

## **How far was King John to blame for the outbreak of war with Philip Augustus in 1202?**

- ✚ **Death of Richard I** – he died without a son & 2 possible claimants, bound to cause trouble. However, those historians who claim that John's defeat was inevitable forget the events of 1199. Richard's death caused Philip to invade Normandy and seize Evreux & the barons of Anjou, Maine & Touraine led by William des Roches to support Arthur (also supported by Philip). John moved quickly to secure Normandy & England and his mother secured the loyalty of the lords of Poitou (especially the families of Lusignan and Thouars). In June, John made a truce with Philip & confirmed the alliances his brother had made (esp. with the counts of Flanders & Boulogne and Otto IV). 15 French counts swore to help John, if necessary against the king of France. John swept into Maine in force, driving Philip back. William des Roches changed sides & brought Constance & Arthur with him. It looked as though the succession dispute had been settled entirely in John's favour – Philip's attempts to take advantage of Richard's sudden death had failed.
- ✚ **Arthur's flight** – Arthur, Constance & Aimeri fled from John and made their way to Philip's court. Roger of Howden claims that Arthur feared imprisonment by John – as Roger died in 1201 he did not know of Arthur's later murder but it does show that John's record of treachery was already well known (had betrayed his father, brother & Philip) – not surprisingly, Arthur did not trust his uncle! A number of great nobles now decided to go on crusade – many had supported John so far but were very worried by the implications of Arthur's flight. The leaving of these nobles on crusade must have encouraged Philip – but he still needed an opportunity
- ✚ **The Treaty of Le Goulet** – an important agreement as it later gave Philip his 'excuse' to start the war. Was it a disaster for John? Traditional view (created at the time) was that John was 'softsword', neither Henry nor Richard would have submitted as John did. Some modern historians (like Gillingham) agree that John was now much weaker, especially as he lost valuable allies. These allies had been vital in Richard's defence of the Angevin Empire, without them would Philip Augustus see an opportunity to strike back? Others claim that John did what he could in a troubled situation – got most of his brother's lands & stopped Arthur who was a serious threat. Could argue that John's acknowledgement of Philip's position may not necessarily have led to war – but he was to blunder into it!

✚ **Marriage to Isabella of Angouleme** – again the traditional view (often repeated by the hostile monks) was that John was guided by his passions and made a disastrous decision to marry the young Isabella (part of the character assassination that John was immoral). More generous historians have pointed out that the marriage brought great benefits for John & the Angevin Empire:

- Angouleme connected Poitou & Gascony – strengthened the Angevin Empire in the south where it was most weak – Richard had died besieging a rebel castle there
- Considerable wealth & strategic importance
- Prevented Hugh of Lusignan from becoming too powerful in this area and becoming a potential threat

So the marriage to Isabella was not simply a result of John's lust but an astute move.

✚ **The Lusignans** – seems to be general agreement that John mishandled Hugh by not offering him compensation for his loss of Isabella. Suitably compensated, he might have accepted the situation. But John refused to do so – again this has been used as an example of John's truculent behaviour. It must be remembered that Hugh had taken the disputed territory of La Marche and, according to some chroniclers, he had seized Eleanor of Aquitaine to force John's agreement. In Spring 1201, John ordered the confiscation of La Marche. This was not sensible since John's former allies were disappearing quickly and Philip was looking for any opportunity to start a war. But John refused to listen to the Lusignans pleas for justice. They appealed to Philip who summoned John to his court (under the Le Goulet agreement) – John refused to go. Philip summoned him several times before taking action against John – Philip wanted to make sure that his actions seemed legal (this became a regular method of expanding French power). Philip took the opportunity to announce the confiscation of all John's fiefs and gave Poitou and Anjou to Arthur – this was seen as a revolutionary move and illustrates the growing power of the French monarchy. Henry II had faced a similar situation in 1152-3 when Philip tried to confiscate all his possessions but Henry had stood up to him. John let Philip make all the moves – he failed to act and so gave Philip his chance.

✚ **Philip Augustus** – other historians (like J Bradbury), studying the French king, have come up with a different emphasis. They argue that Philip had been growing in confidence and military expertise (especially from his encounters with Henry II & Richard) & a series of administrative and financial reforms, which had left his kingdom in a strong position. Bradbury suggests that while Richard was alive there was not much chance of victory –but with John as king, Philip was anxious to put his

power and experience to the test. Philip cleverly used propaganda to persuade the clergy that he was in the right. The desertion of John's allies was the final stage.

- ✚ **Mirebeau** – you could argue that although the war had started, it was not till the capture of Mirebeau that it became full scale. Had John treated Arthur and the captives more leniently, it is possible that the war would not have gone on (Philip had to abandon his invasion of Normandy). But John's mishandling of the situation led to the desertion of William des Roches, Aimery de Thouars & several barons from Anjou & Poitou. Also caused trouble with English barons such as William de Braose. Some historians see this as the turning point – when Philip took his opportunity to invade Normandy. Although the war broke out in 1202, it really began in 1203 with Philip's siege of Chateau-Gaillard.
- ✚ You might conclude that the war started because Philip was anxious to have one and John's actions gave him the opportunity!