

**Volume 18**

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**King Henry II - I**

**Lead: King Henry II of England began his reign with few prospects for a successful rule. He succeeded beyond all expectations.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: When Henry was crowned in Westminster Abbey in CE 1154, the kingdom he inherited was a mess. For two decades a civil war between his mother, the Empress Matilda, and a usurper, King Stephen, had rent the unity of the Anglo-Norman lands. The Welsh had made inroads in the West and the Scots in the North, yet Henry**

**was to become one of England's great monarchs laying the groundwork for the Plantagenet dynasty that would last for 250 years. Through a combination of inheritance, a fortuitous marriage to the extraordinary Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine, and his own determined exertions, he brought under his control the largest assemblage of lands any English King had ruled to that point, from Dublin to Flanders from Scotland to the Pyrenees.**

**In addition to his military exploits, Henry's legislative and legal initiatives took more of both criminal and civil administration of the law under Royal control, wresting them from the hands of the Barons. Some scholars have**

**asserted that his legal accomplishments have made him a candidate as one of the preeminent founders of English Common Law. Henry's administrative skills and ability to recruit talented subordinates was nearly unequaled among his contemporaries. Yet despite his accomplishments, his birthright began to crumble toward the end of his reign due to two momentous crises that tore at his legacy. Next time: a low-born clerk.**

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## **Resources**

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