

Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War That Tore England Apart



Stephen and Matilda's Civil War: Cousins of Anarchy

by Matthew Lewis

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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In 1135, King Henry I of England died without a legitimate heir. His nephew, Stephen of Blois, seized the throne, but his claim was challenged by Matilda, Henry's daughter. The resulting civil war, known as the Anarchy, would last for nearly two decades and tear England apart.

The Causes of the Civil War

The Anarchy was caused by a number of factors, including the lack of a clear heir to the throne, the weakness of the English monarchy, and the ambitions of powerful barons.

Henry I had no legitimate children, so he named his nephew, Stephen of Blois, as his heir. However, many barons were unhappy with this choice, as

they preferred Matilda, Henry's daughter. Matilda was married to Geoffrey of Anjou, a powerful French count, and they had a son, Henry, who was seen as a strong candidate for the throne.

The English monarchy was also weak at this time. Henry I had spent much of his reign fighting wars in Normandy, and he had not been able to establish a strong central government. This made it difficult for him to control the barons, who were becoming increasingly powerful.

Finally, the ambitions of powerful barons also played a role in the outbreak of the Anarchy. Many barons saw the civil war as an opportunity to increase their own power and wealth. They raised armies and fought for both sides in the conflict.

The Course of the Civil War

The Anarchy began in 1135, when Stephen of Blois seized the throne. Matilda immediately challenged his claim, and the two sides fought a series of battles for control of England.

The war was fought primarily in the south of England, and it caused widespread devastation. Towns and villages were burned, and the countryside was ravaged by marauding armies. The war also led to a breakdown of law and order, and there was a sharp increase in crime and violence.

In 1141, Matilda's forces captured Stephen and imprisoned him. However, Matilda was unable to hold on to power, and Stephen was eventually released. The war continued until 1153, when Stephen and Matilda agreed

to a peace treaty. Under the terms of the treaty, Stephen would remain king until his death, and Matilda's son, Henry, would succeed him.

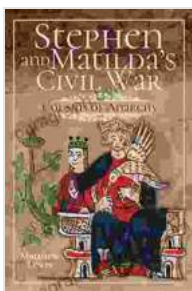
The Legacy of the Anarchy

The Anarchy had a profound impact on England. The war caused widespread devastation and loss of life, and it weakened the English monarchy. The war also led to the rise of powerful barons, who would continue to play a major role in English politics for centuries to come.

The Anarchy is often seen as a turning point in English history. It marked the end of the Norman period and the beginning of the Angevin period. The war also helped to shape the development of the English constitution and the English legal system.

Further Reading

- [The Anarchy on Britannica.com](#)
- [The Battle of Lincoln on English-Heritage.org.uk](#)
- [Magna Carta on NationalArchives.gov.uk](#)



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