

William IX, Duke of Aquitaine

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William IX (Occitan: *Guilhèm de Peitieus*; *Guilhem de Poitou* French: *Guillaume de Poitiers*,) (22 October 1071 – 10 February 1127), called **the Troubador**, was the Duke of Aquitaine and Gascony and Count of Poitou (as **William VII**) between 1086 and his death. He was also one of the leaders of the Crusade of 1101. Though his political and military achievements have a certain historical importance, he is best known as the earliest troubadour^[1] — a vernacular lyric poet in the Occitan language — whose work survived.

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Ducal career

William was the son of William VIII of Aquitaine by his third wife, Hildegarde of Burgundy. His birth was a cause of great celebration at the Aquitanian court, but the Church at first considered him illegitimate because of his father's earlier divorces and his parents' consanguinity. This obliged his father to make a pilgrimage to Rome soon after his birth to seek Papal approval of his third marriage and the young William's legitimacy.

Early career, 1088–1102

William inherited the duchy at the age of fifteen upon the death of his father. It has been generally believed that he was first married in 1088, at age sixteen, to Ermengarde, daughter of Fulk IV of Anjou. Biographers have described Ermengarde as beautiful and well-educated, though suffering from severe mood swings. However, Ruth Harvey's 1993 critical investigation shows the assumption of William's marriage to Ermengarde to be based largely on an error in a nineteenth-century secondary source and it is highly likely that Philippa of Toulouse was William's only wife.^[2]

William IX

Duke of Aquitaine



Miniature of William from a 13th-century chansonnier now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France

Spouse(s) Ermengarde of Anjou
Philippa of Toulouse

Issue

William X, Duke of Aquitaine
Raymond, Prince of Antioch
Agnes, Queen of Aragon

Noble family Poitiers

Father William VIII of Aquitaine

Mother Hildegarde of Burgundy

Born 22 October 1071

Died 10 February 1127 (aged 55)

Further research^[3] has found the claim that William was married to "Hermingerda", daughter of Fulk IV of Anjou is based on the very unreliable chronicle of William of Tyre, written between 1169 and 1187, more than 70 years after the events in question would have taken place. Tyre erroneously identifies Ermengarde's mother as Bertrade of Montfort, the sister of Amalricus de Montfort when her mother was in fact Audearde or Hildegarde of Beaugency. Tyre's chronicle lacks any contemporary corroboration, no primary text ever mentions a marriage between William and Ermengarde. It is therefore not only improbable that William married Ermengarde, it is likely that Ermengarde - at least as a wife of William - never existed.

In 1094, William married Philippa, the daughter and heiress of William IV of Toulouse.^[4] By Philippa, William had two sons and five daughters, including his eventual successor, William X. His second son, Raymond,^[5] eventually became the Prince of Antioch in the Holy Land, and his daughter Agnes married firstly Aimery V of Thouars and then Ramiro II of Aragon,^[6] reestablishing dynastic ties with that ruling house.

William invited Pope Urban II to spend the Christmas of 1095 at his court. The pope urged him to "take the cross" (i.e. the First Crusade) and leave for the Holy Land, but William was more interested in exploiting the absence on Crusade of Raymond IV of Toulouse, his wife's uncle, to press her claim to Toulouse. He and Philippa did capture Toulouse in 1098, an act for which they were threatened with excommunication. Partly out of a desire to regain favor with the religious authorities and partly out of a wish to see the world, William joined the Crusade of 1101, an expedition inspired by the success of the First Crusade in 1099. To finance it, he had to mortgage Toulouse back to Bertrand, the son of Raymond IV.

The Duchess was an admirer of Robert of Arbrissel, and persuaded William to grant him land in northern Poitou to establish a religious community dedicated to the Virgin Mary. This became Fontevraud Abbey, which would enjoy the patronage of their granddaughter Eleanor and would remain important until its dissolution during the French Revolution.

William arrived in the Holy Land in 1101 and stayed there until the following year. His record as a military leader is not very impressive. He fought mostly skirmishes in Anatolia and was frequently defeated. His recklessness led to his being ambushed on several occasions, with great losses to his own forces. In September 1101, his entire army was destroyed by the Seljuk Turks at Heraclea; William himself barely escaped, and, according to Orderic Vitalis, he reached Antioch with only six surviving companions.

Conflict with Church and wife, 1102–1118

William, like his father and many magnates of the time, had a rocky relationship with the Church. He was excommunicated twice, the first time in 1114 for an alleged infringement of the Church's tax privileges. His response to this was to demand absolution from Peter, Bishop of Poitiers. As the bishop was at the point of pronouncing the anathema, the duke threatened him with a sword, swearing to kill him if he did not pronounce absolution. Bishop Peter, surprised, pretended to comply, but when the duke, satisfied, released him, the bishop completed reading the anathema, before calmly presenting his neck and inviting the duke to strike. According to contemporaries, William hesitated a moment before sheathing his sword and replying, "I don't love you enough to send you to paradise."

William was excommunicated a second time for "abducting" the Viscountess Dangerose (*Dangerosa*), the wife of his vassal Aimery I de Rochefoucauld, Viscount of Châtellerauld. The lady, however, appears to have been a willing party in the matter. He installed her in the Maubergeonne tower of his castle in Poitiers (leading to her nickname *La Maubergeonne*), and, as related by William of Malmesbury, even painted a picture of her on his shield.

Upon returning to Poitiers from Toulouse, Philippa was enraged to discover a rival woman living in her palace. She appealed to her friends at court and to the Church; however, no noble could assist her since William was their feudal overlord, and whilst the Papal legate Giraud (who was bald) complained to William and told him to return Dangerose to her husband, William's only response was, "Curls will grow on your pate before I part with the Viscountess." Humiliated, Philippa chose in 1116 to retire to the Abbey of Fontevrault. While in residence she may have had direct conversations or correspondence with Countess Adela of Blois, who was in constant contact with Fontevrault from Marcigny abbey. Philippa did not survive there long, however: the abbey records state that she died on 28 November 1118.

Later career, 1118–1127

Relations between the Duke and his elder son William also became strained—although it is unlikely that he ever embarked upon a seven-year revolt in order to avenge his mother's mistreatment, as Ralph of Diceto claimed, only to be captured by his father. Other records flatly contradict such a thing. Ralph claimed that the revolt began in 1113; but at that time, the young William was only thirteen and his father's liaison with Dangerose had not yet begun. Father and son improved their relationship after the marriage of the younger William to Aenor of Châtellerault, Dangerose's daughter by her husband, in 1121.

William was readmitted to the Church around 1120, after making concessions to it. However, he was after 1118 faced with the return of his first wife, Ermengarde, who had, upon the death of Philippa, stormed down from Fontevrault to the Poitevin court, demanding to be reinstated as the Duchess of Aquitaine—presumably in an attempt to avenge the mistreated Philippa. In October 1119, she suddenly appeared at the Council of Reims being held by Pope Calixtus II and demanded that the Pope excommunicate William (again), oust Dangerose from the ducal palace, and restore herself to her rightful place. The Pope "declined to accommodate her"; however, she continued to trouble William for several years afterwards, thereby encouraging him to join the Reconquista efforts underway in Spain.

Between 1120 and 1123 William joined forces with the Kingdoms of Castile and León. Aquitanian troops fought side by side with Castilians in an effort to take Cordoba. During his sojourn in Spain, William was given a rock crystal vase by a Muslim ally that he later bequeathed to his granddaughter Eleanor. The vase probably originated in Sassanid Persia in the seventh century.

In 1122, William lost control of Toulouse, Philippa's dower land, to Alfonso Jordan, the son and heir of Raymond IV, who had taken Toulouse after the death of William IV. He did not trouble to reclaim it. He died on 10 February 1127, aged 56, after suffering a short illness. His nickname, "the Troubadour", was only applied in the nineteenth century. In contemporary documents the only nickname he occasionally bears is "the Younger" (Latin *junior*), to distinguish him from his father.^[7]

Poetic career

William's greatest legacy to history was not as a warrior but as a troubadour — a lyric poet employing the Romance vernacular language called Provençal or Occitan.

He was the earliest troubadour whose work survives. Eleven of his songs survive (Merwin, 2002). The song traditionally numbered as the eighth (*Farai chansoneta nueva*) is of dubious attribution, since its style and language are significantly different (Pasero 1973, Bond 1982). Song 5 (*Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh*) has two significantly different versions in different manuscripts. The songs are attributed to him under his title as Count of Poitou (*lo coms de Peitieus*). The topics vary, treating sex, love, women, his own sexual and literary prowess, and feudal politics.

An anonymous 13th-century *vida* of William remembers him thus:

The Count of Poitiers was one of the most courtly men in the world and one of the greatest deceivers of women. He was a fine knight at arms, liberal in his womanizing, and a fine composer and singer of songs. He traveled much through the world, seducing women.

It is possible, however, that at least in part it is not based on facts, but on literal interpretation of his songs, written in first person; in Song 5, for example, he describes how he deceived two women.

In a striking departure from the typical attitude toward women in the period, William seems to have held at least one woman in particularly high esteem, composing several poems in homage to this woman, who he refers to as *midons* (master):^[8]

Every joy must abase itself,
and every might obey
in the presence of Midons, for the sweetness of her welcome,
for her beautiful and gentle look;
and a man who wins to the joy of her love
will live a hundred years.
The joy of her can make the sick man well again,
her wrath can make a well man die,

His frankness, wit and vivacity caused scandal and won admiration at the same time. He is among the first Romance vernacular poets of the Middle Ages, one of the founders of a tradition that would culminate in Dante, Petrarch, and François Villon. Ezra Pound mentions him in *Canto VIII*:

And Poictiers, you know, Guillaume Poictiers,
had brought the song up out of Spain
with the singers and viels...

In *Spirit of Romance* Pound also calls William IX "the most 'modern' of the troubadours":

For any of the later Provençals, i.e., the high-brows, we have to... 'put ourselves into the Twelfth Century' etc. Guillaume, writing a century earlier, is just as much of our age as of his own.

— Ezra Pound, *cited in Bond 1982, p. lxxvi*

William was a man who loved scandal and no doubt enjoyed shocking his audiences. In fact, William granted large donations to the church, perhaps to regain the pope's favour. He also added to the palace of the counts of Poitou (which had stood since the Merovingian era), later added to by his granddaughter Eleanor of Aquitaine and surviving in Poitiers as the Palace of Justice to this day.

One of William's poems, possibly written at the time of his first excommunication, since it implies his son was still a minor, is partly a musing on mortality: *Pos de chantar m'es pres talenz* (*Since I have the desire to sing, I'll write a verse for which I'll grieve*). It concludes:



William from a 13th-century chansonnier.

I have given up all I loved so much:
chivalry and pride;
and since it pleases God, I accept it all,
that He may keep me by Him.

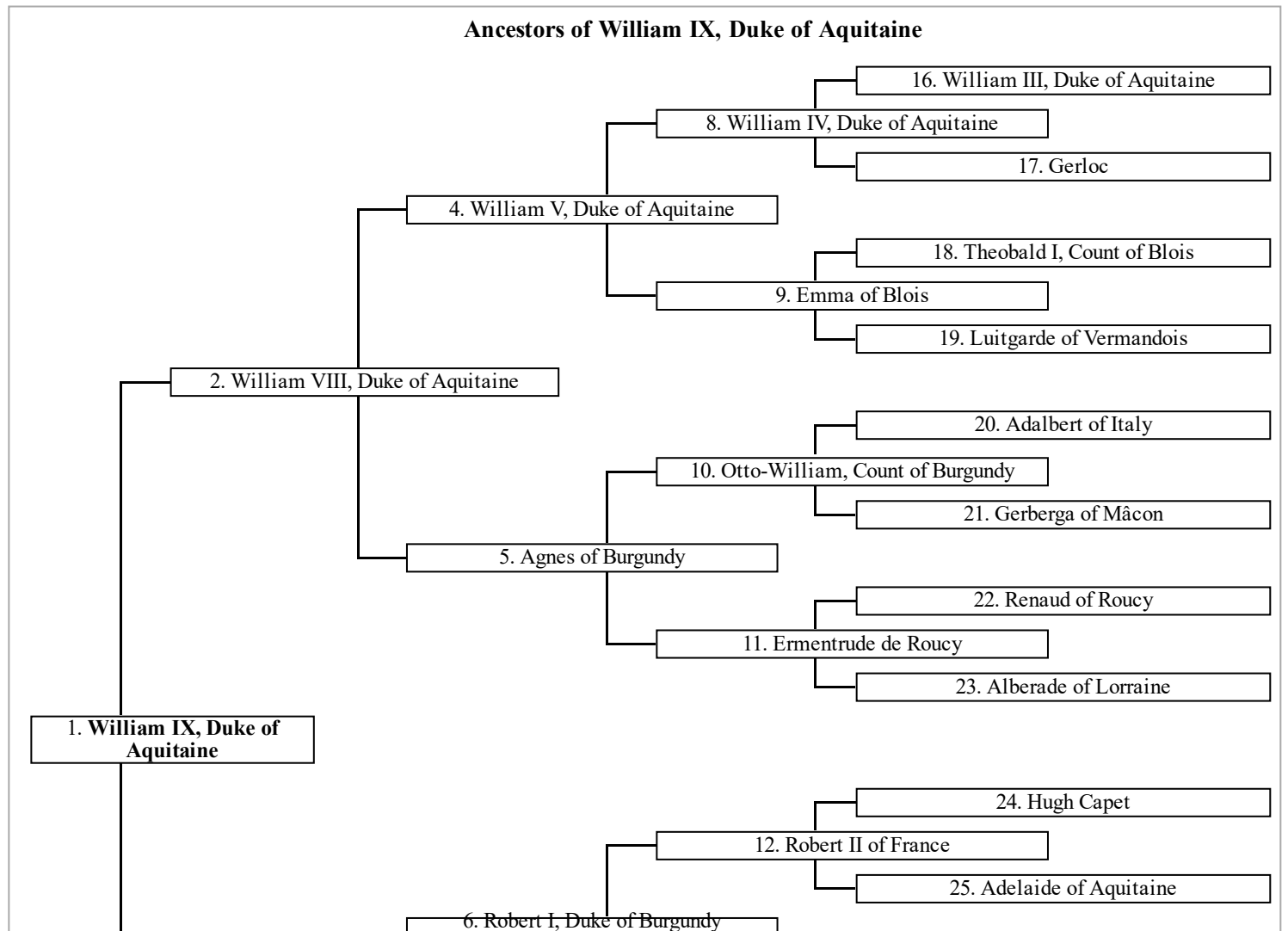
I enjoin my friends, upon my death,
all to come and do me great honor,
since I have held joy and delight
far and near, and in my abode.

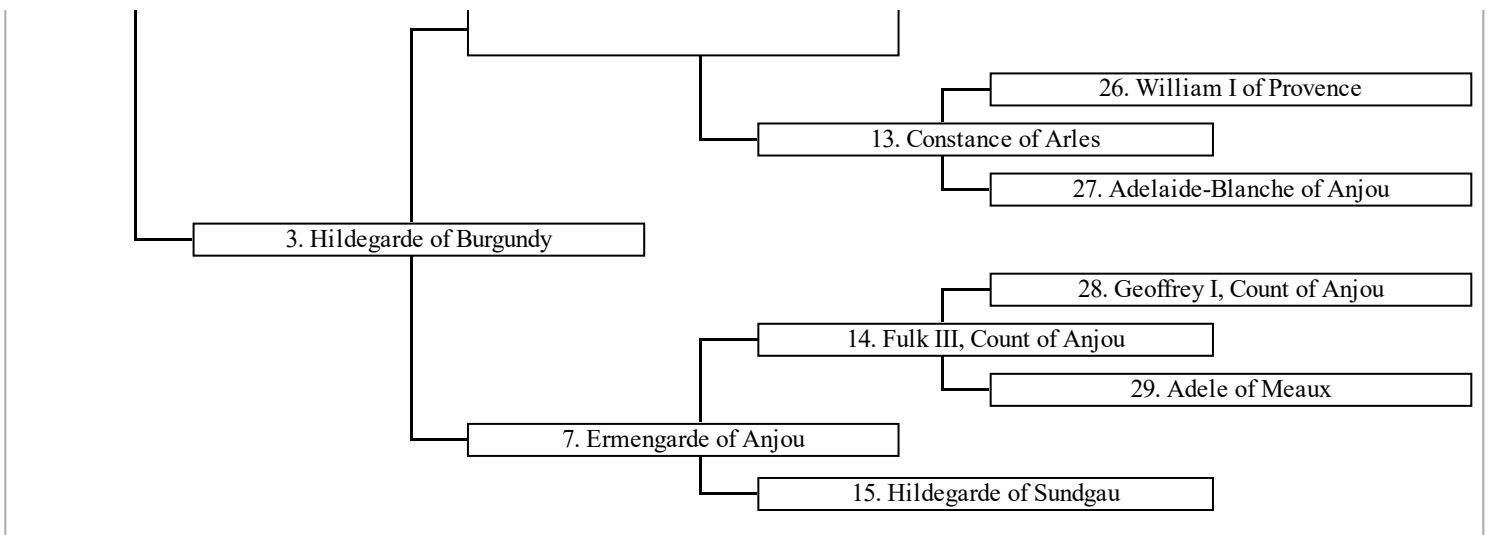
Thus I give up joy and delight,
and squirrel and grey and sable furs.

Orderic Vitalis refers to William composing songs (c. 1102) upon his return from the Crusade of 1101. These might be the first "Crusade songs":

Then the Poitevin duke many times related, with rhythmic verses and witty measures, the miseries of his captivity, before kings, magnates, and Christian assemblies.^[9]

Ancestors





See also

- Dukes of Aquitaine family tree

References

Notes

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2. Harvey, Ruth. "The wives of the 'first troubadour', Duke William IX of Aquitaine". *Journal of Medieval History*, Volume 19, Issue 4, 1993, pp. 307-325
3. Wolterbeek, Marc. "Inventing History, Inventing Her Story: The Case of William of Aquitaine's Marital Affairs." Medieval Association of the Pacific, University of California, Berkeley, March 1995, and International Medieval Congress, Leeds, England, July 1995.
4. John Gillingham, *Richard I*, (Yale University Press, 1999), 29.
5. *Constance, Princess of Antioch (1130-1164)*, Alan V. Murray, *Ancestry, Marriages and Family | journal=Anglo-Norman Studies XXXVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2015*, ed. Elisabeth Van Houts, (The Boydell Press, 2016), 86.
6. Sara McDougall, *Royal Bastards: The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800-1230*, (Oxford University Press, 2016), 199.
7. John E. Morby, "The Sobriquets of Medieval European Princes", *Canadian Journal of History*, **13**:1 (1978), p. 12.
8. Bogin, Meg (1980). *The Women Troubadours*. W. W. Norton and Company. pp. 37–38.
9. Translation based on Marjorie Chibnall, in Bond, p. 240.

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External links

- Complete works (http://www.trobar.org/troubadours/coms_de_peiteu/)
- Works, translated by James H. Donalson (<http://brindin.com/vcb3cove.htm>)
- Smythe, Barbara. Trobador Poets: Selections from the Poems of Eight Trobadors (http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/Medieval_Provencal.html)
- Lyric allusions to the crusades and the Holy Land (<https://web.archive.org/web/20040730210418/http://www.2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/french/about/staff/lp/lyrical.lus>)

William IX, Duke of Aquitaine House of Poitiers Born: 22 October 1071 Died: 11 February 1127		
Preceded by William VIII	Duke of Aquitaine Count of Poitiers 1088–1127	Succeeded by William X

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