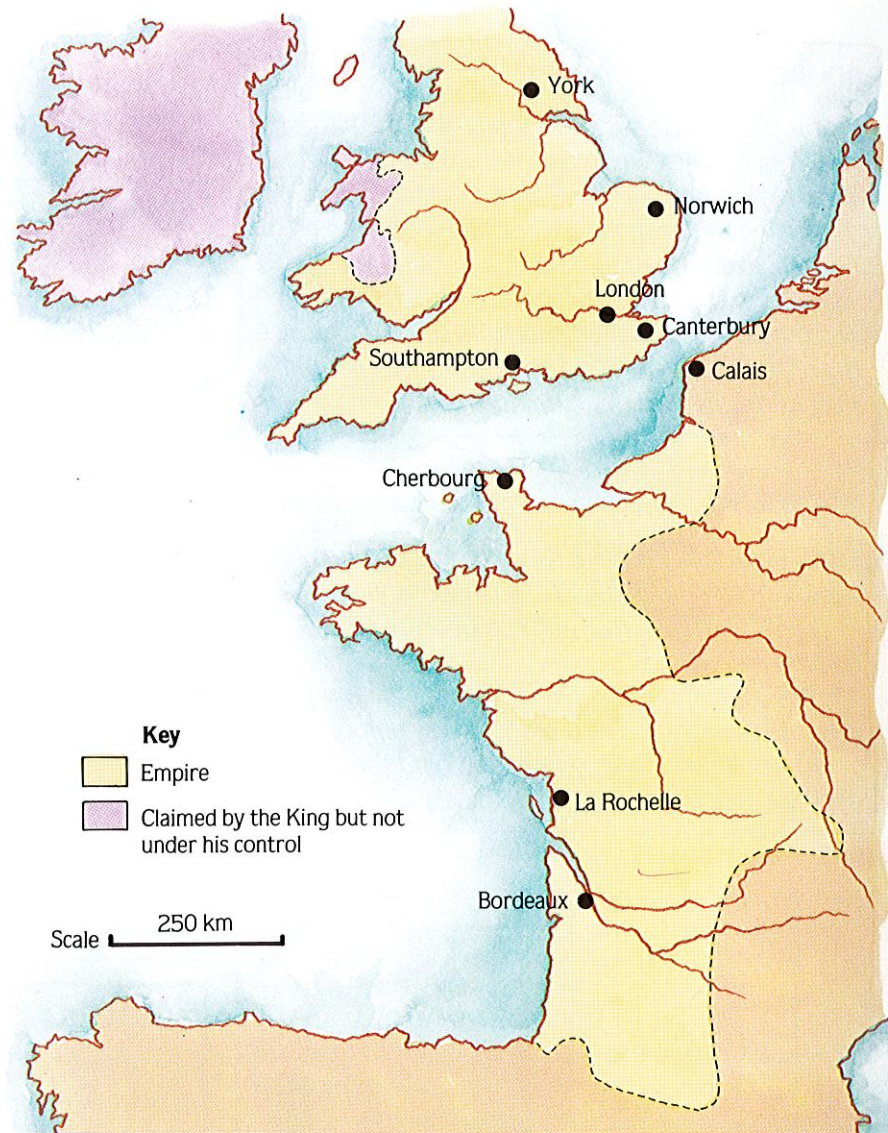


The problems facing medieval kings

The Empire

BY THE time of King Henry II, English kings ruled over an enormous EMPIRE stretching from the border with Scotland to the border with Spain. The vast distances involved made it difficult for English kings to rule this Empire, especially because travel was difficult and slow. Another problem was the threat from neighbouring kings, who were determined to conquer parts of the Empire. For more than 100 years English kings had to fight expensive wars to defend the Empire, until they were left with just the area around Calais.

1. Look at Source 1. How far is it from York to Bordeaux?
2. It was important for the King to visit all parts of the Empire. How long would it take Henry II to travel from York to Bordeaux? (He would be travelling on horseback and covering about 50 km a day at the most.)



SOURCE 1 Map of the Angevin Empire in the late twelfth century

The succession to the throne

Today there are rules about who will be the next monarch when a King or Queen dies. Their eldest son or daughter takes over. This has not always been the case. Sometimes the King chose his successor, sometimes he had no children, and sometimes the BARONS wanted to choose the next King. Disputes over who should rule England led to monarchs being murdered and to several civil wars during the Middle Ages.

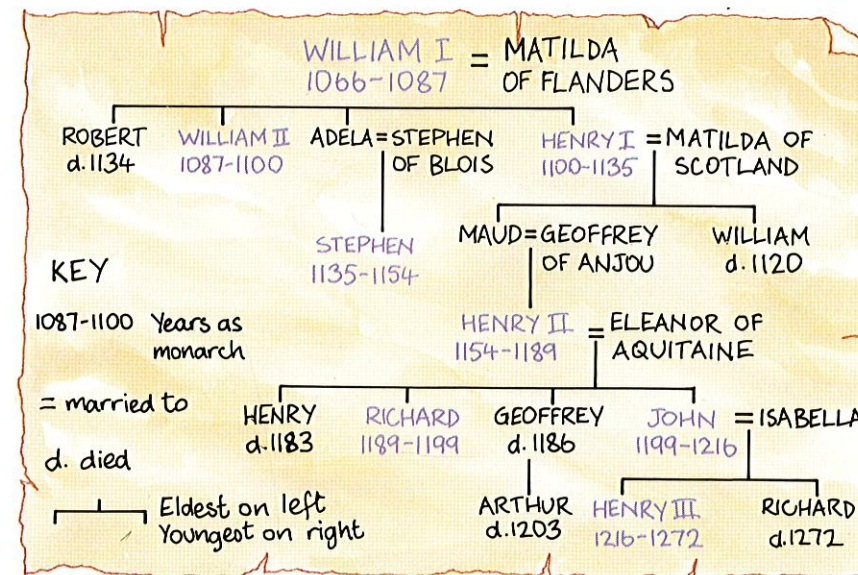
SOURCE 2 The King dreaming



1. Look at Source 2. The King is dreaming of problems he faces. Which of his problems are shown in each section of the picture?

Activity

You are a medieval King of England writing to your son. Explain what problems you face in governing the country.



SOURCE 3 Family tree of English kings from 1066 to 1272

1. Look at Source 3. How many children did William I have?
2. If modern ideas about SUCCESSION to the throne had been used, who would have become King after William?
3. In 1135 both Stephen and Henry II claimed the throne. What were their claims?
4. Which King first inherited the throne according to modern ideas?

The barons

English kings could not rule the country properly without the co-operation of the BARONS. These landowners controlled large parts of England, and were powerful enough to demand special privileges from the King. King John was one of several kings who had to deal with revolts by the barons.

The Church

English kings were not complete masters in their lands for another reason – the Roman Catholic Church. This was under the control of the Pope in Rome. You have already seen how important

religion was to everybody at this time. This gave the Church a lot of influence over people. Disputes broke out between the King and the Church over who was more important. The dispute between Henry II and Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, led to Thomas being murdered.

The peasants

As you have seen, the vast majority of people in England were peasants working on the land. Their lives were hard, and famine and starvation were never far away. This meant there was always the danger of uprisings. In 1381 the peasants rose up in a rebellion which almost overthrew King Richard II.

Scotland and Wales

English kings could never really feel secure while the Welsh borders and the Scottish King threatened the northern borders. Northern England was constantly invaded by Scotland. Various attempts to conquer Wales and Scotland were only partly successful and caused English kings many problems.