

King Louis VII Of France

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Born: 1120 - Champagne, Dordogne, Aquitaine, France
Married: Adela of Champagne
Died: 18 Sep 1180 - , Paris, Ile-de-France, France
Parents: King Louis VI & Adelaide of Maurienne

Louis VII, called **the Younger** or **the Young**, French: *Louis le Jeune* (1120 – 18 September 1180), was King of France, the son and successor of Louis VI (hence his nickname). He ruled from 1137 until his death. He was a member of the House of Capet. His reign was dominated by feudal struggles (in particular with the Angevin family), and saw the beginning of the long feud between France and England. It also saw the beginning of construction on Notre-Dame de Paris and the disastrous Second Crusade.

Early life

Louis VII was born in 1120, the second son of Louis VI of France and Adelaide of Maurienne. As a younger son, Louis VII had been raised to follow the ecclesiastical path. He unexpectedly became the heir to the throne of France after the accidental death of his older brother, Philip, in 1131. A well-learned and exceptionally devout man, Louis VII was better suited for life as a priest than as a monarch.

In his youth, he spent much time in Saint-Denis, where he built a friendship with the Abbot Suger which was to serve him well in his early years as king.

Early reign

In the same year he was crowned King of France, Louis VII was married on 25 July 1137 to Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine, heiress of William X of Aquitaine. The pairing of the monkish Louis VII and the high-spirited Eleanor was doomed to failure; she once reportedly declared that she had thought to marry a King, only to find she'd married a monk. They had only two daughters, Marie and Alix.

In the first part of Louis VII's reign he was vigorous and jealous of his prerogatives, but after his Crusade his piety limited his ability to become an effective statesman. His accession was marked by no disturbances, save the uprisings of the burgesses of Orléans and of Poitiers, who wished to organize communes. But soon he came into violent conflict with Pope Innocent II. The archbishopric of Bourges became vacant, and the King supported as candidate the chancellor Cadurc, against the Pope's nominee Pierre de la Chatre, swearing upon relics that so long as he lived Pierre should never enter Bourges. This brought the interdict upon the King's lands.

Louis VII then became involved in a war with Theobald II of Champagne, by permitting Raoul I of Vermandois and seneschal of France, to repudiate his wife, Theobald II's niece, and to marry Petronilla of Aquitaine, sister of the queen of France. Champagne also sided with the Pope in the dispute over Bourges. The war lasted two years (1142–44) and ended with the occupation of Champagne by the royal army. Louis VII was personally involved in the assault and burning of the town of Vitry. More than a thousand people who had sought refuge in the church died in the flames. Overcome with guilt, and humiliated by ecclesiastical contempt, Louis admitted defeat, removing his armies from Champagne and returning them to Theobald, accepting Pierre de la Chatre, and shunning Ralph and Petronilla. Desiring to atone for his sins, he then declared on Christmas Day 1145 at Bourges his intention of going on a crusade. Bernard of Clairvaux assured its popularity by his preaching at Vezelay (Easter 1146).

Meanwhile in 1144, Geoffrey the Handsome, Count of Anjou, completed his conquest of Normandy. In exchange for being recognised as Duke of Normandy by Louis, Geoffrey surrendered half of the Vexin — a region considered vital to Norman security — to Louis. Considered a clever move by Louis at the time, it would later prove yet another step towards Angevin power.

In June 1147 Louis VII and his queen, Eleanor, set out from Metz, Lorraine, on the overland route to Syria. Soon they arrived to the Kingdom of Hungary where they were welcomed by the king Géza II of Hungary, who was already waiting with the German emperor. Due to his good relationships with Louis VII, Géza II asked the French king to be his son Stephen's baptism godfather. After receiving provisions from the Hungarian king, the armies continued the march to the East. Just beyond Laodicea the French army was ambushed by Turks. The French were bombarded by arrows and heavy stones, the Turks swarmed down from the mountains and the massacre began. The historian Odo of Deuil reported:

During the fighting the King [Louis] lost his small and famous royal guard, but he remained in good heart and nimbly and courageously scaled the side of the mountain by gripping the tree roots ... The enemy climbed after him, hoping to capture him, and the enemy in the distance continued to fire arrows at him. But God willed that his cuirass should protect him from the arrows, and to prevent himself from being captured he defended the crag with his bloody sword, cutting off many heads and hands.

Louis VII and his army finally reached the Holy Land in 1148. His queen Eleanor supported her uncle, Raymond of Antioch, and prevailed upon Louis to help Antioch against Aleppo. But Louis VII's interest lay in Jerusalem, and so he slipped out of Antioch in secret. He united with Conrad III of Germany and King Baldwin III of Jerusalem to lay siege to Damascus; this ended in disaster and the project was abandoned. Louis VII decided to leave the Holy Land, despite the protests of Eleanor, who still wanted to help her doomed uncle Raymond of Antioch. Louis VII and the French army returned home in 1149.

The expedition came to a great cost to the royal treasury and military. It also precipitated a conflict with Eleanor, leading to the annulment of their marriage at the council of Beaugency (March 1152). The pretext of kinship was the basis for annulment; in fact, it owed more to the state of hostility between the two, and the decreasing odds that their marriage would produce a male heir to the throne of France. Eleanor subsequently married Henry, Count of Anjou, the future Henry II of England, in the following May, giving him the duchy of Aquitaine, three daughters, and five sons. Louis VII led an ineffective war against Henry for having married without the authorization of his suzerain; the result was a humiliation for the enemies of Henry and Eleanor, who saw their troops routed, their lands ravaged, and their property stolen. Louis reacted by coming down with a fever, and returned to the Ile-de-France.

In 1154 Louis VII married Constance of Castile, daughter of Alfonso VII of Castile. She, too, failed to give him a son and heir, bearing only two daughters, Marguerite of France, and Alys.

Louis having produced no sons by 1157, Henry II of England began to believe that he might never do so, and that consequently the succession of France would be left in question. Determined to secure a claim for his family, he sent the Chancellor, Thomas Becket, to press for a marriage between Princess Marguerite and Henry's heir, also called Henry (later Henry the Young King). Louis, surprisingly, agreed to this proposal, and by the Treaty of Gisors (1158) betrothed the young pair, giving as a dowry the Norman Vexin and Gisors.

Constance died in childbirth on 4 October 1160, and five weeks later Louis VII married Adela of Champagne. Henry II, to counterbalance the advantage this would give the King of France, had the marriage of their children (Henry "the Young King" and Marguerite) celebrated at once. Louis understood the danger of the growing Angevin power; however, through indecision and lack of fiscal and military resources compared to Henry II's, he failed to oppose Angevin hegemony effectively. One of his few successes, in 1159, was his trip to Toulouse to aid Raymond V, Count of Toulouse who had been attacked by Henry II: after he entered into the city with a small escort, claiming to be visiting the Countess his sister, Henry declared that he could not attack the city whilst his liege lord was inside, and went home.

Diplomacy

At the same time the emperor Frederick I (1152–90) in the east was making good the imperial claims on Arles. When the schism broke out, Louis VII took the part of the Pope Alexander III, the enemy of Frederick I, and after two comical failures of Frederick I to meet Louis VII at Saint Jean de Losne (on 29 August and 22 September 1162), Louis VII definitely gave himself up to the cause of Alexander III, who lived at Sens from 1163 to 1165. Alexander III gave the King, in return for his loyal support, the golden rose.

More importantly for French — and English — history would be his support for Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, whom he tried to reconcile with Henry II. Louis sided with Becket as much to damage Henry as out of piety — yet even he grew irritated with the stubbornness of the archbishop, asking when Becket refused Henry's conciliations, "Do you wish to be more than a Saint?"

He also supported Henry's rebellious sons, and encouraged Plantagenet disunity by making Henry's sons, rather than Henry himself, the feudal overlords of the Angevin territories in France; but the rivalry amongst Henry's sons and Louis's own indecisiveness broke up the coalition (1173–74) between them. Finally, in 1177, the Pope intervened to bring the two Kings to terms at Vitry.

In 1165, Louis' third wife bore him a son and heir, Philip II Augustus. Louis had him crowned at Reims in 1179, in the Capetian tradition (Philip would in fact be the last King so crowned). Already stricken with paralysis, King Louis VII himself was not able to be present at the ceremony. He died on September 18, 1180 at the Abbey at Saint-Pont, Allier and is interred in Saint Denis Basilica.

Louis married three times. By Eleanor of Aquitaine, he had:

- Marie, married Henry I of Champagne
- Alix, married Theobald V of Blois

By Constance of Castile:

- Marguerite of France (1158–97), married (1) Henry the Young King; (2) King Béla III of Hungary (1172–96)
- Alys (4 October 1160 – c. 1220), engaged to Richard I of England; she married William III Talvas, Count of Ponthieu

By Adele of Champagne:

- Philip II Augustus (August 22, 1165 – 1223)
 - Agnes of France (1171–1240), who was betrothed to Alexius II Comnenus (1180–83) but married (1) Andronicus I Comnenus (1183–85); (2) Theodore Branas (1204)
- Legacy

The reign of Louis VII was, from the point of view of royal territory and military power a difficult and unfortunate one. Yet the royal authority made progress in the parts of France distant from the royal domains: more direct and more frequent connection was made with distant vassals, a result largely due to the alliance of the clergy with the crown. Louis VII thus reaped the reward for services rendered the church during the least successful portion of his reign. His greater accomplishments lie in the development of agriculture, population, commerce, the building of stone fortresses, as well as an intellectual renaissance. Considering the significant disparity of political leverage and financial resources between Louis VII and his Angevin rival, not to mention Henry II's superior military skills, Louis VII should be credited with preserving the Capetian dynasty.

Information from online research at: Ancestry.com