 it was so bad that he could even believe his own barons were plotting to take him prisoner and present him to King Philip.

- ❖ John had to rely more and more on **foreign mercenaries** for a fighting force – he used them not only as military commanders but also appointed them to posts in the Norman administration. But their brutal behaviour & the harsh financial demands created by their expense just added to the barons' disillusionment with John. Some Norman contemporaries claimed for many years that John lost Normandy because of his use of mercenaries.
- ❖ The Norman clerics had resented John's financial exploitation & interference in episcopal elections.

Other Factors

- **Philip** cleverly exploited John's predicament:
 - He gave an image of benevolence towards the Church – promising peace, free elections & security for church property. Norman bishops looked not to Canterbury but to Paris (attraction of schools & spiritual centres)
 - He was willing to grant away castles as rewards to loyal vassals (though reserving the right to occupy them in an emergency)
 - He played on the idea of a 'greater France' – stating that Angevin possessions were only temporary & really belonged to Paris
 - He was creating “the myth of French national unity under the royal crown” **Ralph Turner**

- It is possible to argue that John was paying for the consequences of Angevin rule in France & Normandy. **Gerald of Wales** saw the “violent domination & insular tyranny” of the Angevins as a major factor:
 - Henry II's centralising zeal – his justices interfered in local business
 - Exhausting fundraising Of Richard I
 - Reduction of baronial fortresses by confiscating or razing them – often with no regard to right or custom [contrast this was Philip's policy towards castles]“The Capetians benefited from a reputation for good lordship that contrasted with Angevin tyranny, and especially John's behaviour”.
Ralph Turner

- The **Barnwell chronicler** (one of the more balanced contemporaries treating John's reign) believed the loss of Normandy to have been inevitable. Some Historians have argued that Normandy was not John's to lose – its absorption into by the French monarchy was simply part of an inevitable separation from England.
 - ✓ The 'Anglo-Norman' unity was fast disappearing (encouraged by Philip's policies & propaganda)
 - ✓ Native Normans saw most of the benefits going to their distant English cousins
 - ✓ No more than 24 English lords held significant lands in Normandy; even fewer major Normans held large estates in England

If Normandy & England were drifting apart, plausible to see the whole empire on the point of collapse. The Angevins' central administration was too short-lived – “the Angevin monarchs supplied no sense of unity, no shared culture to bind their English, Norman, Angevin & Gascon subjects together.” **Ralph Turner** This was in complete contrast to the Capetians & their propagandists.