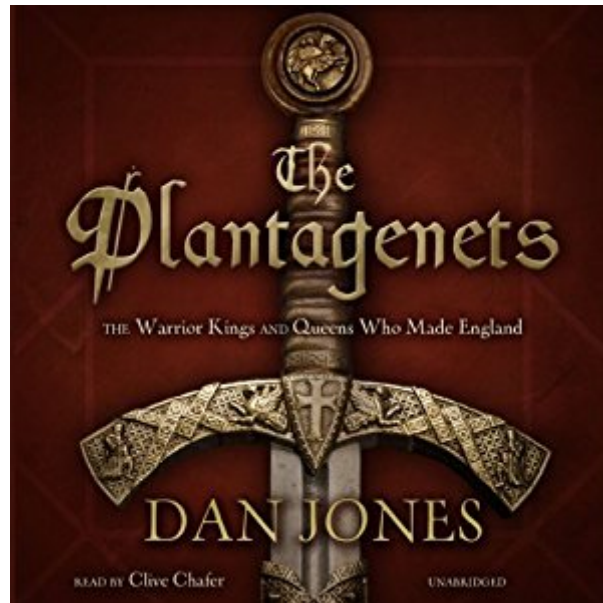


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The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings And Queens Who Made England



Synopsis

The first Plantagenet king inherited a blood-soaked kingdom from the Normans and transformed it into an empire that stretched at its peak from Scotland to Jerusalem. In this epic history, Dan Jones vividly resurrects this fierce and seductive royal dynasty and its mythic world. We meet the captivating Eleanor of Aquitaine, twice queen and the most famous woman in Christendom; her son, Richard the Lionheart, who fought Saladin in the Third Crusade; and King John, a tyrant who was forced to sign Magna Carta, which formed the basis of our own Bill of Rights. This is the era of chivalry, Robin Hood, and the Knights Templar, the era of the Black Death, the Black Prince, the founding of Parliament, and the Hundred Years' War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dan Jones spectacular new (to America) history of England's Plantagenet dynasty from its founding by Geoffrey of Anjou to Richard II's loss of the Crown to Henry of Bolingbroke, or 1120-1399. It was a span of English history that saw the signing of the Magna Carta, the conquest of Wales, and the first half of the Hundred Years' War. The Plantagenet kings included some of the most well known English monarchs (well known even here in America)--Richard the Lionheart, John, and Edward Longshanks. It also included less well known (at least by me), but equally important, monarchs--Henry II and Edward III. Of lesser repute were Henry III, Edward II, and Richard II (and Jones accepts the conventional wisdom that John belongs in that group). Military tactics evolved from sieges led by mounted knights to pitched battles won by archers and dismounted men-at-arms.

The two centuries saw not only the Magna Carta (and the Charter of the Forest) but a number of other, important charters (and the Magna Carta itself needed constant renewal against kings chafing under its yoke). We see English power erode in France and grown in Wales and Scotland. Covering two centuries of history in a single volume is a tall order. Jones succeeds, but the task requires certain sacrifices nonetheless. The Plantagenets is a history of England, but it is one told through the eyes of its kings. The focus is on England's great battles and the struggle for power between the king and the barons. Jones does a particularly great job at tracking the progress of the great charters the barons forced out of successive kings.

This is a great book that covers the history of English Kings from White Ship disaster which killed Henry I son William (and pretty much ended the Norman dynasty) and ends with Henry Bollingbrook's invasion and usurping of the throne from Richard II. This is very much a kings, war and diplomacy book. It does not tell much about everyday life in medieval England. Instead it tells the hard facts of the Plantagenet dynasty from its beginning to end. The most surprising thing about the story is how few good kings England actually had. Really only Henry II and Edward III could be described as great kings and both of them left disastrous sons as heirs. Henry III was a religious flake who managed to get so cross ways with his barons he ended up being effectively disposed by Simon DeMontfort. Edward I, for all of his fame as conqueror of Wales and Hammer of the Scots, left the country bankrupt upon his death. And those two were not even particularly disastrous kings. Then of course there were the truly bad kings. First and foremost was of course John. The book is very instructive in debunking myths about kings. John for all of his fearsome reputation, was no worse a tyrant than his father and older brother and actually did his best to run a fair judicial system (so much for the Robin Hood myth). But what John didn't do, that is brother and father did, was protect the realm. John suffered devastating military defeats at the hands of King Phillip losing Normandy. The loss of Normandy explains many of the problems later kings would have with their barons. Before John lost Normandy, the barons were a cross channel aristocracy who had every reason to support the Kings wars in France.

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