Introduction

The prospects of victory looked good to duke René when he chose to attack count Antoine de Vaudemont and his Burgundian supporters near Bulgnéville in Bar, on 2 July 1431. Charles VII of France had sent him a force led by the renowned ‘knight without reproach’, Arnauld-Guilhem, lord of Barbazan. René also had detachments formed by his Lorraine vassals and German allies altogether numbering about 7500, but his ordnance was scanty and his soldiers included few skilled bowmen. Vaudemont, who was claiming the duchy of Lorraine, only had an army of about 4000 but it included bowmen from the Flemish towns of his ally the duke of Burgundy and 400 more led by two experienced English captains. He also enjoyed the services of the great Burgundian commander, Antoine de Toulongeon, and formidable artillery: men of all ranks were ordered to fight on foot on pain of death. Against the advice of Barbazan and other older knights René decided to attack the enemy in their good defensive position, protected by a stream and fortified by ditches and palisades. Vaudemont was apparently assisted by an omen: a stag ran between the armies, stopped, beating its hooves three times on the earth, and then dashed amongst René’s forces causing confusion. René’s men were subjected to devastating fire from the Burgundian cannons and arrows and Barbazan was soon killed. The battle

lasted for only a quarter of an hour but the pursuit and massacre of René’s soldiers took a further two hours. He was wounded in the face, taken prisoner and handed over to the Burgundians. The calamity of Bulgnéville – political, financial and psychological – was to blight his promising career, putting at risk the security of the territories and titles he accumulated between 1419 and 1435: duke of Bar, Lorraine and Anjou, king of Sicily and Jerusalem and count of Provence.

The second house of Anjou had ruled a number of French territories since 1360 when John II of France had invested his second son, Louis count of Anjou, with his *apanage.*³ Initially it included Anjou, promoted to the status of a duchy, and the county of Maine; other territories came as her dowry when the duke married Marie of Blois. Throughout the 120 years of its existence the extent of the Angevin *apanage* expanded and contracted through marriage, conquest, purchase, sales, confiscation and diplomacy. The lands ruled by the Angevins in France remained under the ultimate jurisdiction of the French kings. The dukes did homage for them, could levy taxes only with royal consent and appeals in litigation could be made to the *Parlement* in Paris.⁴ The situation changed, however, during the rule of duke Louis I in 1380 when the childless queen Joanna of Sicily adopted him as her son and heir. The investment was obligingly made by the schismatic pope Clement VII from his base in Avignon. Two years later the queen was strangled by a rival claimant to the throne, Charles of Durazzo, leaving Louis I of Anjou with a good title to be king of Naples and Jerusalem as well as to the counties of Provence and Forcalquier.⁵ These lands did not form part of the Angevin *apanage*, neither did Bar and Lorraine, but the distinction will not be made in what follows: the problems and benefits that they brought cannot realistically be separated from the original holdings.

³The Angevin dukes of the Valois dynasty, Louis I, Louis II, Louis III and René, 1360 to 1480, are referred to here as ‘the second house of Anjou’. Practice amongst historians varies, some describe the line of Geoffrey Plantagenet, father of Henry II of England as ‘the first house’; here, Charles of Anjou, brother of Louis IX of France of the Capet dynasty and his descendants are regarded as ‘the first house’. There is also the question of their indirect descendants, the house of Durazzo. More will be said (but not too much more) about these dynastic intricacies in Chapter 2.


⁵See Chapter 2 for the claim to Jerusalem.