Hugh Capet

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Hugh Capet[a] (c. 941 – 24 October 996), called in contemporary sources "Hugh the Great" (Latin: *Hugo Magnus*),[1] was the first "King of the Franks" of the eponymous Capetian dynasty from his election to succeed the Carolingian Louis V in 987 until his death.

Contents

Descent and inheritance

The son of Hugh the Great, Duke of France, and Hedwige of Saxony, daughter of the German king Henry the Fowler, Hugh was born in 941.[2] His paternal family, the Robertians, were powerful landowners in the Île-de-France.[3] His grandfather had been King Robert I.[3] His grandmother Beatrice was a Carolingian, a daughter of Herbert I of Vermandois.[2] This makes him the fifth great-grandson of Charlemagne through Pepin of Italy.[4] King Odo was his grand-uncle and King Rudolph the son-in-law of his grandfather, King Robert I.[5] Hugh was born into a well-connected and powerful family with many ties to the reigning nobility of Europe.[b] But for all this, Hugh's father was never king. When Rudolph died in 936, Hugh the Great organised the return of Louis d'Outremer, son of Charles the Simple, from his exile at the court of Athelstan of England.[6] Hugh's motives are unknown, but it is presumed that he acted to forestall Rudolph's brother and successor as Duke of Burgundy, Hugh the Black, from taking the French throne, or to prevent it from falling into the hands of Herbert II of Vermandois or Richard the Fearless, Duke of Normandy.[7]

Hugh Capet	
King of the Franks (more...)	
12th century portrayal of Hugh Capet	
King of France	
Reign	3 July 987 – 24 October 996
Coronation	3 July 987, Noyon
Predecessor	Louis V
Successor	Robert II
Junior king	Robert II
Spouse	Adelaide of Aquitaine
Issue	Hedwig, Countess of Mons
	Gisèle, Countess of Ponthieu
	Robert II
Father	Hugh the Great
Mother	Hedwige of Saxony
Born	941
	Paris, France
Died	24 October 996 (aged 55)
	Paris, France
Burial	Saint Denis Basilica, Paris, France

In 956, Hugh inherited his father's estates and became one of the most powerful nobles in the much-reduced West Frankish kingdom.[8] However, as he was not yet an adult, his mother acted as his guardian.[9] Young Hugh's neighbours made the most of the opportunity. Theobald I of Blois, a former vassal of Hugh the Great, took the counties of Chartres and Châteaudun. Further south, on the border of the kingdom, Fulk II of Anjou, another former client of Hugh the Great, carved out a principality at Hugh's expense and that of the Bretons.[10]

The realm in which Hugh grew up, and of which he would one day be king, bore no resemblance to modern France. Hugh's predecessors did not call themselves *rois de France* ("Kings of France"), and that title was not used until the time of his distant descendant Philip II Augustus. Kings ruled as *rex Francorum* ("King of the Franks") and the lands over which they ruled comprised only a very small part of the former Carolingian Empire. The eastern Frankish lands, the Holy Roman Empire, were ruled by the Ottonian dynasty, represented by Hugh's first cousin Otto II and then by Otto's son, Otto III. The lands south of the river Loire had largely ceased to be part of the West Frankish kingdom in the years after Charles the Simple was deposed in 922. The Duchy of Normandy and the Duchy of Burgundy were largely independent, and Brittany entirely so, although from 956 Burgundy was ruled by Hugh's brothers Otto and Henry.[11]

A *denier* of Hugh Capet when he was Duke of France, calling him "duke by the grace of God" (*Dux Dei Gratia*). Minted at Paris (*Parisi Civita*)

Election and extent of power

From 977 to 986, Hugh Capet allied himself with the German emperors Otto II and Otto III and with Archbishop Adalberon of Reims to dominate the Carolingian king, Lothair. By 986, he was king in all but name. After Lothair's son Louis died in May 987, Adalberon and Gerbert of Aurillac convened an assembly of nobles to elect Hugh Capet as their king. In front of an electoral assembly at Senlis, Adalberon gave a stirring oration and pleaded to the nobles:

> Crown the Duke. He is most illustrious by his exploits, his nobility, his forces. The throne is not acquired by hereditary right; no one should be raised to it unless distinguished not only for nobility of birth, but for the goodness of his soul.[12]

He was elected and crowned *rex Francorum* at Noyon in Picardy on 3 July 987, by the prelate of Reims, the first of the Capetian house. Immediately after his coronation, Hugh began to push for the coronation of his son Robert. Hugh's own claimed reason was that he was planning an expedition against the Moorish armies harassing Borrel II of Barcelona, an invasion which never occurred, and that the stability of the country necessitated two kings should he die while on expedition.[13] Ralph Glaber, however, attributes Hugh's request to his old age and inability to control the nobility.[14] Modern scholarship has largely imputed to Hugh the motive of establishing a dynasty against the pretension of electoral power on the part of the aristocracy, but this is not the typical view of contemporaries and even some modern scholars have been less sceptical of Hugh's "plan" to campaign in Spain.[14] Robert was eventually crowned on 25 December that same year.

Hugh Capet possessed minor properties near Chartres and Angers. Between Paris and Orléans he possessed towns and estates amounting to approximately 400 square miles (1,000 km^2). His authority ended there, and if he dared travel outside his small area, he risked being captured and held for ransom, though his life would be largely safe.[*citation needed*] Indeed, there was a plot in 993, masterminded by Adalberon, Bishop of Laon and Odo I of Blois, to deliver Hugh Capet into the custody of Otto III. The plot failed, but the fact that no one was

punished illustrates how tenuous his hold on power was. Beyond his power base, in the rest of France, there were still as many codes of law as there were fiefdoms. The "country" operated with 150 different forms of currency and at least a dozen languages.[*citation needed*] Uniting all this into one cohesive unit was a formidable task and a constant struggle between those who wore the crown of France and its feudal lords. Therefore, Hugh Capet's reign was marked by numerous power struggles with the vassals on the borders of the Seine and the Loire.

Denier of Hugh Capet for Beauvais

While Hugh Capet's military power was limited and he had to seek military aid from Richard I of Normandy, his unanimous election as king gave him great moral authority and influence. Adémar de Chabannes records, probably apocryphally, that during an argument with the Count of Auvergne, Hugh demanded of him: "Who made you count?" The count riposted: "Who made you king?".[15]

Dispute with the papacy

Hugh made Arnulf Archbishop of Reims in 988, even though Arnulf was the nephew of his bitter rival, Charles of Lorraine. Charles thereupon succeeded in capturing Reims and took the archbishop prisoner. Hugh, however, considered Arnulf a turncoat and demanded his deposition by Pope John XV. The turn of events outran the messages, when Hugh captured both Charles and Arnulf and convoked a synod at Reims in June 991 which obediently deposed Arnulf and chose as his successor Gerbert of Aurillac. These proceedings were repudiated by Rome, although a second synod had ratified the decrees issued at Reims. John XV summoned the French bishops to hold an independent synod outside the King's realm, at Aachen, to reconsider the case. When they refused, he called them to Rome, but they protested that the unsettled conditions en route and in Rome made that impossible. The Pope then sent a legate with instructions to call a council of French and German bishops at Mousson, where only the German bishops appeared, the French being stopped on the way by Hugh and Robert.

Through the exertions of the legate, the deposition of Arnulf was finally pronounced illegal. After Hugh's death, Arnulf was released from his imprisonment and soon restored to all his dignities.

Legacy

Hugh Capet died on 24 October 996 in Paris and was interred in the Saint Denis Basilica. His son Robert continued to reign.

Most historians regard the beginnings of modern France with the coronation of Hugh Capet. This is because, as Count of Paris, he made the city his power center. The monarch began a long process of exerting control of the rest of the country from there.

He is regarded as the founder of the Capetian dynasty. The direct Capetians, or the House of Capet, ruled France from 987 to 1328; thereafter, the Kingdom was ruled by cadet branches of the dynasty. All French kings through Louis Philippe, and all royals since then, have belonged to the dynasty. Furthermore, cadet branches of the House continue to reign in Spain and Luxembourg.

Marriage and issue

Hugh Capet married Adelaide, daughter of William Towhead, Count of Poitou. Their children are as follows:

- Gisela, or Gisele, who married Hugh I, Count of Ponthieu
- Hedwig, or Hathui, who married Reginar IV, Count of Hainaut
- Robert II, who became king after the death of his father

A number of other daughters are less reliably attested.[16]

Ancestry

Notes

a. **^** Capet is a byname of uncertain meaning distinguishing him from his father Hugh the Great. Folk etymology connects it with "cape." Other suggested etymologies derive it from terms for chief, mocker or big head. His father's byname is presumed to have been retrospective, meaning Hugh the Elder, this Hugh being Hugh the Younger, Capet being a 12th-century addition. See: James, *The Origins of France*, p. 183.
b. **^** For a fuller explanation of the descent and relationships of Hugh, see the genealogical tables in Riché, *The Carolingiens* (1993), pp. 367-75.

References

1. **^** Jonathan Jarrett, "Sales, Swindles and Sanctions: Bishop Sal·la of Urgell and the Counts of Catalonia" (http://www.chiark.greenend.org.uk/~jjarrett/files/9salla.pdf), International Medieval Congress, Leeds, 11 July 2005, published in the Appendix, *Pathways of Power in late-Carolingian Catalonia*, PhD dissertation, Birkbeck College (2006), 300.
2. ^ *a b* Detlev Schwennicke, *Europäische Stammtafeln: Stammtafeln zur Geschichte der Europäischen Staaten*, Neue Folge, Band II (Marburg, Germany: J. A. Stargardt, 1984), Tafeln 10, 11
3. ^ *a b* Jim Bradbury, *The Capetians: Kings of France, 987-1328*, (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 69
4. **^** Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians; A Family Who Forged Europe, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 371, 375*
5. **^** Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians; A Family Who Forged Europe, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 371*
6. **^** *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 916–966*, eds & trans. Steven Fanning: Bernard S. Bachrach (New York; Ontario, Can: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 28
7. **^** James, pp 183–184; Theis, pp 65–66.
8. **^** Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians; A Family Who Forged Europe, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 264*
9. **^** Jules Michelet, *History of France*, Vol. I, trans. G. H. Smith (New York: D. Appleton, 1882), p. 146
10. **^** Theis, pp. 69–70.
11. **^** James, pp. iii, 182–183; Gauvard, pp. 163–168; Riché, pp. 285 ff.
12. **^** Harriet Harvey Wood, *The Battle of Hastings: The Fall of Anglo-Saxon England*, Atlantic, 2008, p. 46
13. **^** Lewis, 908.
14. ^ *a b* Lewis, 914.
15. **^** Bordenove, pp. 265–266
16. **^** Thus Gauvard, p. 531.

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Hugh Capet **House of Capet** **Died:** 24 October 996		
Preceded by **Hugh the Great**	**Duke of the Franks** 956–987	**Merged in Crown**
Preceded by **Louis V**	**King of the Franks** 3 July 987 – 24 October 996 With Robert II as co-King (from 30 December 987)	Succeeded by **Robert II**