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Constructing Kingship: The Capetian Monarchs of France and the Early Crusades

James Naus

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Constructing Kingship: The Capetian Monarchs of France and the Early Crusades. By James Naus. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-7190-9097-4. 180 pp. £70.

The study of the medieval crusading movement has grown considerably over the last two decades, and with this growth there has been an increasing diversification in the scope of historical inquiry. New directions have been explored, from Nicholas Paul's *To Follow in Their Footsteps* (2012), which investigates familial traditions of crusading, to Stefan Vander Elst's *The Knight, the Cross, and the Song* (2017), which examines chivalric literature as crusade propaganda. The Crusades were once largely the domain of religious and military historians, but they are now the source and inspiration for myriad fields of research. One such area is the importance of the crusading movement to the memory, identity, and prestige of families and communities across medieval Europe. James Naus, in this highly insightful and astute work, has contributed substantially to this area of scholarship by examining in depth a topic that has long been acknowledged by historians, but one which has rarely been explored in detail: just how important was crusading to the art of medieval kingship? Naus's apposite work examines the role of the Crusades in the formation of the political authority and royal identity of the Capetian monarchs of France between the late-eleventh and mid-thirteenth centuries. So effective were the Capetians in their exploitation of the Crusades, crusading imagery, crusading rhetoric, and crusading memory to empower their royal authority, that within a few generations they were able to establish their dynasty as the crusader-kings par excellence, despite the reality of their relatively poor crusading performance and minimal success. Such associations between the French crown and crusading became so engrained within the wider historical consciousness that by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notions of crusading and the French monarchy went hand in hand, and the French crown's reputation became inseparable from the glories of these medieval campaigns.

The work is divided into two sections. The first deals with the general political situation and the problems of royal governance that the Capetians encountered in the century leading up to the First Crusade (1095-1099), and the effects that the success of the First Crusade and the return of its victorious participants to France had upon the dynamics of power within the Capetian realm. Naus introduces us to the Capetian dynasty and provides an overview of the numerous challenges it faced in establishing its legitimacy as the heirs of the Carolingians (15-27). While the Capetians enjoyed a high social status as kings, they were frequently less politically powerful than many of their vassals. Establishing reciprocal connections with religious houses and other religious institutions was a key first step in emphasising their sacerdotal

kingship, which they could use to leverage greater royal authority. With the success of the First Crusade in 1099, a new economy of crusading status was created in which the Capetians possessed little currency, unlike many of their leading vassals. Philip I of France had not participated in the First Crusade, and his brother Hugh, Count of Vermandois, had abandoned it in its hour of need, much to the shame of the dynasty. Crusading became the new yardstick against which prestige was measured. Despite their setbacks, in the early twelfth century the Capetians were able to forge links with heroes of the First Crusade, such as Bohemond I of Antioch, to compete with their vassals for status and authority. Through such links, crusading prestige was transferred to the Capetians as these heroes became part of their dynasty, while connections to religious houses were put to good use in order to disseminate a suitably heroic narrative through chronicles of the First Crusade, which glossed over any royal failings.

The second section explores the response of the Capetians to the crusading movement across the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Chroniclers, writers, artists, and architects were employed by the French crown to characterise the Capetians as crusaders and represent the actions the Capetians undertook within France in a similar fashion, imbuing the dynasty with crusading prestige. The kings of France were thus able to acquire the virtues of crusaders without ever actually having to go on crusade. Consequently, a royal crusading image for the dynasty was being built up and banked against future success. Even when further crusades in which the dynasty participated were abject failures, such as Louis VII's command of the Second Crusade (1146-1148), were they able to respond to criticism and maintain their authority through the continued use of such tools.

One of the key sections of this work is a reassessment of the crusading image of Philip II Augustus. Philip II was a participant of the Third Crusade (1189–1192), but departed soon after his arrival in the Holy Land, having achieved relatively little. His role is largely overshadowed by his rival and fellow third-crusader, Richard I of England—the Lionheart—who appears as the leading figure in the historical narrative. Naus examines the Third Crusade, as well as later crusades that were launched during his reign, from the perspective of the Capetian dynasty. Naus argues against the traditional narrative, which is highly critical of Philip's actions and casts him as a reluctant crusader, to demonstrate that he was much more committed to the campaign than has previously been thought, that he has been unfairly vilified by hostile Anglo-Norman writers, and that he only departed the Holy Land for vital political reasons (112–140). Indeed, despite his departure, Philip appears to have received little wider criticism, and that by the late twelfth century, the notion that the kings of France were Christendom's premier crusaders had become well established in popular opinion. Later Capetians,

such as Louis VIII and Louis IX in the thirteenth century, grew up in an environment where crusading was an expected and integral part of French kingship, and this was reflected in the actions of their reigns. Crusading had become a royal duty from which they would not shirk.

Naus has produced a work for which there has been a sore need, which is engaging, well written, and thought-provoking. A nuanced approach is provided by the detailed analysis of the relationship between crusading and medieval kingship framed in the context of a single royal dynasty. Indeed, one wonders how the actions of the Capetians might compare with other dynasties across medieval Europe, who similarly had much to gain from exploiting the crusading movement to advance their own royal authority. Some sections would have benefited from a greater contextualisation to more firmly establish the underlying history upon which much of the subsequent analysis was based, especially for those unfamiliar with the topic. Some greater discussion on the historical memory of the early crusades by later Capetians and kings of France from the fourteenth century would also have been a welcome addition, even if only a simple summary. Nevertheless, with this focused study, Naus has opened the door for considerable future research in this area, and we look forward to what that may bring.

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