Within both popular and academic culture, the twelfth century stands as one of the best known and loved medieval centuries. After all, it was the era in which the so-called twelfth-century renaissance occurred, when the genre of Romance was born, historical writing went through a “golden age,” chivalry began to coalesce as a secular ideal, scholasticism developed and cathedral schools grew far beyond their intended purpose. It was a grand age of crusading as well as the development of the idea of crusade. Land clearing and reclamation, a “commercial revolution” and territorial expansion in the Baltic and on the Iberian Peninsula all suggest a century of European energy and dynamism.

The century is likewise replete with colorful, larger-than-life personalities, especially in the Anglo-Norman world. Among the most famous are King Henry II of England, his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine and their famous (or infamous) sons, Richard and John. Hidden away, and most definitely understudied by Anglophone scholars are their continental counterparts and overlords, the Capetian kings of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. There are, of course, exceptions to this scholarly oversight on the Capetians, including works that focus upon the dynasty in relation to such entities such as the Papacy, the Gallic episcopacy and specific religious communities, and most recently, the Capetians in relation to crusading.1

As individual monarchs the Capetians have certainly not garnered the avalanche of scholarship the Anglo-Normans have. Louis VII is perhaps the most neglected of all Capetian monarchs between 1108 and the fourteenth century,

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especially considering how long he ruled. Louis' father Louis VI has had some biographical work done him, including three stand-alone biographies since the 1980s, although these three have not been translated into English.\(^2\) Louis VII's son, Philip II, has had seminal but limited biographical work done on him.\(^3\) Louis VII does not have a single biography devoted to his life in English. A finite number of biographies of him have appeared in French, but none have been translated.\(^4\)

Clearly historians have found Louis VII a hard person to assess. What little we know about his life up to his accession as King of France is rather inauspicious. Born in 1120, a second son, Louis spent his childhood without the political education and expectations his older brother Philip received. In 1131, things changed dramatically for eleven year old Louis. He suddenly became heir apparent when his thirteen year old brother died after his horse stumbled over a pig in a Paris street, throwing him so he hit his head on a stone, the horse falling on top of him.\(^5\) Throughout his life Louis exhibited a rather “clerkish” and pious sort of temperament, and indeed, had his brother not died prematurely, Louis might very well have ended up in the church.\(^6\) His overall interest in ruling between 1137 when he became sole ruler to when he departed on crusade in 1147 does not seem extraordinarily high and Louis leaned heavily on advisors like the Abbot of Saint Denis, Suger, throughout this period. There were exceptions to this, however, as suggested by Michael L. Bardot in Chapter Three. Both personally and as a monarch Louis acted inconsistently, and even exhibited a certain naïveté, as related by the twelfth-century raconteur Walter Map, who says that one time Louis took a nap out in the countryside under a tree attended by only two knights. When his brother-in-law scolded him for


\(^6\) Bradbury, *Capetians*, 148.