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James Naus, *Contesting Kingship: The Capetian Monarchs of France and the Early Crusades*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2016. xiv + 163 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$105 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0719090974

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In *Constructing Kingship*, James Naus turns on its head one of the standard questions about the crusades. Historians have usually asked, “Why did monarchs like Louis VII and Louis IX decide to risk their kingdoms and lives by going on crusade?” Naus wonders instead, essentially, “What took the French kings so long?” Because of what Naus terms “the new crusading economy of status,” the advantages of going on crusade for kings far outweighed the potential drawbacks. Indeed, a decision not to go to Jerusalem carried such a risk as to put a monarch’s legitimacy, his claim to sacral status, in jeopardy.

Naus divides this argument into two halves: crisis and response. The first half, crisis, paradoxically grows out of the success of the First Crusade, in which no king participated. Chapter one, “Framing the Capetian Miracle,” opens with a consideration of the theoretical basis of Frankish kingship. Working from Carolingian traditions, early Capetian monarchs built their rule on claims to sacrality, an idea developed and promoted in collaboration with a number of monastic houses, notably Fleury and Saint-Denis. In an age of aggressive and at times brutal castellans, this sense of sacrality was one of the key traits that elevated an increasingly weak monarch above his subjects. The effect of the First Crusade, as Naus discusses in his second chapter, was to undermine even this basic check against decentralized authority. Participation in the crusade allowed castellans to claim for themselves part of the divine essence over which kings had once asserted a monopoly.

Unlike their subjects, the Capetians “had a sorry record when it came to the First Crusade” (p. 32). Not only had King Philip I elected to stay home, in part because he was under excommunication, but his brother Hugh of Vermandois had become one of the expedition’s most notorious deserters. After the siege of Antioch, the army’s leaders had sent him back to Constantinople to demand immediate military support, preferably with the emperor himself in the relief force, but then Hugh had never returned. It was a decision so shameful that northern French writers, notably Guibert of Nogent and Robert the Monk, did their best to excuse or conceal his behavior. Philip’s own later attempt to claim for his house some of the expedition’s luster by marrying his daughters to the crusading heroes Bohemond and Tancred may have backfired as well. Naus asks, “Could Bohemond now challenge Philip’s position, completing the transformation from Italian marauder to French powerbroker?” (p. 38). As a counterfactual, the question cannot be resolved, but one suspects that the answer would be “no,” since Bohemond attempted nothing of the kind—not to mention that his own subsequent, spectacular military failures likely caused the Capetians as much or more embarrassment than had Hugh’s checkered crusading career.[1]

The logical arrangement of this first half of Naus’s book is compelling, but it is not as well supported by examples and evidence as a reader might hope. It does appear probable, even likely, that castellans

would have claimed for themselves some sort of sacral authority and in doing so would have challenged the power of kings (and bishops, dukes, counts, and other castellans who had avoided the crusade, no doubt). But it is difficult if not impossible to make a statistical case to that effect. How many turbulent castellans in early twelfth-century Francia were veterans of the crusade? Indeed, how many castellans actually survived the crusade, returned home, and established any sort of political relationship with the king? In making a case on behalf of Naus's argument, it is possible to assemble some useful anecdotes, examples of crusaders behaving not just rebelliously but near sociopathically.<sup>[2]</sup> Thomas of Marle, whose career Naus treats briefly but effectively, is a good example—although *Constructing Kingship* dwells more on Thomas's posthumous memory as a crusade hero rather than on the crimson record of brutality described by Suger of Saint-Denis and Guibert of Nogent. Other examples of tempestuous castellan-crusaders are more problematic. Guy Trousseau, for example, did parlay his time on crusade into a royal match for his daughter, but he was also a deserter from the siege of Antioch. One wonders if this lapse in courage made Guy, in King Philip's eyes, less a sacral threat and more a potentially useful tool in administering his kingdom. Duke Robert of Normandy, another returning crusader with a genuine reputation for heroism, was able only to exchange his sacral status for a still cheaper reward: a lifetime imprisonment more comfortable than usual after he had suffered defeat at the hands of his younger brother, King Henry I of England. The rationale for Naus's interpretation—that returning crusaders were well placed to challenge a royal monopoly on sacrality—is absolutely convincing, but the evidence presented here does not allow him to make that case definitively.

On the whole, the argument in the first half of *Constructing Kingship* would have been better served by a deeper engagement with the “mutationist” debate in French historiography. The traditional narrative of medieval French history, as defined during the latter half of the twentieth century, saw a collapse in royal authority during the reigns of the later Carolingians and the early Capetians, when royal prerogatives (the “ban”) devolved to dukes and counts and eventually to the level of the castellan. The result, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, was a period of “feudal anarchy.” This basic historical outline is fundamental to Naus's argument (though the devolution of the ban, based on *Constructing Kingship*, would seem to have occurred later—or else the process was greatly accelerated—because of the enhanced prestige of castellans within the new economy of status). The traditional reading, however, has come under ferocious attack (played out in the pages of *Past & Present*). Notably, Dominique Barthélemy has argued that the emergence of a brutal ruling order of castellans is more apparent than real, the product of new habits of record keeping, particularly within religious houses, including those on whose support the reputation of the Capetians had begun to rely.<sup>[3]</sup> Naus is clearly familiar with this literature but does not engage with it here in the way that the subject demands. A direct intervention in the debate on his part would have been especially welcome, since the question of “mutationism” is far from settled.

The second part of Naus's book, “Response,” revisits the story of how Capetian kings, beginning with Louis the Fat (r. 1108-1137) and his adviser Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis (1122-1151), undertook the hard work of building a French kingdom. Crusading is usually ancillary to this tale of royal transformation, Suger himself often depicted as ambivalent or else hostile to the whole enterprise. In Naus's retelling, however, Suger is a consistent proponent of crusades. Aware of the crisis in sacrality triggered by crusade veterans and exacerbated by the twin failures of Philip and Hugh to participate effectively in the movement, Suger sought to associate his kings with the trappings and ideology of crusading. The third chapter of *Constructing Kinship*, titled “Suger of Saint-Denis and the ideology of crusade,” is pivotal for this argument. Naus ably reconstructs there the key elements of Suger's program of royal image-making: the design of the portals of the basilica of Saint-Denis, based on the model of Roman triumphal arches; the inclusion in the church of a crusade-themed stained-glass window (which Naus dates to the abbacy of Suger rather than his successor, Odo of Deuil); and above all, the *Gesta Ludovici Grossi*, Suger's biography of Louis VI, intended at once to celebrate the king's reign and to provide his successors with a model of effective rulership.

In one of Naus's more daring arguments, he describes the *Gesta Ludovici* as a text infused with crusading ideals, despite the fact that Louis himself never traveled to the East nor apparently ever considered doing so. To reconcile such conflicting narrative and political demands, Suger structured most of his chapters around the idea of "just warfare," in which Louis put down rebellions in his kingdom but only after receiving clerical endorsement for his actions. The model, Naus suggests, grew out of Urban II's declaration of the crusade in 1095 and the subsequent response. An ecclesiastical council proclaims war, and a secular army answers. Suger thus promoted the idea of a crusading king, even though the king in question devoted his energy exclusively to the home front. It is an ingenious argument, though one must wonder if Suger really crafted this system in response to the crusade. A strong dose of ecclesiastical self-interest and self-promotion surely informed his program to an equal or greater degree. Naus's decision to highlight the ideas and ideology of the crusade, however, does cast light on a previously underappreciated force that may have inspired Suger's vision.

The final two chapters of *Constructing Kingship* largely provide narratives of the reigns of the next two French Kings, Louis VII (r. 1137-1180) and Philip Augustus (r. 1180-1223), with an accent on the theme of crusade. Louis VII was the first monarch to take the cross, joined shortly thereafter by Conrad III of Germany. Suger's biographer, the monk William of Saint-Denis, suggested that the abbot was cool to the expedition, but Naus argues convincingly that this was a literary stance dictated by hindsight and the Second Crusade's remarkable failure. All contemporary evidence points toward Suger's enthusiastic support for Louis's decision. The abbot hoped that he would finally have in reality the model crusader-king whose ideal Louis the Fat had never been able to realize. In anticipation of a grand success, Suger dispatched the monk Odo of Deuil to join the Second Crusade and keep record of what happened. After the expedition foundered, Suger campaigned in 1150, aggressively but unsuccessfully, to have his king return to Jerusalem. Louis VII's successor, Philip Augustus, famously joined Richard the Lionheart on the Third Crusade, but just as famously he returned home early after the siege of Antioch. Naus reads the decision not as desertion but as a perfectly understandable choice dictated by practical considerations. Many of Philip's rivals had died during the siege of Acre, leaving the field at home wide open for an ambitious ruler to expand his domain. Naus risks striking too apologetic a tone when he says that, from Philip's perspective, "being a crusader was important, but so was having a strong France, which would protect the Church in the long run" (p. 126). More convincing is Naus's overall conclusion, that Philip was a pragmatic king who viewed the crusade favorably but who could not afford to involve himself in the subsequent expedition that Pope Innocent III would declare and for which he would recruit the king and his followers.

Naus ends his book with an acknowledgement of the most famous French crusading king, Louis IX. Because of the record of his predecessors, Louis grew up in an environment where crusading was considered integral to royal identity. It is the perfect note on which to finish *Constructing Kingship*, but it is a shame that St. Louis does not get a full fledged treatment in a more wide-ranging conclusion, as opposed to a short paragraph at the end of the last chapter. Despite the fact that Louis's career as a crusader has been meticulously studied, it is likely that Naus would have delivered new insight into it. *Constructing Kingship* nonetheless does provide a valuable overview of the connections between royal ideology and the practice of crusading. It is likely to speak most immediately to crusade historians rather than students of French political history more broadly, given the absence of a thorough treatment of the mutationist debate. In crusade literature, however, Naus has put his stamp on this most critical topic, and his book will now serve as a starting point for discussion of it.

## NOTES

[1] As discussed in, for example, Nicholas L. Paul, "A Warlord's Wisdom: Literacy and Propaganda at the Time of the First Crusade," *Speculum* 85 (2010): 534-66.

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[2] Jeremy Adams, "Returning Crusaders: Living Saints of Psychopaths?" in E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith, eds., *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond, Essays in Honor of Grover A. Zinn, Jr.*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 328-41.

[3] Dominique Barthélemy, "Debate: The Feudal Revolution," *Past & Present* 152 (1996): 196-205.

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