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Marriage, Inheritance, and the Balance of Power in Twelfth-Century England and France

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, The University of Auckland, 2004
Abstract

This project attempts to chart the importance of the social institutions of marriage and inheritance in giving rise to political change in England and France during the period 1100-1215. It benefits from the study of diverse primary sources that include chronicle histories, legal and financial documents, charters, diplomatic treaties, letters, and contemporary works of imaginative literature. It also takes into account the extensive secondary literature dealing with the period both in the area of historical research and in related fields such as anthropology, political science, and literary criticism. The thesis is broadly divided into two parts, with four chapters devoted to an extended analysis of major themes and a further four providing a narrative reading of the period to illustrate the ideas put forward.

The central argument contends that a ‘multipolar’ balance of power existed among the quasi-independent states under the nominal lordship of the kingdom of France (and also involving England) around 1100; that this arrangement was disrupted frequently in the following years so that by around 1200 any remaining balance was more ‘bipolar’ in nature with the Plantagenet and Capetian kingdoms now dominating the smaller territorial units; and that the most important factors in creating this change were the political ramifications of marriage and inheritance episodes. The idea of a balance of power is developed and discussed by reference to similar ideas prevalent in the study of international relations among European states during the eighteenth century.

To support the argument several chapters are devoted to a close examination of the social practices and restrictions surrounding marriage and inheritance during the twelfth century. Issues such as the need for consent between marriage partners, marital restrictions on the basis of consanguinity, and the prevalence of primogeniture in the handing down of estates are all discussed at length. A central theme is the contested and provisional nature of all these issues during the period, with rules that were either unclear or not universally accepted creating opportunities for political advancement by members of the social elite. Further, this thesis
contends that earlier historiographical models describing a simple and consistent opposition between ecclesiastical leaders and lay magnates on questions of marriage are unrealistic. It looks to identify points of overlap and temporary alliance in secular and ecclesiastical policies, as well as noting the conflicts that occurred between them on other occasions. The project also aims to use the techniques and advantages of cultural history to add a significant extra dimension to the central political argument, by examining prevailing beliefs and value systems surrounding the institutions of marriage and inheritance.
Acknowledgements

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Principles of Marriage</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Principles of Inheritance</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Cultural Context of Marriage and Inheritance</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Balance of Power</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Anglo-Norman Reunification and the Continental Response, 1100-1130</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Realignment and Conflict, 1130-1154</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Capetian Revival: The Assertion of Sovereignty, 1183-1215</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: Calculating Consanguinity</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France in the late eleventh century</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial connections of Henry I’s bastards in France</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# List of Charts and Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property transfers in marriage contracts</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Poorstock inheritance</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Flexible’ and ‘restrictive’ models of marriage</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The succession to Richard I</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry I’s Anglo-Saxon connection</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Norman rivalries</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivo’s consanguinity calculation</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consanguinity between the children of Henry I and Fulk V of Anjou</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen’s Anglo-Saxon and Scottish connection</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of the children of Henry II and Raymond Berengar</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consanguineous relationships</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships and rivalries</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip’s consanguinity claim</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John’s relationship to Isabella of Angoulême</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman and Germanic degrees of relationship</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting cousins</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives ineligible by affinity</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MGH-SS</td>
<td><em>Monumenta Germaniae historica – scriptores</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHB</td>
<td><em>Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td><em>Patrologiae cursus complectus</em> (commonly <em>Patrologia latina</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHF</td>
<td><em>Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Rolls Series</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>