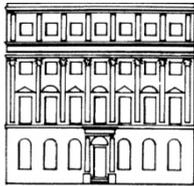


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The Power of Weakness: Machiavelli Revisited

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ARTICLE

THE POWER OF WEAKNESS: MACHIAVELLI REVISITED*

Annette Kehnel

I. Introduction: The Public Flogging of the Indian Kings

Immediately after the solemn act of anointment, ancient Indian kings had to undergo an act of severe public humiliation in their annual consecration ceremony. While speaking the words: 'We beat the sins away from you, we lead you past death', the priest and his helpers slowly beat the king's back with wooden sticks taken from holy trees.¹ This scene, the ritual humiliation of a king, stages an unsettling alliance between power and weakness right at the heart of an archaic inauguration rite. The ritual is described as a part of the ancient Indian royal consecration *rājasūya* in the White Yajurveda, one of the four main Vedic texts transmitting liturgies for ancient Hindu rituals, probably dating back as far as the second millennium BC. How can we explain this ritual of humiliation and weakening of a future king?

In late nineteenth-century Germany, in the year 1893, when Albrecht F. Weber presented his edition of this Indian liturgical text to the members of the Royal Academy in Berlin, the assumption of an ongoing struggle between king and priest, *rex* and *sacerdos*, between state and church, lay close at hand. *Kulturkampf* explained everything. The nineteenth-century arguments still sound familiar in the early twenty-first century: religion, in those ancient days, was trying to subdue the independent exercise of secular power. The ritual was

*This article is based on a lecture given at the German Historical Institute London on 4 May 2010.

¹ Albrecht F. Weber, *Über die Königsweihe, den rājasūya: Abhandlungen der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Phil.-hist. Classe* (Berlin, 1893), 1-158, at 6, 62-3, see also 132, 139-40.

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thus identified as an indication of the predominance of the priestly class, even in ancient India. Sacred influence in secular affairs (*der priesterliche Hauch der Zeit*) must have been as fully developed, Weber concluded, as it was in the German Middle Ages. The ancient Indian king appears as the 'sadly priest-ridden heir' to what Weber considered was once the ideal Aryan king. The priestly class, moreover, had successfully manipulated truly original Aryan rituals of power in its own favour.

As early as 1957, Johannes Cornelis Heesterman drew attention to the limits of Weber's Wilhelmine views in the foreword to the modern edition of the *rājasūya* texts.² In many ways, however, the nineteenth-century view still shapes ways of seeing in the early twenty-first century. The idea of a pre-modern society dominated by the power of religion is commonplace. This is true not only of first year students of medieval history, but also of what we might call the modern 'collective memory'. Western Europeans are quite sure that it was a commitment to secular principles that enabled their forefathers to overcome the pre-modern 'dark ages' of religious domination.³ With Machiavelli, so the story goes, 'modern' concepts of power developed. The idea of a secular state took shape and eventually prevailed in the notorious struggle between the secular and the religious. Emperors and kings no longer submitted to popes and archbishops. Ecclesiastical influence was banned; religious concepts of rulership vanished. Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke laid the foundations for modern political theory, a secular understanding of power, rationality, enlightenment, the separation of church and state, and, finally, for democracy and all the other great 'blessings' of Western civilization.⁴

² Johannes Cornelis Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration: The Rājasūya Described According to the Yajus Texts and Annotated* (The Hague, 1957).

³ See Frank Rexroth (ed.), *Meistererzählungen vom Mittelalter: Epochenimaginationen und Verlaufsmuster in der Praxis mediävistischer Disziplinen* (Munich, 2007), esp. the article by M. Bojcov, who suggests that these grand narratives owe their longevity at least in part to their fairy-tale structure: the good (in our case, the secular and the rational), once severely oppressed, after a series of trials wins over the bad (religion).

⁴ We will not trace the various reasons for the longevity of this tale, which might have served a purpose in the 19th and 20th centuries, but can certain-

The ideas presented in this article trace a different path in the history of power. It is argued that the unsettling alliance between rituals of weakness (as exposed in the figure of the beaten king) and the exercise of power cannot be adequately explained as a constant feature of political struggles for power, especially between the sacred and the secular.

II. *Classical Explanations*

Before examining the view that there is more to ritual weakness than its function as a political instrument in the struggle between religious and secular power, we will first briefly sum up the most common academic interpretations. To medieval historians, it is self evident that a medieval king performed rituals of humiliation before God and the saints, thus demonstrating the Christian virtue (*Herrscher-tugend*) of *humilitas*. Acts of public humiliation were used in medieval politics as an instrument of power. And as medieval kings and emperors were crowned by religious authorities, every coronation was more than the official installation of a future ruler; it was an opportunity to readjust the balance between secular and ecclesiastical powers. All the symbolic gestures of humiliation to be performed, for example, by the future emperor before his coronation in Rome (he had to dismount from his horse and walk towards the pope; then, seated on a chair, he had to kiss the pope's feet; and, inside St Peter's, repeatedly prostrate himself before the altar) can therefore be interpreted as acts of submission to the spiritual authority of the church. In the same way, every medieval inauguration provided a stage for a ritual contest between spiritual and worldly power. Finally, scholars seem to agree that the medieval Roman church, its liturgy and its rituals also supplied the basic ritual elements for secular ritual.

ly no longer cast light on the condition of the postmodern, global, and post-colonial world, especially because it explains nothing at all to members of cultures which have never expressed their inner conflicts in terms of oppositions such as secular vs. ecclesiastical, church vs. state, or religion vs. rationality. For a solid treatment of this problem in Carolingian history see Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge, 2009), 9–10.

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An equally familiar explanation is offered by ethnologists. They consider acts of humiliation to be 'liminal elements' at the very centre of *rites de passage*; that is, in those rituals that accompany social passage or status elevation, such as adoption or birth, puberty, ordination, coronation, engagement, marriage, and death. First systematically described by Arnold van Gennep in 1909, they were further elaborated in the formal analysis of the ritual process by Victor A. Turner in 1969.⁵ Van Gennep distinguishes three ritual phases: separation, margin, and re-aggregation, or pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. The actual transformation of the ritual candidate takes place in the core period of the ritual process. It requires spatial and temporal withdrawal from the regular modes of social action for a period in which the central values of the culture in which it occurs can be scrutinized. It is, moreover, generally accompanied by a series of ritual humiliations and sufferings. While ritual beatings, slaps, public laughter, mockery, or ritual undressing may be quite harmless, physical torture, mutilation, tattooing, the loss of a finger, circumcision, or infibulation leave life-long scars.

Finally, we might recall the point of view of a political pragmatist such as Machiavelli. Suffering, weakness, and even scenes of public defeat can be employed as instruments of power according to ancient and modern Machiavellians. The appearance of meekness (*pietà*), humanity (*umanità*), or piety (*religione*) might sometimes be important for the successful pursuit of political aims. Weakness as an instrument of power was well known in medieval politics. One of the examples most often cited in this context is an incident reported by Thietmar of Merseburg. At the synod of Frankfurt in 1007, Emperor Henry II practically forced his bishops to give in to his will by weeping and repeatedly throwing himself on the ground in front of the whole congregation. His point, namely, the foundation of a new bishopric of Bamberg, was thus eventually won.⁶ This example fits neat-

⁵Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage: Etude systématique des rites de la porte et du seuil, de l'hospitalité, de l'adoption, de la grossesse et de l'accouchement, de la naissance, de l'enfance, de la puberté, de l'initiation, de l'ordination, du couronnement, des fiançailles et du Mariage, des funérailles des saisons, etc.* (Paris, 1909); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York, 1995).

⁶Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2003), 104–29.

ly into the use of weakness as an instrument of power according to modern theories of the strategies of power. Modern handbooks on power generally dedicate a few sentences to the intelligent use of weakness, with advice such as: act in a stupid manner in order to overcome your stupid partner, pretend to be weak, avoid appearing cleverer than your boss, the appearance of defeat can sometimes be very helpful and transform weakness into power!⁷

III. Case Studies: Ritual Weakness in Medieval Inauguration Rituals

The following case studies from the Middle Ages illustrate rituals of weakness which the future ruler had to undergo in the course of inauguration ceremonies in different parts of medieval Europe. The examples to be discussed are (1) ritual defeat in a mock fight, (2) sexual intercourse and ritual bath, (3) ritual beatings, (4) ritual illness, and (5) ritual manslaughter.

1. *Ritual Defeat in a Mock Fight: The Irish Kings of Tara and Connacht*

Here we see a ritual element that forces the future king into suffering defeat. An example from Irish sources highlights this situation, namely, the inauguration of the kings of Tara in Ireland as described in the *vita* of the early Irish saint, Colmán. This hagiographical text, composed at some time in the twelfth century, contains an enumeration of the rights and privileges of St Colmán, and in this context a passage describes a detail of the local inauguration ritual of a new king:

And thus it should be done, the king to be at the foot of the pillar-stone of the hostages above, and the man of the Huí Forannan upon the flag-stone below, an open horsewhip in his hand so as to save himself as best as he can from the cast, provided that he do not step forth from the flagstone . . . The king

⁷ e.g. Robert Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power* (New York, 1998), law 21, 22, 46, 47.

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who shall slay a descendant of thine shall decay or die an early death, unless his steed and his dress be given to him for it.⁸

The text is cryptic, but the situation it describes is clearly a mock fight. Apparently the future king stands at the foot of the inauguration stone, which is occupied by one of his future subjects (a man of the Huí Forannan). The future ruler has to perform a difficult task: he must throw a javelin at his future subject, but is not allowed to hit him. Thus there seems to be no alternative but to demonstrate ‘incompetence’ in handling a spear. Of course, we could go further and interpret an otherwise lost trace of ritual manslaughter into this twelfth-century account of an inauguration scene. For present purposes, however, the humiliating aspects are more important. The element of humiliation is ritually embedded in a symbolic fight in which the future king claims access to the inauguration stone occupied by a man of his people. In order to win—that is, in order to gain access to the stone—the candidate must refrain from victory in the duel. Or in other words, there is no way to victory but by allowing defeat.

A marginal trace of the same motif might be recognized in the inauguration of the O’Conor kings of Connacht held at the royal mount of Carnfree (Carn Fraoich). This mount, in use over the centuries until the later Middle Ages, was also furnished with an inauguration stone. The rites that constituted the inauguration ceremony in Carnfree were no doubt influenced and changed by political realities. The only textual description is preserved in a late medieval prose tract and bardic poem, the prototype of which has been dated by Katharine Simms to the twelfth or thirteenth century.⁹ According

⁸ From the *Vita* of St Colmán, son of Lúachan (12th cent.). Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Betha Colmáin Maic Lúacháin: The Life of Colmán son of Lúachan*, Todd Lecture Series, 17 (Dublin, 1911), 72–3, § 70 (with a brief description of the inauguration of the kings of Tara. Trans. from the Old Irish by Kuno Meyer). Thanks to Dr Katharine Simms, who kindly drew my attention to this passage and suggested plausible readings. Cf. Elizabeth FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c.1100–1600: A Cultural Landscape Study* (Woodbridge, 2004), 99–129, at 49, 103.

⁹ Myles Dillon, ‘The Inauguration of O’Conor’, in J. A. Watt, J. B. Morrall, and F. W. Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies Presented to Aubrey Gwynn* (Dublin, 1961), 187–202, at 189, 197; for the dating of the text see Katharine Simms, ‘“Gabh umad a Feidhlimidh”: A Fifteenth-Century Inauguration Ode?’, *Eriu*, 31 (1980), 132–45. Cf. FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, 99–129.

to this ceremonial ode, the future king performs an act of humiliation before gaining access to the mount (and thus the stone). He has to give his horse to one of his subjects, a keeper of the mount, before bending down so that his subject can mount the horse from the future king's back.¹⁰ We might speak here of a mock deal, rather than a fight. However, the motif is the same: the ritual obliges the future ruler to act in a subordinate role.

2. Sexual Intercourse and Ritual Bath: The Kings of Donegal

The next example might be called one of the most unsettling cases of a medieval European inauguration ritual: the royal bath preceded by sexual intercourse between the future ruler and a horse. (See Illustration 1.) A ritual of this sort is described in the late twelfth century by the well-known author Gerald of Wales in his report on the inauguration of the kings of Donegal:

A new and outlandish way of confirming kingship and dominion. . . . There is in the northern and farther part of Ulster, namely in Kenelcunill, a certain people which is accustomed to appoint its king with a rite altogether outlandish and abominable. When the whole people of that land has been gathered together in one place, a white mare is brought forward into the

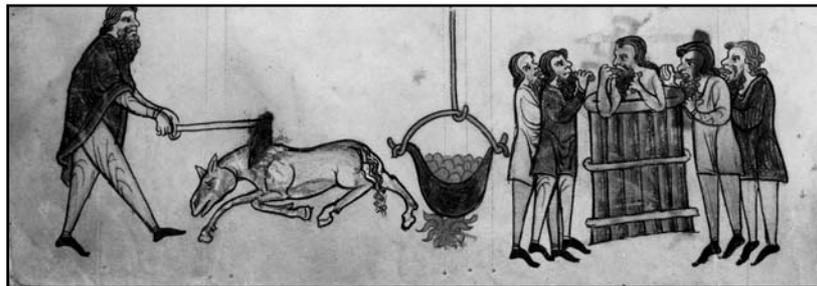


Illustration 1. Detail from Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hiberniae*, MS 700 National Library of Ireland (c.1200). Property of the Board of the National Library of Ireland. Reproduced with permission.

¹⁰ Dillon, 'The Inauguration of O'Conor', 189, 197.

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middle of the assembly. He who is to be inaugurated, not as a chief, but as a beast, not as a king, but as an outlaw, has bestial intercourse with her before all, professing himself to be a beast also. The mare is then killed immediately, cut up in pieces, and boiled in water. A bath is prepared for the man afterwards in the same water. He sits in the bath surrounded by all his people, and all, he and they, eat of the meat of the mare which is brought to them. He quaffs and drinks of the broth in which he is bathed, not in any cup, or using his hand, but just dipping his mouth into it round about him. When this unrighteous rite has been carried out, his kingship and dominion have been conferred.¹¹

The procedure is indeed disturbing. We are told that the king of Donegal, on the day of his inauguration in front of his future subjects, embraced a white mare ('jumentum candidum . . . Ad quod ille . . . bestialiter accedens'), which was then killed, boiled in water, and eaten by the whole assembly. The king-to-be in the meantime took a bath in the broth. This is what Gerald of Wales reports about the kings of Donegal.

¹¹ Giraldus Cambrensis, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. J. J. O'Meara (Mountrath, 1982), 109-10. For the Latin original see Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, ed. J. F. Dimock, in Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera Omnia* (RS 21,5) (London, 1867), 1-204, at 169: [Distinctio III, cap. 25:] 'De novo et enormi regni et domini confirmationis modo. . . Est igitur in boreali et ulteriori Ultoniae [Ulster] parte, scilicet apud Kenelcunnil [Cenel Conaille, today Donegal], gens quaedam, quae barbaro nimis et abominabili ritu sic sibi regem creare solet. Collecto in unum universo terrae illius populo, in medium producitur jumentum candidum. Ad quod sublimandus ille non in principem sed in beluam, non in regem sed exlegem, coram omnibus bestialiter accedens, non minus impudenter quam imprudenter se quoque bestiam profiteatur. Et statim jumento interfecto, et frustatim in aqua decocto, in eadem aqua balneum ei paratur. Cui insidens, de carnibus illis sibi allatis, circumstante populo suo et convescente, comedit ipse. De jure quoque quo lavatur, non vase aliquo, non manu, sed ore tantum circumquaque haurit et bibit. Quibus ita rite, non recte completis, regnum illius et dominium est confirmatum.' For a lucid recent description see Andrej Pleterski, 'Die Kärntner Fürstensteine in der Struktur dreier Kultstätten', in Axel Huber (ed.), *Der Kärntner Fürstenstein im europäischen Vergleich* (Gmünd, 1997), 43-119, at 84.

Historians disagree on the historical value of Gerald's account. It was and is read as a piece of written evidence testifying to the very roots of civilization, to the archaic ideas surviving on the Celtic fringes of Europe. In accordance with practices known from the common ancestry of Indo-European peoples, the ruler-to-be accomplishes a symbolic mating with the mare, which represents the sovereignty of the land.¹² On the other hand, the reliability of the source has often been questioned, and the passage in the *Topographia* has been dismissed as a piece of Anglo-Norman propaganda. Like other conquest historians in the twelfth century, Gerald, it was claimed, was collecting arguments to justify the conquest, for example, by documenting the barbarism of the subjected people. As he never visited the north of Ireland, his report of the Donegal inauguration is based on hearsay.¹³ In spite of the many parallels to the account that can be found in the rituals of other Indo-European peoples which, in fact, makes this sort of practice not implausible,¹⁴ Gerald's description is quite obviously biased. It is generally agreed that, as a representative member of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, Gerald collected material on his visits to Ireland as proof of the cruel and barbaric character of the Irish in order to justify the miserable outcomes of the Anglo-Norman invasion.¹⁵ We should keep in mind, therefore, that we owe our knowledge of the archaic Donegal inauguration to its force as a political argument in favour of a conquering people.

The Donegal inauguration inspired modern scholars to undertake comparative Indo-European anthropological studies from the nine-

¹² Julius Pokorny, 'Das nicht-indogermanische Substrat im Irischen', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 16 (1927), 95-144, at 123-5; Franz Rudolf Schröder, 'Ein altirischer Krönungsritus und das indogermanische Rossopfer', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 16 (1927), 310-12.

¹³ Gerald was in Ireland twice, first in 1183-4 in the company of his brother Phillip de Barry and again in 1185-6 with Prince John. For a brief and lucid summary of Gerald's life see A. B. Scott, 'Introduction', in Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland*, ed. and trans. Alexander Brian Scott and Francis X. Martin (Dublin, 1978), pp. xii-xxxiii.

¹⁴ Cf. Katharine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), at 22.

¹⁵ Cf. Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales 1146-1223* (Oxford, 1982), 158-77, 187-94; Beryl Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages* (London, 1974), 121-57; Smalley regards him as the most learned of the 'Conquest historians'.

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teenth century on; it provoked not only objections but also a search for comparable material. The intention of refuting the 'calumnious charges against the Irish people, princes and kings' brought by Gerald of Wales inspired John Lynch's interest in Carinthian ritual.¹⁶ Lynch dismissed the view that the story about the kings of Donegal had a historical core. His argument was that none of the holy bishops of Donegal would have allowed such a pagan rite to be practised in his diocese. He was also convinced that no country in the world would have such a disgusting way of installing its kings, although he mentioned that there were some customs in other parts of Europe which were no less ridiculous, for instance, the case of Carinthia.

So much for the historical context of the textual transmission of our knowledge about the inauguration of the kings of Donegal in a type of royal bath. The involvement of a horse is obviously one of the most prominent features in inauguration ceremonies amongst Indo-European peoples. Its prototype is usually traced back to the Indian *Asvamedha*, the ritual sacrifice of a male horse in the course of a new king ascending to the throne.¹⁷ We would thus have an Irish counterpart in the inauguration of the kings of Donegal. The fact that a mare and not a stallion is involved in the Irish case has given rise to a discussion about whether or not the custom was of Indo-European origin. The ritual intercourse of the king-to-be with the mare would then refer to the ritual view of territorial sovereignty as a female goddess or queen. In order to conquer the land, the future king had to conquer and lie with her. This tradition mingles with that of the ceremonial sacrifice: ritual slaughter of the horse, which is subsequent-

¹⁶ John Lynch, 'Cambrensis Eversus, seu potius Historica fides', in Matthew Kelly, *Rebus Hibernicis Giraldo Cambrensi Abrogata*, 3 vols. (Dublin, 1848), i. 111.

¹⁷ Schröder, 'Ein altirischer Krönungsritus', 310-12; Pokorny, 'Das nicht-indogermanische Substrat', 123-5; Wilhelm Koppers, 'Pferdeopfer und Pferdekult der Indogermanen', in id. (ed.), *Die Indogermanen- und Germanenfrage: Neue Wege zu ihrer Lösung* (Salzburg, 1936), 279-411; Jaan Puhvel, 'Aspects of Equine Functionality', in id. (ed.), *Myth and Law amongst the Indo-Europeans: Studies in Indo-European Comparative Mythology* (Berkeley, 1970), 157-72; id., *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, 1989), 267-76; Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*; Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth, 1991), 117-20; Yolande de Pontfarcy, 'Two Late Inaugurations of Irish Kings', *Études celtiques*, 24 (1987), 203-8; Pleterski, 'Die Kärntner Fürstensteine', 84.

ly boiled and consumed by all the people. Thus all share in the sovereignty of the land, which can then be transferred to the candidate.¹⁸

The temporary placing of the future king into the kettle with the broth is indeed unsettling. Pontfarcy interprets the bath in the soup as the completion of the ritual mating between the future king and the mare, the return into the cosmic uterus, and eternal rebirth.¹⁹ The cauldron used to boil the sacrificial meat to be eaten at the victors' feast figures as a symbol of sovereignty and plays a prominent part in Pindar's account of the horse competition at the Olympic Games of 476 BC.²⁰ Another trace leads to the concept of the ritual bath, knowledge of which is also transmitted from early modern Madagascar.²¹ Whether it is a symbolic return to the cosmic uterus or a ritual boiling of the sacrifice, I suggest that the public bath in the horse's broth should be added to our list of ritual sufferings and humiliations in medieval inauguration rites.

¹⁸ Note here that Emil Goldmann also suggested that the Carinthian rite had an original sacrificial function, arguing that the role of the animals involved, especially the horse, was that of a sacrificial victim. Add to this the fire-maker mentioned by John of Viktring and we have basically everything needed for a ceremonial sacrifice. Emil Goldmann, *Die Einführung der deutschen Herzogsgeschlechter Kärntens in den slowenischen Stammesverband: Ein Beitrag zur Rechts- und Kulturgeschichte* (Breslau, 1903); for a critical review of Emil Goldmann, see August von Jaksch writing in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 25 (1904), 69–103. The 14th-century contemporary John, however, gave an entirely different interpretation of the horse and the ox, claiming that they stand for the Carinthian people, who use cattle to till the Carinthian fields. Moreover, later sources all speak of a 'mageres ungestaltes Feldpferdt' (literally: an old mare) which would be fit neither for a sacrifice nor the task of representing the Carinthian people.

¹⁹ Pontfarcy, 'Two Late Inaugurations', 204.

²⁰ Gregory Nagy, 'Sovereignty, Boiling Cauldrons, and Chariot-Racing in Pindar's *Olympian 1*', in Emily Lyle (ed.), *Kingship* (Edinburgh, 1988), 143–7.

²¹ Maurice Bloch, 'The Ritual of the Royal Bath in Madagascar: The Dissolution of Death, Birth and Fertility into Authority', in David Cannadine and Simon Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), 271–97; Pietro Lupo, 'Un culte dynastique à Madagascar, le Fitampoha (bain des reliques royales)', *Etudes Océan Indien*, 16 (1993), 31–59.

3. *Ritual Beatings: A Slap in the Face for the Duke of Carinthia in Austria*

A Continental example of the public humiliation of a future ruler is the inauguration of the dukes of Carinthia at the *Fürstenstein*.²² Here we have a ritual beating—the future duke’s face is slapped, right in the middle of his inauguration ceremony. We will begin by introducing the inauguration site. The *Fürstenstein* consists of a Roman pillar turned upside down and placed on the earth, so that its original base provides a traversable platform. It was located in an open field near Karnburg and is now preserved in the atrium of the Landesmuseum Klagenfurt.²³ A second piece of inauguration furniture was the Duke’s Chair (*Herzogstuhl*), which was situated some miles away and apparently came into use once the elevation of the candidate to the dukedom was complete. As compared with the Irish examples cited so far, the Carinthian inauguration has the great advantage of being extremely well documented in the sources. In fact, so much brilliant research has recently been done on it that it will suffice here briefly to recapitulate the procedure and sketch the main problems of interpreting the rite.²⁴

The oldest comprehensive narratives about the Carinthian inauguration ceremony date from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth

²² For the most recent and comprehensive study of the Carinthian inauguration see Pleterski, ‘Die Kärntner Fürstensteine’; Peter Štih, ‘Die Nationswerdung der Slowenen und damit verknüpfte Geschichtsvorstellungen und Geschichtsmymen’, *Carintha*, 197 (2007), 365–81; Annette Kehnel, ‘*toren spil* und Geltungsmacht: Die Geschichte der Symbole der Kärntner Herzogseinsetzung’, in Gert Melville (ed.), *Institutionalität und Symbolisierung: Verstetigungen kultureller Ordnungsmuster in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Im Auftrag des Sonderforschungsbereiches* (Cologne, 2001), 477–91. For an older treatment of the Carinthian inauguration ritual that is still academically valid see Paul Puntchart, *Herzogseinsetzung und Huldigung in Kärnten: Ein verfassungs- und kulturgeschichtlicher Beitrag* (Leipzig, 1899), 11–29; see also Claudia Fräss-Ehrfeld, *Geschichte Kärntens, i. Das Mittelalter* (Klagenfurt, 1984), 343–50.

²³ The ritual use of the inauguration stone is closely associated with the Carinthian inauguration chair, sometimes named *sedes tribunalis*, situated some miles away near Maria Saal. It is first explicitly mentioned in the written sources as *sedes Karinthani ducatus* in a letter from the imperial notary, Burchard of Cologne, dating from the year 1161. August von Jaksch (ed.), *Die Kärntner Geschichtsquellen 811–1202* (Klagenfurt, 1904), 387, no. 1031.

²⁴ Cf. Pleterski, ‘Die Kärntner Fürstensteine’.

centuries, when the Habsburgs first created the dukedoms and installed the dukes of Carinthia.²⁵ The following description of the ritual procedure at the *Fürstenstein* is by the Irish historian John Lynch, who wrote in the year 1662. I cite him at length here, first because this text is not well known, and secondly because as far as I know he is the first historian to work on the Carinthian inauguration from a comparative perspective:

When a new prince is about to assume the reins of government in Carinthia, a singular ceremony is observed, unknown in any other state. A marble stone is erected in a wide meadow. When the inauguration is to take place, a peasant, to whom the office belongs by hereditary right, stands up on the stone, having on his right hand a young black cow and on his left a lank and half starved mare. The people are all around, and [there is] an immense concourse of peasants. The candidate, surrounded by a band clothed in purple, advances towards the stone; the insignia of his office are borne before him, and the whole train of the procession except himself is gorgeously dressed. He comes in peasant's dress, with a cap on his head, shoes on his feet, and a shepherd's crook in his hand, and looks more like a shepherd than a prince. As soon as he appears in sight, the man on the stone cries out in the Illyrian tongue, 'Who is he that cometh on so proudly?' 'The lord of the land is coming,' answer the surrounding multitudes. 'Is he a just judge?' he

²⁵ Joseph Seemüller (ed.), *Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik*, MGH Deutsche Chroniken V, 2 vols. (Hanover, 1890); Johannes Abbatus Victoriensis, *Liber Certarum Historiarum*, ed. Fedor Schneider, MGH Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum in usum Scholarum, 2 vols. (Hanover, 1909-10). A third authority is an insertion in two manuscripts of the High Middle German law compilation (the manuscripts from Gießen and St Gallen). The text of the Gießen manuscript is printed in Karl Rauch, 'Die Kärntner Herzogseinssetzung nach alemannischen Handschriften', in *Abhandlungen zur Rechts- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift Adolf Zycha* (Weimar, 1941), 173-232, at 185-8. For a compilation of the sources in Latin and High Medieval German see B. Grafenauer, *Ustoličevanje koroških vojvod in država karantanskih Slovencev / Die Kärntner Herzogseinssetzung und der Staat der Karantanerlawen*, Academia Scientiarum et Artium Slovenica, Class I: *Historia et Sociologia*, 7 (Ljubljana, 1952).

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asks; 'Seeks he the good of his country? Is he a free man? And worthy of the dignity? Does he practise and promote Christian piety?' 'He does and he will' answers the crowd. The man then resumes, 'Pray tell me by what right can he deprive me of this seat?' The master of the ducal palace answers: 'The place is purchased from you for sixty denari: these cattle,' he says, pointing to the cow and mare, 'shall be yours; you shall have the clothes which the duke takes off, and you and your whole family shall be free from tribute.' After this dialogue, the peasant lightly slaps the candidate's cheek, orders him to be a just judge, and after receiving the money, retires from his position. The duke then ascends the marble [column]; brandishes his sword as he turns round and round; addresses the people, and promises that he will be a just judge. They say, too, that he drinks water which is presented to him in a peasant's cap, as a pledge of his future sobriety, etc. . . . It is the princes of Austria that are thus installed: they are styled the archdukes.²⁶

John Lynch's text summarizes the installation based on Eneas Silvio Piccolomini's late medieval version in his work *De Europe*, compiled in 1458. Complemented by the earliest comprehensive descriptions from the fourteenth century, the procedure can be summed up as follows. The future duke appears at the stone and is dressed in a peasant's clothes by a hereditary 'dresser'. The stone, however, is already occupied by a peasant, a member of the family who holds the right to inaugurate the dukes ('rusticus libertus . . . per

²⁶ John Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus, seu potius historica fides in rebus hibernicis Giraldo Cambrensi abrogata*, ed. Matthew Kelly, 3 vols. (Dublin, 1848), iii. 344–7. The source used by John Lynch is a certain Joannes Auban, otherwise known as Johannes Boemus, John of Bohemia, who lived in the early 16th century and was a collector of antiquities and curiosities. In his work *Omnium gentium mores leges et ritus* he writes about the origin of mankind as readily as about the character of the people of Asia. Boemus Johannes (Aubanus), *Omnium gentium mores, leges et ritus*, ed. August Vindele (Augsburg, 1520), for the passages cited see: *Liber tertius*, vol. xiii. His source, in turn, was Eneas Silvio Piccolomini, private secretary and diplomatic adviser to the Habsburg Emperor Friedrich III, the later Pope Pius II (1458–64). Piccolomini reports on the installation of the dukes of Carinthia in *De Europe*, written in Austria in 1458, drawing on the work of John, abbot of Viktring (see p. 17 of this Article).

successionem stirpis ad hoc officium heredatus', John of Viktring). According to John of Viktring, the peasant holds a speckled ox with one hand, with the other a mare. According to Ottokar, the future duke brings these animals along. Then follows a litany of speech and replies. The peasant inaugurator asks the assembled people about the future duke, his character and Christian faith, and whether he is worthy of the ducal dignity. A symbolic deal between the future duke and the peasant follows. The latter receives the cattle, the clothes, sixty denari, and freedom from tax on his house in exchange for the dukedom. Eventually, a mock fight takes place between the duke and his inaugurator in which the duke is slapped in the face by the peasant, who then gives way to the duke. After taking possession of the inauguration stone, the duke turns around on the stone, swinging the sword to the four cardinal points; he then has to take a draught of water, brought to him in a peasant's hat, several fires are lit by the holder of the office of fire-maker ('incendiarius, quem dicunt ad hoc iure statutum'), a mass is celebrated in the nearby church of Maria Saal, and a meal follows. After the mass, the duke performs his duty as a judge for the first time, sitting on the Duke's Chair (*Herzogstuhl*), where he bestows fiefs upon his vassals.

There are many interpretations of the Carinthian inauguration. From the seventeenth century on political theorists interpreted the Carinthian people's right to install their future dukes as a significant contribution to the development of the contractual theory.²⁷ The nineteenth century was fascinated by the question of the national origins of the rite. Georg Graber read the inauguration as a ceremony based on Germanic laws and institutions, introduced and imposed on the subdued Slavic people by the German conquering tribes at some time in the seventh or eighth century.²⁸ Emil Goldmann, by

²⁷ Joseph Felicijan, *The Genesis of the Contractual Theory and the Installation of the Dukes of Carinthia* (Klagenfurt, 1967); for the Carinthian rite's importance for the idea of the democratic character of an ancient free Carinthian people, see Štih, 'Die Nationswerdung der Slowenen', 377.

²⁸ Georg Graber, *Der Eintritt des Herzogs von Kärnten am Fürstenstein zu Karnburg* (Vienna, 1919), 190; for a modern version of the nationalist stress on the Germanic origins of the ceremony see Wilhelm Mucher, *Die Sprache des Religionsunterrichts in Südkärnten. Zweite Entgegnung: Der Herzogbauer und sein Halsschlag* (Maria Saal, 1970) 53–128. See now Štih, 'Die Nationswerdung der Slowenen'.

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contrast, saw the original meaning of the ritual as the integration of a foreigner and outsider, namely, a Germanic ruler, into the Slavic tribal state.²⁹ The fact that the peasant asks his questions in a Slavic language ('windische rede' in Ottokar's *Reimchronik*; 'Slavice' in John of Viktring) seems to support the idea that the Slavic peasantry was welcoming a foreign Germanic chief. Goldmann in fact speaks of an initiation rather than an inauguration rite. He is thus the first (after John Lynch) to suggest a strictly comparative interpretation of the Carinthian ritual, tracing its origins to royal consecrations in ancient India (*rājasūya*) and pre-Christian ceremonial sacrifice. The inauguration stone might originally have been an altar plate, and the mare involved would have been intended as a sacrificial victim. This theory has recently resurfaced, and the Indo-European pedigree of the Carinthian rite and its kinship with ritual marriage and fertility rites (*hiros gamos*) have been much elaborated.³⁰ The oft lamented problem of the uniqueness of the Carinthian ritual can therefore be dismissed.³¹

This ceremony imposes a whole series of humiliations on the future duke. First, he is dressed in peasant clothes. Even if we accept the theory that it was a precious wedding costume that the duke had to wear, we must not forget that it was a peasant's wedding costume and not a duke's. The change of clothing performed in this account therefore fits neatly into the pattern of ritual undressing, which is often found at the opening of a *rite de passage* and symbolizes the renunciation of status and individuality. Ritual undressing and change of clothes in fact survived as an element of most European inauguration orders, even in imperial inaugurations. These aspects, however, tend to be marginalized and treated under the heading of 'subsidiary actions' (*Nebenhandlung*).³²

²⁹ Goldmann, *Einführung*, 699–706.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 115–91; for further literature see above, n. 17.

³¹ The uniqueness is often still stressed, see e.g. Claudia Fräss-Ehrfeld, *Geschichte Kärntens*, 348: 'Das Problem der Herzogseinsetzung ist ein Schlüsselproblem der Kärntner Geschichte, die Quellenlage macht es zu einem ungelösten. Die Einzigartigkeit dieser Zeremonie bedingt den Mangel an echten Vergleichen.'

³² See Percy Ernst Schramm, *Geschichte des englischen Königtums im Lichte der Krönungen* (Weimar, 1937), 9–10; *id.*, 'Der Ablauf der deutschen Königsweihe nach dem Mainzer Ordo (um 960)', in *id.*, *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste* (Stuttgart, 1969), iii. 59–107, at 63–4.

A second humiliation performed at the stone was the ritual interrogation concerning the qualities and characteristics of the candidate, during which the future duke is obliged to be absolutely silent. In a ceremonial litany, the peasant negotiates the candidate's suitability with the assembled people. In its fourteenth-century version, this litany, beginning with the peasant's question 'qui est iste, qui procedit?', is no doubt a Christianized version of the ritual trial, modelled on the messianic Old Testament prophecies in Psalm 24. Again, parallels might be drawn with other European coronation ceremonies.

A third and final element of ritual humiliation can be identified in the symbolic deal between the duke and his inaugurator, accompanied by a mock fight. The inaugurator frees the way to the stone, signifying access to power and the dukedom, in return for the cattle, clothes, money, and freedom from taxation. This idea of a symbolic deal between the king and his inaugurator is also common in Irish sources. In the story of the finding of Cashel, a swineherd gives the land to the future king Conall Corc in return for certain rights and gifts.³³ The above-mentioned ceremonial ode of the inauguration of the O'Conor kings of Connacht carefully lists all the rights and valuables which the king-to-be has to grant in return for the kingship. The idea of rulership as an item of trade turns power into an issue negotiated between the one who dominates and those dominated. The Carinthian example has often been cited as a showpiece of a people acting as sovereign by handing over power to the selected future holder, thus entering into a contract. The symbolic mock fight would ritually confirm the actual contract and, by inflicting physical pain, ensure proper commemoration of the treaty entered into. As in the above-mentioned Irish example concerning the kings of Tara, the mock fight exposes the future holder of power to the power of others and forces him into a ritually prescribed position of suffering.

4. Ritual Illness: The Invalid Ruler in Roman, French, and German Coronations

Another very potent image of the weak, ill, or invalid ruler is to be found in the context of the inauguration of French kings in Reims,

³³ Myles Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', *Eriu*, 16 (1952), 61-73, at 67 (trans. 72).

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medieval emperors in Rome, and German kings in Aachen. The first medieval imperial coronation ceremony was performed at Christmas 800 when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne in St Peter's Basilica in Rome. According to his biographer, Einhard, Charlemagne was taken completely by surprise. The oldest coronation order, however, dates from the year 960. In between, from Charlemagne to Berengar I (915), eleven emperors were crowned in Rome, but we know nothing about the actual procedure. The narrative sources are surprisingly uninterested in the issue. Reports of coronations only become fashionable from the fourteenth century onwards.³⁴

From the year 960, however, the procedure of the ceremonial crowning of the medieval emperor can be reconstructed from the *ordines*. These are texts which contain the actual order of the ceremony, list the words and prayers to be spoken by those involved, and provide instructions on how to proceed and what to do. Most of these texts were written in the wider context of the papal curia; that is, we have to take into account a clear clerical bias. The reconstruction and textual transmission of the *ordines*, which were widely distributed all over Europe and usually used for royal coronations in Aachen and elsewhere, was one of the major issues addressed by German historical research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Begun by Georg Waitz in 1873, this project was largely completed by Reinhard Elze in 1960; others, such as Helmut Beumann, Eduard Eichmann, and Percy Ernst Schramm also contributed a great deal.³⁵ It should

³⁴ One exception is the coronation of Louis the Pius by Pope Stephen II in 816, described by Ermoldus Nigellus in his epic, *Ad honorem Hludowici Christianissimi Caesaris Augusti*, Book II. Widukind of Corvey describes only the royal crowning of Otto I in Aachen (936), and probably wrote down what he saw when Otto II was installed in 962. The most reliable report of a medieval coronation is of the crowning of the very last emperor, Karl V, in Bologna in the year 1530. It was compiled by the papal master of ceremonies, who himself led the procedure. See Eduard Eichmann, *Die Kaiserkrönung im Abendland: Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des kirchlichen Rechts, der Liturgie und der Kirchenpolitik*, 2 vols. (Würzburg, 1942), i. pp. xii-xiii.

³⁵ Georg Waitz, *Die Formeln der deutschen Königs- und römischen Kaiserkrönung vom 10. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1873). Eichmann, *Kaiserkrönung im Abendland*; Reinhard Elze (ed.), *Ordines coronationis imperialis: Die Ordines für die Weihe des Kaisers und der Kaiserin*, MG Fontes iuris germanici antiqui IX (Munich, 1960); Schramm, 'Der Ablauf der deutschen Königsweihe'.

briefly be mentioned that no medieval imperial or royal coronation was exactly the same as its forerunner. Like all the rituals discussed so far, the political needs of the time always influenced the actual arrangements.³⁶

The Mainz Ordo, however, served as a *Leittext*, a guiding model. It survived in more than fifty copies from all over Europe, dating from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, and recorded the basic elements of every medieval coronation. One of the most famous copies is an illuminated manuscript of the Ordo for the sacralizing and crowning of the French kings, produced in the mid thirteenth century. According to Jacques Le Goff, this Ordo was never 'performed' and was only an ideal representation of a royal consecration as imagined by Louis the Pius. Le Goff also suggests, however, that the structure of this rite can be interpreted as a *rite de passage*.³⁷

The 'invalid king' is introduced in the first, pre-liminal phase of separation which, in the context of the coronation ritual, is symbolized by the act of escorting the candidate from the palace to the church. Both the Mainz and French Ordo specify an interesting aspect. Two bishops are commissioned to fetch the king from the palace, or to be more precise, to get him out of bed ('*exeunte rege de thalamo*'). They bear witness to his awakening and rising from bed. It is their duty to lead the candidate from his bed to the church, supporting him actively on the left and right side. This detail presupposes a state of weakness ritually imposed on the candidate.³⁸ The

³⁶ For coronations during the reign of the Hohenstaufen dynasty in the 12th and 13th centuries see e.g. Reinhard Elze, 'Eine Kaiserkrönung um 1200', in Bernhard Schimmelpfennig and Ludwig Schmugge (eds.), *Päpste – Kaiser – Könige und die mittelalterliche Herrschaftssymbolik: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (London, 1982), 365–73.

³⁷ Jacques Le Goff, Eric Palazzo, Jean-Claude Bonne, and Marie-Noël Colette, *Le sacre royal à l'époque de saint Louis d'après le manuscrit latin 1246 de la BNF* (Paris, 2001); see Jacques Le Goff, 'A Coronation Program for the Age of Saint Louis: The Ordo of 1250', in János M. Bak (ed.), *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual* (Berkeley, 1990), 46–57. For the distribution of the manuscripts of the Mainz Ordo see Schramm, 'Der Ablauf der deutschen Königsweihe', 63–4.

³⁸ Le Goff, 'A Coronation Program', 51. Cf. Richard A. Jackson, *Vive le Roi! A History of the French Coronation Ceremony from Charles V to Charles X* (London, 1984), 134–5. Le Goff observes this element at the coronation of Charles V in the early 14th century.

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central liminal phase is introduced with significant gestures: the candidate must lay aside his weapon and coat (a ritual undressing) and is led to the altar, where he lies on the ground with arms spread out in the form of a cross. He lies thus prostrate until the end of the litany and again before confession.³⁹ Then, of course, the liturgical interrogations might be interpreted as a ritualized trial: the future king is treated like a defendant. The act of anointing, finally, might be read alongside the ritual treatment of the ill and the dying who, apart from priests and bishops, were anointed in the Christian Church. The Mainz Ordo prescribes anointment not only of the head and wrists but also of the chest, which presupposes undressing. An eleventh-century medieval writer ascribes literal transformative powers to the act of anointing: 'te hodie in virum alterum mutavit.'⁴⁰

Finally, the act of coronation forces the candidate into a posture of submission, into an 'inclinatio semiplena' as Jean Claude Schmitt puts it, drawing on Humbert de Romanis.⁴¹ The coronation in the sacramentary of Warmundus of Ivrea (early eleventh century) illustrates the necessity of submitting to the authority of power.⁴² The one to be crowned, probably Otto III, has no choice but to bow down before his coronator.⁴³ This idea of the humiliated king can be traced back to the Old Testament Psalms, to the sufferings of the chosen king,⁴⁴ and to the image of the suffering servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53. The medieval sites of royal and imperial coronations, such as the altar of St Peter's in Rome, or that in the cathedral in Aachen, are

³⁹ See Elze (ed.), *Ordines coronationis imperialis*, 2: 'Deinde vadant ante confessionem beati Petri apostoli, et prosternat se pronus in terram, et archidiaconus faciat letaniam.'

⁴⁰ Schramm, 'Der Ablauf der deutschen Königsweihe', 72.

⁴¹ Jean Claude Schmitt, *Die Logik der Gesten* (Stuttgart, 1990), 285–6.

⁴² Ivrea Kapitularbibliothek, MS 86, fo. 191–206^v. B. Baroffio and F. Dell'Oro, 'L'Ordo Missae del vescovo Warmondo d'Ivrea', *Studi medievali*, 16/3 (1975), 795–823.

⁴³ In this context, it would be worth investigating medieval acts of self-coronation. There is an example from Visigothic Spain, where self-coronation was interpreted as an act of delegitimation. See Reinhard Schneider, *Königswahl und Königserhebung im Frühmittelalter: Untersuchungen zur Herrschaftsnachfolge bei den Langobarden und Merowingern* (Stuttgart, 1972), 200, n. 65.

⁴⁴ G. W. Ahlström, *Psalm 89: Eine Liturgie aus dem Ritual des leidenden Königs* (Lund, 1959), 40.

therefore places of humiliation and represent a period of temporary weakness on the part of the future emperor or king.

A final observation relates to one of the most important insignia of royal power in the Ottonian empire, the *Reichskrone*.⁴⁵ (See Illustration 2.) This insignia of power consists of eight metal plates,



Illustration 2. Detail from the *Reichskrone* (the Ottonian Imperial Crown): the Hezekiah (Isaiah) plate. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien. SK XIII 1. Western Germany, second half of the tenth century. Reproduced with permission.

four of them depicting the logic of the heavenly Jerusalem in a complicated arrangement of precious gems and jewels. The four other plates are pictorial enamels depicting the classical ideals of Christian rulership in the following personifications: Jesus Christ (*maiestas domini* or *pantocrator*), King David, King Solomon, and King Hezekiah. Each figure holds a banner bearing an inscription. The three kings are usually described as Old Testament models of Christian rule in the Middle Ages: Rex David with the reminder *honor regis iudicium diligit* (the honour of the kings loves justice); Rex Solomon with

⁴⁵ Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the never-ending story of the problems of dating the *Reichskrone*. The most generally accepted opinion dates it to the late 10th century. However, it has been plausibly argued that it dates from the 11th century (Mechthild Schulze Dörlamm) or even from the mid 12th century (Hans Martin Schaller). For a comprehensive account see Joachim Ott, 'Kronen und Krönungen in frühottonischer Zeit', in Bernd Schneidmüller and Stefan Weinfurter (eds.), *Ottonische Neuanfänge: Symposium zur Ausstellung 'Otto der Große, Magdeburg und Europa'* (Mainz, 2001), 171–88;

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the words *time Dominum et recede a malo* (fear the lord and keep away from evil). The banner on the Hezekiah plate is carried by Isaiah, the prophet, and reads: *Ecce adiciam super dies tuos xv annos* (I will add to your days another fifteen years).

King David and King Solomon are depicted standing, while the *maiestas domini* plate and the Hezekiah plate depict their kings seated. Most significant for our purposes is the observation that the Hezekiah plate, smaller than the other pictorial plates, represents a rather dubious ideal of kingship. The Old Testament King Hezekiah was disobedient and struck by God with disease for his sins. The plate depicts this king in a vulnerable position: sitting on his throne, supporting his head with his hand on his right cheek, the other hand on his heart. A suffering king! On his right the prophet Isaiah stands upright and in the foreground. He is about to tell the sick king of God's promise to restore the king's health and to add another fifteen years to his rule.

A suffering king on the central insignia of royal power in the medieval German empire might, in fact, be a reason to explore further the function of weakness in rites of empowerment as something more than a mere instrument of power, preferably employed by religious or archaic powers to suppress secular and rational forces. The public display of weakness might also be explained as a structural unit in the collective management of power in pre-modern, modern, and postmodern societies.

5. *Ritual Manslaughter: The Sword in the Crown of the German Emperor*

The final example in the series of case studies presented here dates from the fifteenth century. (See Illustration 3.) It is an image taken from the Chronicle of the Council of Constance by Ulrich von Richental which depicts King Sigmund enfeoffing the Duke of Bavaria in 1417 during the Council of Constance. The king sits on a throne,

a detailed analysis is offered by Gunther G. Wolf, *Die Wiener Reichskrone* (Vienna, 1995); Mario Kramp (ed.), *Krönungen. Könige in Aachen: Geschichte und Mythos. Katalog der Ausstellung*, vol. i (Mainz, 2001). A lucid account of the actual use of the royal insignia is given by Jürgen Petersohn, 'Die Reichsinsignien im Herrscherzeremoniell und Herrschaftsdenken des Mittelalters', in Gesellschaft für staufische Geschichte e. V. (ed.), *Die Reichskleinodien: Herrschaftszeichen des Heiligen Römischen Reiches* (Göppingen, 1997), 162–83.



Illustration 3. The enfeoffment of Duke Ludwig III of Bavaria, Count Palatine bei Rhein, by King Sigmund. Image from Ulrich von Richental, *Concilium zu Constanz* (Augsburg: Anton Sorg, 1483), fo. 99r. Library of Congress, Rosenwald Collection Incun. 1483.R5, available online at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbc3&fileName=rbc0001_2008rosen0097page.db&recNum=98>, accessed 1 Sept. 2011.

wearing the crown on his head and holding the sceptre in his left hand. Behind him, three princes of the realm stand with the royal insignia. The one in the foreground holds a sword in his left hand and stabs the king's head from behind, right in the centre of the crown. The scene is unsettling. What are we looking at? An assault? A ritual sacrifice? A public execution? Obviously we are seeing a person who, in the presence of others, is being threatened from behind with a sword. But none of those standing around seem to be unduly worried by this.

Nor are modern scholars, as Werner Paravicini has only recently pointed out. 'Strangely, the striking gesture has attracted little attention in the research. It has hardly been a problem to anyone. None of the many present-day colleagues I asked had an explanation to

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hand.⁴⁶ It seems, in fact, that historical research has rendered this threatening gesture all but invisible. Its threatening nature has either been overlooked, described without comment, or interpreted away.⁴⁷ Of course, the general warning to be very careful when interpreting medieval images must always be heeded. Richental's depictions could be visual misunderstandings, as Jürgen Petersohn and, in conversation, Karl Friedrich Krieger, have pointed out.⁴⁸ It is well known that Richental was a highly partial witness, and that he often lacked understanding of the symbolic content of the insignia and political communications of his time. Other contemporary witnesses do not report this gesture at all. It is therefore likely that what is shown in the image from Richental's Chronicle has little to do with what actually happened at the Council of Constance.

The evidence is, however, explicit. With the same clarity, presented unmistakably in word and image, the 'sword in the crown' is mentioned on nine further occasions in April and May 1417. Eight were enfeoffments of high-ranking imperial princes, which Sigmund had called for in the new year, among them Friedrich von Hohenzollern, Burgrave of Nuremberg (18 April 1417); Duke Ludwig VII the Bearded of Bavaria-Ingolstadt (11 May 1417); Ernst and Wilhelm III of Bavaria-Munich (11 and 13 May 1417); Archbishop Johann of Nassau (23 February 1417); Duke Adolf of Kleve (21 or 28 April 1417); Johann of Bavaria, Count Palatine of Neumarkt-Amberg (13 or 31 May 1417); and Magnus of Saxony, Prince Bishop of Camin (26 May 1417). The gesture was carried out again (and perhaps for the last time) when Duke Friedrich IV of Austria was retrospectively enfeoffed on 8 May 1418. Finally, a highly detailed description of the

⁴⁶ Werner Paravicini, 'Das Schwert in der Krone', in Franz J. Felten, Annette Kehnel, and Stefan Weinfurter (eds.), *Institution und Charisma: Festschrift für Gert Melville zum 65. Geburtstag* (Münster, 2009), 279–309, at 292.

⁴⁷ For a recent description of the scene see Karl-Heinz Spieß, 'Kommunikationsformen im Hochadel und am Königshof im Spätmittelalter', in Gerd Althoff (ed.), *Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 2001), 261–90, esp. 272, ill. 3, with a commentary on the act of enfeoffment at 277–85.

⁴⁸ Jürgen Petersohn, 'Über monarchische Insignien und ihre Funktion im mittelalterlichen Reich', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 266 (1998), 47–96, at 79–80. Paravicini, 'Schwert in der Krone', 294, n. 34 mentions private correspondence in a letter of 23 Aug. 2007.

sword in the crown is mentioned for Christmas 1414, when King Sigmund attended mass in Constance cathedral. Again, image and text clearly refer to the 'sword in the crown': 'while the king sang, the duke of Saxony stood behind him, with the naked sword in his hand, and he held the tip of the sword right to the centre of the king's head.'⁴⁹ There is no doubt: all manuscripts of the chronicle unanimously testify, in word and image, to these ten occasions on which the same gesture was used at the enfeoffment of the imperial princes.⁵⁰

Historians have offered a number of possible interpretations which make the gesture less threatening. Legal historians have interpreted the sword as the 'axis of God's rule', in the words of L. Fischel, for example, while G. Wacker has described it as an axis of law linking the divine and the earthly judge-king.⁵¹ Bernd Schneidmüller, building on the work of Hermann Heimpel, has recently embedded the Christmas reading of Sigmund in the context of late medieval tendencies of desacralization. He has pointed out that the precedence of the Christian empire over the Church is anchored in the festive liturgy in a highly sophisticated way, for what is being read is the opening of the second chapter of the Gospel of St Luke: 'In these days a decree went out from Ceasar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. Exiit edictum a Cesare Augusto, ut aescriberetur universus orbis.' This sentence turns the history of salvation into a chapter in the history of the emperor, as it were: 'For after all, in calling a census, Caesar Augustus created the preconditions for the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The Roman empire thus preceded the Christian church.'⁵² All these interpretations have one thing in common: they deflect our attention away from an act that physically threatened the

⁴⁹ 'Und die will er das sang, stünd der hertzog von Saxen ob im und hat ain bloß schwert in der hand, und hub das hoch uff und stackt den spitz gen des kaisers hopt.' Ulrich Richental, *Das Konzil zu Konstanz MCDXIV-MCDXVIII: Kommentar und Text*, ed. O. Feger (Starnberg, 1964), ch. 48, quoted in Paravicini, 'Schwert in der Krone', 281.

⁵⁰ Paravicini, 'Schwert in der Krone', 288-92.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 288.

⁵² Bernd Schneidmüller, 'Investitur- und Krönungsrituale: Mediävistische Ein- und Ausblicke', in Marion Steinicke and Stefan Weinfurter (eds.), *Investitur- und Krönungsrituale: Herrschaftseinsetzungen im kulturellen Vergleich* (Cologne, 2005), 475-88, at 488.

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ruler and direct it towards the assumed symbolic content of this strange gesture, regardless of whether the spoken act of the imperial reading is regarded as a liturgically concealed statement of imperial superiority, or whether the sword is seen as a reminder that all power originates in divine authority.

A third line of argument must also be mentioned here. Intentionally or not, the Christian understanding of sacred rule as expressed in this ritual conveys strong connotations of Christian *humilitas*. This is a commonly and universally used building block in the medieval language of ritual, whether within the framework of the inauguration of a ruler, enfeoffment, the consecration of a ruler, conflict resolution, or another situation of political communication. The argument goes that the ritual transformed a ruler threatened by a sword into a ruler urged to practise the Christian virtue of humility.

The following attempt to interpret the sword in the crown is linked to this argument. It starts with the interpretation of the gesture as an 'old ceremonial protective gesture',⁵³ first suggested by Hermann Heimpel and Hartmut Boockmann. This may initially sound paradoxical, for who is being protected from whom? One potentially revealing source who answers this question is connected to the coronation of Otto I as emperor in 962. According to Thietmar of Merseburg, on the occasion of his coronation Otto I had named the later bishop of Utrecht as sword-carrier, asking him to hold the sword over his head 'when I am praying at the holy threshold of the apostles today'.⁵⁴ Thietmar, who was writing in 1018 (and thus more than

⁵³ Hartmut Boockmann, Herbert Jankuhn, and Wilhelm Treue (eds.), *Athenaion Bilderatlas zur Deutschen Geschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 285, Tafel 99b, Commentary at 626; Hermann Heimpel, 'Königlicher Weihnachtsdienst auf den Konzilien von Konstanz und Basel', in id., *Aspekte: Alte und neue Texte*, ed. S. Krüger (Göttingen, 1995), 101-31, at 114; cf. Paravicini, 'Schwert in der Krone', 293-4.

⁵⁴ Thietmar von Merseburg, *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. and annotated David A. Warner (Manchester, 2001), bk. IX, ch. 32, p. 175: 'When the aforementioned Caesar entered Rome, he made this trustworthy youth his sword-bearer, with the following words: "Today, while I am praying at the threshold of the Apostles, you must continually hold the sword above my head. For I am well aware that the Romans' loyalty to our predecessors was often suspect. It is wise to foresee adversity while it is still distant and thus avoid being found unprepared for it."'

fifty years after the event he describes), had found a practical explanation for this gesture by pointing to the emperor's fear of the traitorous Romans. The function of the sword over the imperial head was to protect it.

The episode contains an important pointer, however. The sword-carrier is to spring into action on the threshold of the church. The sword is to be lifted above the future emperor at precisely the moment when he is waiting and praying on the threshold of St Peter's. The candidate is led to the church in a solemn procession. As early as the Mainz Ordo, the threshold of the church has a symbolic function. *Ad sacra limina apostolorum*, in the Mainz Ordo, *ad ostium ecclesiae*, is where the future emperor must wait while the archbishop and the bishops pray to God to support the weak candidate. In this view, then, the task undertaken by the Ottonian sword-carrier is not designed to protect the candidate, but rather an exaggerated statement of the candidate's vulnerability on the threshold of the church, at the very core of liminality. Seen in this way, the analogy which Boockmann and Heimpel assume between an Ottonian gesture of protection in the context of the emperor's coronation and the sword in the crown at the enfeoffments in Constance is highly plausible. But we might add a further dimension. The 'old ceremonial gesture of protection' expresses the power of the protector as well as the weakness of the protected (king). The scene therefore supplies an intense image of the 'powers of weakness' by depicting the ruler's need for protection. The materiality of the sword above the ruler's head stores an awareness of the fragility of power. It argues with the power of weakness in the central passage of status elevation. The gesture in Constance can find a place in this tradition.

IV. *Cross Cultural Case Studies*

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the above-mentioned Carinthian example already caused a lively academic discussion in which Emil Goldmann, for example, drew a comparison with the annual consecration of the king in the ancient Indian *rājasūya* ritual mentioned at the beginning of this article. The Babylonian *Akitu* festival is often mentioned as a prototype for this form of ritual. This was a festival of ritual renewal, which lasted for several days and is

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known to have existed in two forms, as a spring and autumn festival, from perhaps as early as 3,000 BC. Within the framework of this festival, performed every year, the king was divested of his insignia. He had to submit to a ritual trial in the temple and to endure the blows of the high priest before – ritually renewed – he could assume sovereignty for another year.⁵⁵

On this trail of Ancient Near Eastern culture we must include the tradition of the ill-treated *Gottesknecht*, the image of the suffering king that forms a leitmotiv of Christian images of rule, but goes back as far as the origins of the people of Israel. It is assumed that the Canaanite–Israelite ritual renewal of life left traces of their liturgical staging in the Psalms of Lamentation of the Elect.⁵⁶ Isaiah's words, too, 'He had no beauty or majesty . . . He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not' (Isaiah 53: 2–3) can be read as a liturgical accompaniment to the ritual humiliations undergone in the context of the Canaanite rituals of installation.

Early ethnological studies dating from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries document practices that are, in many respects, unsettlingly analogous: the ruler beaten in Sierra Leone, South India, and Zaire,⁵⁷ and the martyred and ritually murdered ruler of Burkina

⁵⁵ S. A. Pallis, *The Babylonian Akitu Festival* (Copenhagen, 1926); Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'Akitu', in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 5 vols. (2nd edn. Detroit, 2005), i. 221–4; Amélie Kuhrt, 'Usurpation, Conquest and Ceremonial: From Babylon to Persia', in Cannadine and Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty*, 20–55, esp. 32, n. 33 for the sources. The longest text is incomplete and dates to Hellenistic times, after Alexander the Great. Claus Ambos completed his *Habilitationsschrift* at the University of Heidelberg in 2009, and it will be published soon. For now see Claus Ambos, 'Weinen aus Demut: Der babylonische König beim Neujahrsfest', in id., Stephan Hotz, Gerald Schwedler, and Stefan Weinfurter (eds.), *Die Welt der Rituale: Von der Antike bis heute* (Darmstadt, 2005), 38–40; Claus Ambos, 'Das "Neujahrsfest" zur Jahresmitte und die Investitur des Königs im Gefängnis', in Doris Prechel (ed.), *Fest und Eid: Instrumente der Herrschaftssicherung im Alten Orient* (Würzburg, 2008), 121–34.

⁵⁶ Herbert Haag, *Der Gottesknecht bei Deuterocesaja* (Darmstadt, 1985); cf. Ahlström, *Psalms* 89, 40.

⁵⁷ James George Frazer, 'The Burden of Royalty', in id., *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, ii. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* (London, 1966),

Faso, documented in Michael Cartry's fascinating studies.⁵⁸ Other examples might be added here. Suzanne Blier, to cite just one, highlights the paradoxical alliance between royal perfection and ritually induced physical disability in the African concepts of kingship found in Benin, Yoruba, Dahomey, and Cuba. Physical imperfection and weakness seem to have influenced various types of African royal ceremony and art. Since kings were forbidden by ritual to speak in pub-

1-25. Frazer cites John Matthews, *A Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone, on the Coast of Africa* (London, 1791), 75. Here the preconditions for royal office are mentioned, among them knowledge of local traditions, a command of rhetoric, 'a good head', sobriety, and the capacity to receive the complaints and ailments of the people. Except among the Mandingos and the Suzeés, kings are usually strangers: 'few kings are natives of the country they govern.' However, there is no hint of ritual maltreatment of the future king. J. Zweifel and M. Moustier, 'Voyages aux sources du Niger', *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, 20 (1880), 111. A report of their (highly entertaining) performance before the Société is on p. 579. No mention, however, is made there of the maltreatment of kings. Frazer also cites Olfert Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique contenant les noms, la situation & les confins de toutes ses parties, leurs rivières, leurs ville & leurs habitations, leurs plantes & leurs animaux, les mœurs, les coutumes, la langue, les richesses, la religion & le gouvernement de ses peuples* (Amsterdam, 1686; reprint 1970), 250 where we find the following description of the election of a king of Sierra Leone: 'Lors qu' un Roi est mort, son fils lui succède; que s'il n'a point d'enfant mâles: c'est son frere ou son plus proche parent qui monte sur le trône. Avant qu'on le proclame Roi, on le va chercher dans sa maison, on le charge des chaînes & on l'amene ainsi dans le Palais, où il lui faut essayer un certain nombre de coups qu'on lui donne. Ensuite on rompt ses liens, on lui met les vêtement Royal & on l'amene dans le Funco où les Principaux du Royaume sont assemblez, & le doyen des Soldatequis après un long discours, pour prouver les droits du Roi á la couronne, lui remet entre les mains les marques de la dignité Royale, qui sont une espece de hache avec laquelle on tranche la tête aux criminels. C'est ainsi qu'on installoit les Rois sur le trône de Sierra Lionna (!) avant que les Rois de Quoja ou Cabo-monte s'en emparassent, ces Princes y envoyant maintenant un Gouverneur avec le titre de Dondagh qui signifie Roi.'

⁵⁸ Michel Cartry, 'Le suaire du chef', in id., *Sous le masque de l'animal: Essais sur le sacrifice en Afrique Noire* (Paris, 1987), 131-231, esp. 206-8, 221-4. He also makes mention of a ritual bath (211) and a series of ritual abuses (210-11). See 211: 'Il n'est pas ici nécessaire de décrire les épreuves que subira le chef durant cette retraite . . . Selon divers informateurs, l'apprentissage de la marche est une terrible épreuve. L'on dit que de cette leçon de marche, le chef – homme âgé, parfois un viellard – sortirait brisé.'

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lic, they assumed aspects of a mute; too sacred (or dangerous) to touch the ground, they were transported on hammocks; they stood with their arms supported by courtiers, had to move extremely slowly, or held court while lying prone on special back rests, all characteristics signalling at once disability and physical inability to stand independently.⁵⁹

V. *The Power of Weakness Beyond the Middle Ages*

Taken together, these images suggest a strong tradition of ritually induced states of weakness in a future ruler (defeat, illness, beatings, maltreatment, murder), across different time periods and cultures. Kings and princes in India, Ireland, Babylon, Carinthia, France, and Germany might have more in common than historians like to admit. The medieval historical tradition, in particular, has treated its kings and emperors all too gently, often seeming to fear cross-cultural comparison like the plague. Christian rulers have been treated as an entirely unique species, only to be understood within the comprehensive framework of the European Christian tradition. One might even speak of an occidental belief in a Western Christian *Sonderweg* that has blinded historical research until today. To the present day, there is a firm insistence that a structural difference exists between the Christian and other concepts of rulership.⁶⁰ Franz-Reiner Erkens has only recently widened the 'German historical horizon' by suggesting cross-cultural comparisons beyond the boundaries of the Christian world. In the introduction to his most recent monograph on sacred kingship, he argues not only that the distinction between Christian and pagan concepts of rulership should be dropped altogether, but also that Christian concepts of rulership should no longer be treated as particular cases within the cultural development of human soci-

⁵⁹ Suzanne Preston Blier, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form* (New York, 1998), 11–41: 'Paradoxes of Rule', esp. 32.

⁶⁰ Hans-Hubert Anton, 'Sakralität', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. vii (Munich, 1999), col. 1263: 'Auch wenn alle diese Formen in religionsgeschichtl. Phänomenologie unter S. gefaßt werden könnten, sollen die bibl.-christl. geprägten wegen wesentl. struktureller Verschiedenheit als sakral-theokrat. bezeichnet werden.'

eties.⁶¹ The 'power of weakness' no longer deserves treatment as something unique, whether as a memento to Christian *humilitas* or an expression of archaic or pagan traditions.

Ritually induced weakness is a constant part of rituals of power all over the world. There is something that we might call the art of weakness (*Schwäche zeigen*). Elements of humiliation right at the centre of universal rituals of power can be seen less as indicating religious domination and much more as an expression of collective knowledge about a fundamental rule of power. I suggest reflecting on the possibility that claims to authority and power can only be successful if power finds ways and symbols of expressing its weakness, its own contingency, its fragility. Future research might therefore look for rituals and symbols of weakness as an expression of the collective knowledge of the indispensable need for balance in the making of social coherence. They could be analysed as elementary units in what we might call the social reproduction of order.

All the examples mentioned here have one thing in common: in the ritual performance, the future ruler is physically weakened (sometimes going as far as ritual killing). He is forced to submit; the transience of human existence is demonstrated to him. Rituals of humiliation, the symbolism of infirmity, and gestures of protection are ubiquitous in the rituals marking the accession and maintenance of power. They have a fixed place in the repertoire of cultural strategies of legitimization.

In any case, the ritual beatings of the Indian kings which opened this article are more than just the reenactment of a struggle for power between secular and spiritual authority. Anyone who wants to rule must be prepared to suffer. Awareness of this connection can be demonstrated across cultures and periods, and is certainly not something unique to the Christian Middle Ages. This knowledge perhaps separates the Middle Ages more from the age of absolutism than from the present day. Anyone who wants to rule today must be prepared to suffer: electioneering in soup kitchens, appointment diaries

⁶¹ Franz-Reiner Erkens, 'Sakral legitimierte Herrschaft im Wechsel der Zeiten und Räume', in id. (ed.), *Die Sakralität von Herrschaft. Herrschaftslegitimierung im Wechsel der Zeiten und Räume: Fünfzehn interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu einem weltweiten und epochenübergreifenden Phänomen* (Berlin, 2001), 3–32, at 21; id., *Herrschersakralität im Mittelalter: Von den Anfängen bis zum Investiturstreit* (Stuttgart, 2006).

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that put the achievements of medieval asceticism in the shade, public grillings in talk shows, the revelation of private lives in gossip magazines, and so on. As a rule, beatings of the elect still play a central part in the machinery of power today. They are, however, administered differently: not on a single occasion, in a concentrated and violent form within the ritual framing the accession to power, but democratically institutionalized and permanently watched over by the media in the 'bodies of power'.

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