



***Two Houses, Two Kingdoms: A History
of France and England 1100–1300***

By Catherine Hanley

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A book that well addresses examining the relationships between the early Plantagenets and Capetians for the general reader has been in need for some time, and Catherine Hanley's latest volume much fulfils that need. There has been a wealth of scholarship on the matter, not least on some of its more famous protagonists such as Richard I of England and Philip Augustus of France; however, as is made evident by Hanley's references and inclusion in the bibliography, much of this has fallen out of accessibility for the general reader—by publication if not by price range. Thus, Hanley's book seeks to provide what is a well-researched and accessible overview of the two houses and their relationships with one another.

At the beginning of her work, Hanley emphasizes that the book is about people, not events. This is clear from the deft narrative that runs through the work, highlighting not only the many kings of England and France during the two hundred years under examination, but also relishing the opportunity to present some of the more formidable women and other family members that played important roles in the governance and networks of the Plantagenet-Capetian relationships during this period. Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Castile are likely known figures to many familiar with the period; the sister queens Eleanor and Margaret of Provence are likely not, and the inclusion of their stories within this grand narrative are much welcome. Equally, there are many royal figures—often sharing the same name—to be kept abreast of in this history and Hanley's genealogical charts at the beginning of the book, separated by polity, are much welcome even for the more informed reader.

The monarchs of England and France—or as they were at the start of the book, kings of the English and Franks respectively—are the starring figures of this study, though none so more than Eleanor of Aquitaine. Unrivalled as the only woman to rule both England and France, and with a longevity to rival most, Eleanor's involvement in cross-Channel affairs for much of the twelfth century makes her a dominant figure in the narrative. However, Hanley does balance this with the perspective of many of the other royal women of both kingdoms who were otherwise ostracised, imprisoned,

or neglected by their respective kings. This is a rich history, and Hanley brings the stories of those who have been missing or misinterpreted from the high Middle Ages to life with a new perspective.

Given that Hanley's book is one of people, it is perhaps no surprise that she touches on the most pressing of issues throughout the work; that of succession, fertility, heirs, and dynasties. At one time or another both dynasties suffered from a lack of male heir, and the precariousness of one not appearing forthcoming. England's lack of male heir with the death of William Adelin in 1120 turned to the civil war between the rightful heiress Matilda and her cousin Stephen of Blois and ultimately saw the accession of the Plantagenets onto the English throne. France, however, managed to keep the Capetian dynasty in power with the birth of the much-desired Philip *Dieudonné* in 1165 after twenty-eight years (and three wives) to Louis VII.

One critique is that although Hanley posits this work as a history of the two houses and kingdoms, the work is heavily weighted towards the Plantagenet perspective and events; greater inclusion of other narrative material from a French perspective and engagement with a wider range of French historiography and primary source material may have remedied this. There remain some issues of dramatization in the work which veer away from historical accuracy, undoubtedly intended to draw the reader into the narrative even further. On the whole this is a well-researched and much-needed work, though the many figures of medieval England and France and their associated families (and vassals) may prove overwhelming for the unfamiliar reader. This is therefore not a likely entry work for those with no bearing of England and France in the high Middle Ages, but would be well suited to those who already have a passing interest, as well as those who are looking for a lively and informative history of the two dynasties. Hanley must also be praised for her work in bringing together the stories of the many royal women of the period and placing them alongside their counterparts; too often in general histories women appear to be nothing more than a footnote or otherwise missing from the narrative. This is also a necessary work for anyone seeking to understand the intertwining of the two dynasties in the prelude to the Hundred Years War: the high Middle Ages is a period of interest by itself, but this may add desired contextual

knowledge of the relationships between the two polities prior to the outbreak of warfare that was to dominate their interactions for the next two centuries.

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