

V. France after the Frankish Union (843-)

A. The Rise of the Capetian Dynasty and the “Problem of the Duke”

1. To see how France rose up to become a powerful nation much more quickly than Germany, we must look at how it evolved as a medieval monarchy after the break-up of the Frankish empire.
2. As in Germany, the situation after 843 was chaotic, with the West Franks expending a lot of energy trying to take over Germany, and in the end losing power over France itself.
3. The main reason for the fall of the Franks in France was the arrival of the Vikings, who not only raided the coast year after year, but eventually resolved to colonize central Europe rather than return to frigid Scandinavia.
4. The Frankish kings decided that the best course of action for dealing with this ongoing threat was to accept a Viking presence in France permanently. Thus the Frankish king Charles “the Simple” made a bargain with the Viking commander, Rollo, making him the Duke of Normandy in **911 AD** in exchange for his pledge of loyalty to the king.
5. Dissatisfied with the Carolingians as leaders, the French lords preferred the counts of Paris, starting with a man named Odo (who had stoutly resisted the Viking attacks on Paris) as kings of France, setting off a contest between the counts of Paris and the Franks.
6. The descendant of Odo, Hugh Capet, won out in the year **987 AD**, becoming the first king of a long-lived “*Capetian*” dynasty (named after him).
7. Although they triumphed over the Carolingians, the Capetians inherited the “problem of the duke”—specifically, the Duke of Normandy—from them.



Viking conqueror *Rollo* became Duke of Normandy in **911 AD**. William “the Conqueror” was his descendant.



Count of Paris *Hugh Capet* became the founder of the successful Capetian dynasty of kings in **987**.

B. Avoidance of an “Investiture” Controversy

1. An important element of the success of the Capetians of France relative to the Ottomans of Germany was that the Capetians did not attempt to use the Church as a part of their system of power against the dukes.
2. The lesson of avoiding a power struggle with the Church was learned by the son of Hugh Capet, Robert II, **c.996 AD**.
3. Robert wished to marry his cousin Bertha for her land. Because they were so closely related, however, the marriage was forbidden by the Church.

4. When Robert married her despite being warned not to by the leaders of the Church, he was *excommunicated*. (As with Henry IV of Germany, he was denied participation in the rites of Christianity thereafter, thus—in Christian belief—condemned to *hell* and his lords were relieved of their oaths of loyalty to him.)



The Excommunication of Robert II depicted by Jean-Paul Laurens captures the desolation of the experience for Robert and his would-be bride, Bertha. The Capetian kings learned to avoid entanglements with the Church.

5. Robert found he was powerless without the acceptance of his reign by the dukes, so he had to give up the marriage and reconcile with the Church.
6. The lesson was learned, and the Capetians ruled as more *secular* kings than the German kings, focusing on more conventional ways of expanding their power.