

King Louis IX of France



Born: 25 Apr 1215 Poissy, FRA

Married: Margarite de Provence

Died: 25 Aug 1270 FRA

Parents: King Louis VIII & Blanche de Castile

Louis IX (25 April 1214 – 25 August 1270), commonly Saint Louis, was King of France from 1226 to his death. He was also Count of Artois (as Louis II) from 1226 to 1237. Born at Poissy, near Paris, he was a member of the House of Capet and the son of King Louis VIII and Blanche of Castile. He is the only canonised king of France and consequently there are many places named after him, most notably St. Louis, Missouri in the United States. He established the Parlement of Paris.

Early life

Louis was born in 1214 at Poissy, near Paris, the son of King Louis VIII and Blanche of Castile. A member of the House of Capet, Louis was twelve years old when his father died on November 8, 1226. He was crowned king the same year in the cathedral at Reims. Because of Louis's youth, his mother ruled France as regent during his minority.

His younger brother Charles I of Sicily (1227–85) was created count of Anjou, thus founding the second Angevin dynasty. The horrific fate of that dynasty in Sicily as a result of the Sicilian Vespers evidently did not tarnish Louis's credentials for sainthood.

No date is given for the beginning of Louis's personal rule. His contemporaries viewed his reign as co-rule between the king and his mother, though historians generally view the year 1234 as the year in which Louis began ruling personally, with his mother assuming a more advisory role. She continued as an important counselor to the king until her death in 1252.

On May 27, 1234 Louis married Marguerite of Provence (1221 – December 21, 1295), whose sister Eleanor was the wife of Henry III of England.

Crusading

At the age of 15, Louis brought an end to the Albigensian Crusade in 1229 after signing an agreement with Count Raymond VII of Toulouse that cleared his father of wrong-doing. Raymond VI of Toulouse had been suspected of murdering a preacher on a mission to convert the Cathars.

Louis's piety and kindness towards the poor was much celebrated. He went on two crusades, in his mid-30s in 1248 (Seventh Crusade) and then again in his mid-50s in 1270 (Eighth Crusade). Both were complete disasters; after initial success in his first attempt, Louis's army of 15,000 men was met by overwhelming resistance from the Egyptian army and people.

He had begun with the rapid capture of the port of Damietta in June 1249,[1] an attack which did cause some disruption in the Muslim Ayyubid empire, especially as the current sultan was on his deathbed. But the march from Damietta towards

Cairo through the Nile River Delta went slowly. During this time, the Ayyubid sultan died, and a sudden power shift took place, as the sultan's slave wife Shajar al-Durr set events in motion which were to make her Queen, and eventually place the Egyptians' slave army of the Mamluks in power. On April 6, 1250 Louis lost his army at the Battle of Fariskur[2] and was captured by the Egyptians. His release was eventually negotiated, in return for a ransom of 400,000 livres tournois (at the time France's annual revenue was only about 250,000 livres tournois, so it was necessary to obtain a loan from the Templars), and the surrender of the city of Damietta.[3]

Following his release from Egyptian captivity, Louis spent four years in the crusader Kingdoms of Acre, Caesarea, and Jaffe. Louis used his wealth to assist the crusaders in rebuilding their defenses and conducting diplomacy with the Islamic powers of Syria and Egypt. Upon his departure from the Middle East, Louis left a significant garrison in the city of Acre for its defense against Islamic attacks. The historic presence of this French garrison in the Middle East was later used as a justification for the French Mandate following the end of the First World War.

Relations with the Mongols

Louis exchanged multiple letters and emissaries with Mongol rulers of the period. During his first crusade in 1248, Louis was approached by envoys from Eljigidei, the Mongol ruler of Armenia and Persia.[4] Eljigidei suggested that King Louis should land in Egypt, while Eljigidei attacked Baghdad, in order to prevent the Saracens of Egypt and those of Syria from joining forces. Louis sent André de Longjumeau, a Dominican priest, as an emissary to the Great Khan Güyük Khan in Mongolia. However, Güyük died before the emissary arrived at his court, and nothing concrete occurred. Louis dispatched another envoy to the Mongol court, the Franciscan William of Rubruck, who went to visit the Great Khan Möngke Khan in Mongolia.

Patron of arts and arbiter of Europe

Louis' patronage of the arts drove much innovation in Gothic art and architecture, and the style of his court radiated throughout Europe by both the purchase of art objects from Parisian masters for export and by the marriage of the king's daughters and female relatives to foreign husbands and their subsequent introduction of Parisian models elsewhere. Louis' personal chapel, the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, was copied more than once by his descendants elsewhere. Louis most likely ordered the production of the Morgan Bible, a masterpiece of medieval painting.

Saint Louis ruled during the so-called "golden century of Saint Louis", when the kingdom of France was at its height in Europe, both politically and economically. The king of France was regarded as a *primus inter pares* among the kings and rulers of the continent. He commanded the largest army, and ruled the largest and most wealthy kingdom of Europe, a kingdom which was the European center of arts and intellectual thought (La Sorbonne) at the time. The prestige and respect felt in Europe for King Louis IX was due more to the attraction that his benevolent personality created rather than to military domination. For his contemporaries, he was the quintessential example of the Christian prince, and embodied the whole of Christendom in his person. His reputation of saintliness and fairness was already well established while he was alive, and on many occasions he was chosen as an arbiter in the quarrels opposing the rulers of Europe.

Religious zeal

The Holy Crown of Jesus Christ was bought by Louis IX from Baldwin II of Constantinople. It is preserved today in a 19th century reliquary, in Notre Dame de Paris.

King Louis IX washing the feet of the poor. The perception of Louis IX as the

exemplary Christian prince was reinforced by his religious zeal. Louis was a devout Catholic, and he built the Sainte-Chapelle ("Holy Chapel"), located within the royal palace complex (now the Paris Hall of Justice), on the Île de la Cité in the centre of Paris. The Sainte Chapelle, a perfect example of the Rayonnant style of Gothic architecture, was erected as a shrine for the Crown of Thorns and a fragment of the True Cross, precious relics of the Passion of Jesus. Louis purchased these in 1239–41 from Emperor Baldwin II of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, for the exorbitant sum of 135,000 livres (the chapel, on the other hand, cost only 60,000 livres to build). This purchase should be understood in the context of the extreme religious fervor that existed in Europe in the 13th century. The purchase contributed greatly to reinforcing the central position of the king of France in western Christendom, as well as to increasing the renown of Paris, then the largest city of western Europe. During a time when cities and rulers vied for relics, trying to increase their reputation and fame, Louis IX had succeeded in securing the most prized of all relics in his capital. The purchase was thus not only an act of devotion, but also a political gesture: the French monarchy was trying to establish the kingdom of France as the "new Jerusalem."

Louis IX took very seriously his mission as "lieutenant of God on Earth," with which he had been invested when he was crowned in Rheims. Thus, in order to fulfill his duty, he conducted two crusades, and even though they were unsuccessful, they contributed to his prestige. Contemporaries would not have understood if the king of France did not lead a crusade to the Holy Land. In order to finance his first crusade Louis ordered the expulsion of all Jews engaged in usury. This action enabled Louis to confiscate the property of expelled Jews for use in his crusade. However, he did not eliminate the debts incurred by Christians. One-third of the debt was forgiven, but the other two-thirds was to be remitted to the royal treasury. Louis also ordered, at the urging of Pope Gregory IX, the burning of some 12,000 copies of the Talmud in Paris in 1243. Such legislation against the Talmud, not uncommon in the history of Christendom, was due to medieval courts' concerns that its production and circulation might weaken the faith of Christian individuals and threaten the Christian basis of society, the protection of which was the duty of any Christian monarch.[5]

Tunique and cilice of Louis IX. Treasure of Notre-Dame de Paris. In addition to Louis's legislation against Jews and usury, he expanded the scope of the Inquisition in France. The area most affected by this expansion was southern France where the Cathar heresy had been strongest. The rate of these confiscations reached its highest levels in the years prior to his first crusade, and slowed upon his return to France in 1254.

In all these deeds, Louis IX tried to fulfill the duty of France, which was seen as "the eldest daughter of the Church" (*la fille aînée de l'Église*), a tradition of protector of the Church going back to the Franks and Charlemagne, who had been crowned by the Pope in Rome in 800. Indeed, the official Latin title of the kings of France was *Rex Francorum*, i.e. "king of the Franks," and the kings of France were also known by the title "most Christian king" (*Rex Christianissimus*). The relationship between France and the papacy was at its peak in the 12th and 13th centuries, and most of the crusades were actually called by the popes from French soil. Eventually, in 1309, Pope Clement V even left Rome and relocated to the French city of Avignon, beginning the era known as the Avignon Papacy (or, more disparagingly, the "Babylonian captivity").

Information from online research at: Ancestry.com