



1

His Majesty

Let there be one ruler, / one king, to whom the
son of devious-devising Kronos / gives the scepter
and right of judgment, to watch over his people.

—ILIAD, II:204–6

IN HIS *SIETES PARTIDAS* KING ALFONSO the Wise said that “emperadores et reyes son como comenzamiento et cabeza de los otros,” “alma e cabeza, et ellos los miembros” (emperors and kings are the birth and brain of humankind, soul and brain, and the others are the limbs).¹ The state was like a human body, in which the king was the soul and brain; the subjects the limbs. In England, during the last agonizing days of sickness of King George V, a psychoanalyst observed the reaction of three of his patients. All exhibited worsening symptoms of physical and mental conditions. The night after the death of the sovereign, one dreamed he had shot at a man who resembled his father; another had depressing memories of the death of his own father; the third patient dreamed that his father was dead.² In 1978, in New Guinea, 912 Americans testified to their attachment to the charismatic leader Jim Jones by committing collective suicide.³

Since the world began, no community has failed to recognize a leader, a mediator between the community itself and heaven. Whether this leader was a priest or a warrior is a secondary matter. A. M. Hocart has justly observed that kings and bishops are but two branches of the same tree,⁴ and Géza Roheim, studying the divinity of kingship, wrote that this “is either an earth-born power projected into heaven, or the shadow of heaven upon earth.”⁵ The idea of the divinity of kingship began in Egypt and developed into a complex political and religious system. “The main purpose of this cosmological speculation was to show that Egypt was primitively ruled by gods and that the unification of the two parts of Egypt was the realization of a divine plan.”⁶ Egyptian influence on the evolution of kingship in classical times can be dated from the conquests of Alexander the Great, even though it developed much further in the Roman world.⁷ Hellenistic political thought elaborated the idea that the sovereign was the compassionate manifestation of God to humanity, the shepherd of his flock, father and benefactor, font of law, or better still the very personification of law. Since the sovereign was *pater*, any regicide was judged a parricide, in fact the greatest parricide. After the discovery of a conspiracy against Emperor Frederick II in March 1246, the guilty were judged on the basis of the Roman

1. *Las Sietes Partidas* 1807, pt. 1, intr., and ley v, 11, p. 3.

2. Fairbairn 1936, 278–84. Cf. De Grazia 1948, 114.

3. Pozzi 1990.

4. Hocart [1927] 1969.

5. Roheim [1930] 1972, 204.

6. Dvornik 1966, 1:5.

7. Taylor 1931.

law *Lex pompeia* and treated as parricides, closed up in a leather sack (*culleus*), and cast into the sea.⁸

“This sublime conception of kingship was destined to offset the danger that always befalls the concentration of absolute power in the hands of a single man, while the king’s divinization made such concentration bearable and acceptable to his subjects.”⁹ Thus the very image of the sovereign stamped on the obverse of coins—in place of images of divinities, who were the celestial patrons shown on coins issued by the Greek cities—served to guarantee the purity of the metal.

The inheritance of Greek political thought was not, however, transmitted directly to the Roman republic. A cultural shift was accomplished at the end of the first century B.C., in the time of Julius Caesar, the patron of Cleopatra; Pompey, the conqueror of Jerusalem; and Anthony, the lover of the same Cleopatra in Alexandria.¹⁰ The deification of Caesar was a fundamental step in the development of the Roman cult of kingship. The divine immortality of Octavius, as *divi filius* (son of god), was recognized on his death, and in life he received the honors reserved for a *divus*.¹¹ Asiatic cults entered the political life of the West through a Roman filter, leaving their mark as much on regional traditions as they did on the church liturgy of the High Middle Ages. The church fathers identified government with *patria potestas* and considered the emperor to be the guardian of the world. Fritz Kern writes that governments were thought of as miniature images of divine government.¹² I would say, rather, that divine government was imagined through the model of the earthly one. Elements of the imperial cult were integrated into the Byzantine Empire in a religious syncretism that developed basically two features: the Stoic doctrine of providence (*Providentia augusta*)¹³ and the association of the ruler with the sun, a theme that appeared in Rome after the accession of Heliogabalus in 219. This was when the circle of solar rays was adopted, a Hellenistic symbol. After the conversion of Constantine, the diadem lost its rays, but it was still not abandoned. The solar heritage was not the only regal trait received from the past, however, since the West, well before the coronation of Louis the Pius (816), took from Israel a conception of kingship based chiefly on anointing. Thus Christian monarchy overlay and fused together different regal cults. “Christian thought of the Eastern Roman Empire was based upon Hellenistic political thought . . . what appealed most forcibly to the imagination of Christian writers was the notion of divine monarchy.”¹⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, in *De laudibus Constantini*,¹⁵ gave these theories their Christian meaning, the monarch being Christ on earth. In *De monarchia*, Dante, referring to the king, spoke of his “necessity.” Even the emperor’s apotheosis (his deification on his death) was replicated. In 337, after Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, the Roman mint struck a coin with the legend *DIVUS CONSTANTINUS PATER AUGUSTORUM* (divine Constantine, father of emperors), showing the emperor ascending the heavens riding in a solar chariot.¹⁶

8. Kantorowicz 1988, 638–40; Nardi 1980.

9. Dvornik 1966, 1:278.

10. Blumenthal 1913.

11. Dvornik 1966, 11:491. But see also Pippidi 1945.

12. Kern [1914] 1939, 7.

13. Brehier and Battifol 1920; Charlesworth 1936 and 1939; Fears 1977, 221ff.

14. Dvornik 1966, 11:611.

15. PG, xx.

16. Cohen 1888, VII, n. 760; Bickermann 1929 and 1972; Boer 1972; Settis and Frugoni 1973, 51ff.; Halsberghe 1972, 167ff.; Cameron 1976, 19–20.

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Fig. 1 Christos Helios in the celestial chariot of fire, Giullii mausoleum, arcosolium, Rome, Grotte Vaticane.

Even the idea of the king as animate law was introduced in the new religion. The iconography of the *traditio legis* (e.g., in the Ambrosian ciborium)¹⁷ refers frequently to this kind of royal worship. In Bertand de la Tour's sermon in memory of Charles of Calabria (the son of King Robert of Naples) we can read that "iste dominus Karolus fuit fedelissimus deo, dei etiam vicarius" (this lord Charles was most faithful to God, whose vicar he was).¹⁸ It was not until English constitutional thought of the fourteenth century that a different concept of the king appeared, as subordinate to natural law: "the king is under God and the law, for it is the law which makes the king." In his political treatises, Sir John Fortescue (1394–ca. 1476) quoted Saint Thomas Aquinas: "Rex datur propter regnum, et non regnum propter regem" (the king is given to the realm, not the realm to the king), to affirm the distinction between a "dominium regale" (royal dominion) and a "dominium politicum et regale" (political and royal dominion), the second only applicable to England.¹⁹

Dante's image of pope and emperor as "two suns" is well known,²⁰ and the solar cult always remained tied to kingship. In fact, one of the appellations of the Roman emperor was *Sol invictus* (unconquered sun).²¹ Reflecting the same meaning, the coronation mantle

17. Bertelli, Brambilla Barcilon, and Gallone 1981, 20–31.

18. Quoted in D'Avray 1994, 152.

19. Baumer 1940, 10–11.

20. Kantorowicz 1963, and here, Part II, Chapter 8.

21. See L'Orange 1935; Halsberghe 1972.

Image not available

Fig. 2 Saint Francis in the celestial chariot of fire, Giotto, Assisi, Basilica superiore.

of the emperor Henry II was spangled with stars.²² We could add that a solar chariot transported Alexander the Great to heaven,²³ that one of the versions of the death of Romulus repeated the same legend, and that the *Christos-Helios* was presented with the same chariot in the mosaic of the Giulii mausoleum (Fig. 1; it is now located under the Confessional of St. Peter in the Vatican).²⁴ The solar chariot was also used for Christ by Bishop Rabbula.²⁵ Saint Francis of Assisi made his ascent to heaven in a similar chariot, at least as depicted in the images left to us by Giotto (Fig. 2) and by Taddeo Gaddi, based on the tale of Bartolomeo de Rinonico in *De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Jesu*. Even if western Christendom did not accept the solar cult for its own kings,²⁶ one must admit that a hundred years before Louis XIV, who called himself the “Sun King,” Cosimo I de’ Medici as grand duke of Tuscany played with the assonance of his own name with “cosmos.”²⁷ The duke also thought the battle of Montemurlo (where his adversaries were defeated) was a personal “resurrection,” which allowed him to assume the zodiacal sign of Capricorn, the same sign used by Caesar Augustus.

Even without resorting to deification, Byzantium knew Caesaro-papism.²⁸ What distinguished the Christian Byzantine emperors from their Hellenistic and Roman predecessors, who had already recognized the sacredness of kingship, were the priestly characteristics inherited from the tradition of divination.²⁹ The kings of western Christianity, who were weaker with regard to the papacy, tended to adopt the binomial *rex sacerdos*,

22. Schramm 1963, 26; Paul 1983; but see also Poelnitz 1973; *Le soleil* 1983.

23. Settis and Frugoni 1973.

24. Testini 1966, 76.

25. See here, Chapter 4, page 65.

26. Brown 1982b.

27. See Forster 1977.

28. See Dagron 1996. For the imperial image, see Grabar 1936.

29. Dagron 1996, 21.

focusing on the assimilation of sacred and profane, when they did not aspire directly to sainthood, for themselves or their ancestors,³⁰ as with Saint Louis (Fig. 3).³¹ It seems unlikely that the Carolingians had to seek further for the supernatural powers attributed to them—which the Frankish *reges criniti* (long-haired kings)³² had possessed earlier—than the unction they received from the church, to which they had submitted. “The ecclesiastical revolution under the early Carolingians had created a theoretical structure of kingship.”³³ It was precisely to attenuate this submission that they developed the idea of the “Regnum Davidicum.”³⁴ In the Holy Roman Empire, Otto III wanted to call himself *Servus apostolorum*, with reference to Saints Peter and Paul: “The emperor associated his government with that of the pope, the successor precisely of Peter and Paul.”³⁵ As a tenth-century *Ordo* for the imperial coronation prescribed: “The prayer finished, the elect proceeds to the choir of Saint Gregory with the cardinals, arch-presbyters, and archdeacons who have assisted him during the office of anointing, and after having clothed him with the amice, alb, and girdle, they bring him to the sacristy before the pope, who makes him a priest and gives him the tunic and dalmatic.”³⁶ For France, Villette emphasized approvingly that “Charles the Bald never entered a church without his dalmatic, to show that in church he was a member of the clergy, and outside of church he struck with his sword as a king.”³⁷ A page noted with regard to Louis XVI that “every day the king attended Mass. . . . When the king was in the lower part of the chapel, he was presented with the *corpse* to kiss it,” and, he added, “it was one of the prerogatives of royalty, since the king was considered to be a subdeacon.”³⁸

As well, under Emperor Frederick II the royal court itself was presented as a twin of the church. The body of imperial functionaries was considered in the same way as a religious order: the order of justice.³⁹

At Bologna, in the coronation ceremony for Charles V, the young emperor took off his royal clothing to put on the *almice* and *mozzetta* of a canon of St. Peter’s (“*recipitur a Canonicis in Canonicum S. Petri*”). He sang with the clergy; then, taking off the vestments of a canon, he put on the sandals and tunic of a deacon and over this a sumptuous cope; then he put on royal clothing again to receive anointing. He served as a deacon in the pontifical Mass offered by Clement VII, and then returned to sit on his own throne, where he sat with his own imperial garments (“*Quo facto redit ad suum suggestum, ubi riassumit insignia sua imperialia, et sedet*”).⁴⁰ When, in Florence, Grand Duke Cosimo III de’ Medici was admitted among the Lateran canons (1700), he had Carlo Maratta paint his portrait wearing a surplice and their three-cornered hat, and twenty years later he was pictured again wearing the vestments of Saint Joseph.⁴¹ In the Palazzo Pitti there were numerous small chapels and devotional altars, which the Hapsburg-Lorraine and the

30. See Gorski 1969; Vauchez 1977; Graus 1981; Folz 1984.

31. Le Goff 1996, 298–310.

32. Wallace-Hadrill [1962] 1982.

33. Ullmann 1969; Peters 1970, 71; Sot 1988, 712ff.

34. Kantorowicz 1946, 57.

35. Ladner 1988, 35.

36. Kern 1956, 38ff.; Boisserée 1842.

37. Villette 1611, 226–27.

38. Hezecques n.d., 177 and 181–82.

39. Kantorowicz 1988, 249.

40. Giordani 1842, 33ff.

41. Langedijk 1981–87.

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Fig. 3 *Rex sacerdos* (Saint Louis), Vivaldus, *Opus regale*, Saluzzo, 1507, frontispiece.

Savoy dynasties gradually dismantled. Much the same was true of the Alcázar in Madrid.⁴²

Another imperial appellation was *pius*.⁴³ Romans in the republican period continued to call the priest celebrating certain rites that had been among the duties of their kings *Rex sacrorum*. In the imperial period Augustus became *Pontifex maximus*, at the same time supreme head of the state and of its religion, and was deified on his death. In 310 Constantine embraced Christianity, which became the new religion of state. From that moment on, the emperor was a *Christomimètes*, assuming, by this means, new priestly characteristics. A large coin minted at Aix-la-Chapelle under Charlemagne had as a motto “XC:VINCIT:XC:REGNAT—KAROLUS MAGNUS IMPERAT” (Christ triumphs, Christ reigns, Charles the Great rules).⁴⁴ For King Alfonso X the Wise, the kings of Castile were “Vicars of God, each one in his own kingdom, placed over the people to keep them in justice and truth.”⁴⁵ But I think no king appeared in the guise of the Father omnipotent so much as John II of Castile presumed to do during the feast celebrated in his honor at Valladolid in May of 1428.⁴⁶

In Byzantium the emperor of the East sat under a ciborium whose vault was frescoed with a sky studded with stars (curiously, Claude Villette saw in the similar ciborium above the high altar where the Corpus Domini was kept “the sacred womb of the Virgin mother of our Savior”).⁴⁷ The throne resembled a chariot or at least had legs representing lions to symbolize cosmic movement.⁴⁸ When he left the imperial palace for a procession, the emperor walked under an umbrella, another reference to the vault of heaven, and he was surrounded by torches, which referred to solar flames.⁴⁹

In one of those “logical instabilities” that Saussure speaks of, if the throne referred to the movement of the stars, the king instead was immobile. In this case the emphasis was placed on his resemblance to an idol. I will speak further of the immobility of the central figures in the Roman triumph, and of the sovereign’s face painted red like the statue of Jove, but he also presented himself as a marble image of divinity. He was distant and mute, and silence had to be strictly observed around him.⁵⁰ At the Byzantine court, on the appearance of the emperor in the audience chamber, the basilica, or the consistory, appropriate officials (the *silentiarii*) imposed silence. J. G. Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, says that in ancient Japan the Mikado was obliged to sit on his throne every morning for several hours with a crown on his head. He was supposed to remain immobile like a statue for the whole time, without moving hands or feet. Only in this way could he assure the tranquillity of the empire over which he reigned. Not only this, “such a holiness was ascribed to all parts of his body, that he dared to cut off neither his hair, nor his beard, nor his nails.”⁵¹

The long hair of the Frankish kings (*reges criniti*, as Gregory of Tours referred to it)⁵² was related to the same need.

42. See Gerard 1983.

43. Weinstock 1971, 248ff.

44. Kantorowicz 1946, 3.

45. *Las Sietes Partidas* 1807, II, pt. 1, ley v, II:7.

46. Fernandez 1975, 101–79.

47. Villette 1611, 53; see also Smith 1936, 107ff.

48. L’Orange 1953, 82ff., 124ff.

49. Dvornik 1966, 1:523.

50. Alföldi 1970, 36ff.

51. Frazer 1911, 3.

52. Wallace-Hadrill 1962 [1982], 148ff.

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Fig. 4 Priam kissing Achilles' knee, Etruscan amphora, Munich, Museum für antike Kleinkunst 3171 (J 890).

When, in 1822, Mr. Crawford was admitted to the presence of the king of Siam, having been sent on mission to him, the king on his throne “had more the appearance of a statue in a niche, than of a living being.”⁵³ A few official portraits of European rulers suggest the same immobility. They were even made to be placed on the throne when the sovereign was absent. Sometimes they refer directly to *proskynesis* (servility: it was thought that clemency resided in the knee). An exposed leg in a portrait was a clear allusion to this (just as an exposed breast indicated virginity).⁵⁴ The figure of the king with a leg, or more often a knee, exposed was an ancient cliché (Fig. 4). It can be found, for instance, in an incunabulum of Johannes Thurocz's *Chronica Hungarorum* (Augsburg, 1488; Fig. 5), in the *Libro della ventura* by Lorenzo Spiriti (printed by Gotardo da Ponte in Milan, 1501), in a print of Charles V and his enemies by Martin van Heemskerck (1556), in a portrait of King Charles I of England by Van Dyck, in the figure of the sovereign in the frontispiece of the Leiden edition of Machiavelli's *Prince* of 1643 (Fig. 6).⁵⁵ It appears in Hyacinthe Rigaud's well-known portrait of Louis XIV (cf. Fig. 7), as well as in two portraits of Louis XV painted some years later.⁵⁶ As for immobility, one can look at portraits of Elizabeth I of England, the Ditchley portrait, for example. The queen wears a costume so rigid that it prevents any movement. She is represented immobile, like an idol.⁵⁷ A ceremonial was observed at her court quite similar to that of the Mikado. We have the testimony of a Venetian ambassador: “In the royal antechamber stands a chair covered with brocade, and this antechamber they call the presence chamber, and they have such reverence for their king that they always uncover themselves in this chamber, because the chair represents

53. Cited in Jones 1883, 486.

54. See Bertelli 1995.

55. Bertelli and Innocenti 1979, sec. xvii, 41.

56. Reichler 1985, 55–77; Bertelli 1995. For official portraiture, see Bardon 1974; Polleross 1988; Ellenius 1966 (limited to Sweden).

57. O'Donoghue 1894; Strong 1977.

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Fig. 5 Johannes Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum*, Augsburg, 1488, fol. 52v.

the king, before whom you cannot pass without showing reverence, whoever you are in England.”⁵⁸ This leads one to imagine a remarkable continuity with the custom attested by Dio Cassius for the Roman Empire. The *sella curulis* of Caligula was placed in the temple of Jove on the Capitoline hill, and the senators did homage to it when the emperor was absent. Thus also the throne of Commodus was covered with a lion’s skin and a club placed across it, symbolizing the Roman Hercules, in the absence of the sovereign.⁵⁹ During the first church councils, the book of the Gospels was placed on a throne to symbolize the physical presence of God in the work of the council.⁶⁰ A page of the court

58. Alberi 1839–63, ser. 1, II (1840): 395.

59. Dio Cassius 1970, 59, 24.4, and 72, 17.4; Weinstock 1971, 283–84.

60. Calore 1995.

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Fig. 6 Nic. Machiavelli Florentini, *Princeps*, Leiden (Lugduni Batavorum), de Vogel, 1643. Frontispiece.

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Fig. 7 The knee of the young king Louis XIV (by Henri Testelin), Château de Versailles, M.v. 3475.

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Fig. 8 The empty throne flanked with foxes and lions, *De Prins van N. Machiavel*, frontispiece, Dutch translation of *The Prince*, The Hague ('s Gravenhage), Engelbreg Boucquet, 1704.

of Louis XVI, Count Felix d'Hezecques, wrote with regret that in his time only elderly courtiers, such as the duc de Penthièvre, the prince de Soubise, and the maréchal de Biron, bowed in salute when they passed before the state bed of the king "when he was not present."⁶¹ One wonders if the frontispiece of a Dutch edition of Machiavelli's *Prince* (1704; Fig. 8) does not refer to the same ceremonial.⁶² It is even possible that the bailiff H. Gessler was echoing the same custom when he wanted to make the inhabitants of the canton of Uri bow before Emperor Albert's hat.

The theory that power descended by divine right was already present at the time of the Roman Empire. But it had a particular development in the Christian era, at Byzantium, where the emperor was seen to be like Christ enthroned, a Christ reincarnated. (And, in this respect, why did the kings of France have the entire genealogy of the kings of Judea sculpted on the façade of the cathedrals of Paris and Reims [Fig. 9], alluding to Christ as if to their own ancestor?) One must keep in mind that a royal coronation, with the Hebraic symbolism of anointing at its apex, was, in many aspects, an embalming. Thanks to this rite the king became *Christos kuriou*, the Messiah Yahweh, the "Son of God" ("this day have I begotten thee"; Psalm 2:7). To underscore his new status, his

61. Hezecques n.d., 170.

62. Bertelli and Innocenti 1979, pt. xviii, no. 5; Bertelli 1990b.

transformation into a sacred person, the king even changed his name (or added a numeral to it). Once anointed, he became a sacred person: "Nolite tangere christos meos!" (Do not touch my anointed ones). Access to the sacrament of anointing also made him similar to a priest. Referring to the Frankish kings, Pope Paul I called them "gens sancta, regale sacerdotium, populus acquisitionis" (holy dynasty, royal priesthood, gift to the people),⁶³ and Pope Stephen II referred to Pepin as a "novus Moyses" (new Moses) and as a "perfulgidus David" (shining David).⁶⁴

For the pope this "rebirth" was imitated physically. A broadside of 1555, *L'ordine che si tiene nel creare il sommo pontefice, con le cerimonie che si fanno della coronazione in S. Giovanni Laterano*, says that the newly elected pope, "dressed in black, enters on a tumbrel of the dead; the office of the dead is sung, and then he is dressed with the vestments of a bishop."

Like a priest, the king was both the advocate of his people before heaven and the sacrificial hostage of heaven among his people. He assumed the traits of a scapegoat for the sins of his subjects. In the *XII Abusivis Saeculi* of the Pseudo-Cyprian it is written that the king must "attend to prayer at the times fixed" (certis horis orationibus insistere),⁶⁵ as Vivaldus showed in his *Opus regale* (Saluzzo, 1507) with the image of Saint Louis in prayer. In his portrait of Alfonso V the Magnanimous, king of Naples, Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote that the king

delighted much in holy writings and particularly in the Bible, which he had almost completely memorized . . . he was most pious toward the poor, most religious in hearing three masses a day, which he never missed, two low and one sung. . . . He was most diligent in what related to the divine cult. On Holy Thursday he washed the feet of as many of the poor as the years of his age; and he washed them properly, and dried them, and humbly made a cross on the right foot and then kissed it. . . . Every day he continuously recited the office of the Lord . . . and at night he did not fail to rise to say the office . . . he fasted for all the vigils of the feasts of Christ and the most glorious Virgin Mary, and every Friday he fasted with bread and water.⁶⁶

The duc de Saint-Simon says that Louis XIV only once in his life (when he was on a campaign) failed to go to Mass. "The king never in his life missed going to Mass, except once with the army when there was a long march." He never failed to fast on fast days; instead, "some days before Lent, he announced publicly at his *Lever* that he would take it very badly if anyone were given fat to eat." He never missed sermons during Advent and Lent "or any devotion of Holy Week, great feasts, processions of the Holy Sacrament, or days observed by the Order of the Holy Spirit, or Assumption." He took Communion five times a year, "always wearing the collar of the Order [of the Holy Spirit], with its vestment and mantle." On Holy Thursday he served a dinner to the poor.⁶⁷

This was all behavior more suited to a deacon than to a layman, which was part of the conception of the *Christomimèsis* of kingship that transformed the monarch into a *rex*

63. *Codex Carolinus* 1892, xxxix:552; Enright 1985, 130.

64. *Codex Carolinus* 1892, xi:505; Enright 1985, 130.

65. Enright 1985, 54.

66. Vespasiano da Bisticci 1970, 86–87.

67. Saint-Simon 1983–88, v:183–85.

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Fig. 9 The kings of Judea, on the façade of the cathedral of Reims (from H. E. Leblan, *La cathedrale de Reims*, Reims, C. Coulon, 1882).

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Fig. 10 The anointing in the cathedral of Reims (engraving from A. Banchet, *Le sacre de Louis XV roy de France et de Navarre dans l'Eglise de Reims le Dimanche xxv Octobre MDCCXXII*).

sacerdos, thanks to anointing (Fig. 10). It was not by chance that the archbishop of Mainz, when consecrating German kings, uttered the formula: “In this day the grace of the Lord has changed you into another man, and thanks to the sacred rite of anointing he makes you participate in his divinity.”⁶⁸ In the French *sacre*, the twelve peers of the realm, in all together holding the crown above the sovereign’s head, remind one explicitly of the twelve apostles.⁶⁹

We do not know when the biblical model of Saul and David was taken up again in the early Middle Ages. The oldest dated coronations on record are those of the Visigothic kings Wamba (672), Ervig (680), Eghica (687), and Witiza (700).⁷⁰ A ceremony is described by the bishop of Toledo in the *Historia Wambae*.⁷¹ About the same time, another coronation ceremony can be traced to Irish kings. The *Vita Columbae*, written at Iona between 668 and 704, includes a story of an angel that descended from heaven, bringing for King Aidan a codex written onto crystal: “Once, while the memorable man was living on the island of Hinba, he saw one night, in an ecstasy, an angel of the Lord, who had in his hand

68. Kern 1956, 37 and 52ff.

69. See Villette 1611, 238–39; Menin 1723; [Alletz] 1775. Cf. Millon 1931; Schramm [1929] 1960b, 163ff.; Baynes 1984; Valensise 1986; Bautier 1989; Hedeman 1990.

70. Julian of Toledo 1910, 503–4; PL, xcvi:766; Bouman 1957; Collins 1977, 41–42; Enright 1985.

71. MGHSSRMer., v, 1910; Collins 1977.

a glass book of the ordination of kings.⁷² Since the text of this *Ordo* has not survived, we cannot say whether the ceremony preceded the anointing. It may be that this ordination never took place and that the reference served only to exalt the supremacy of the *paruchia Columbae*. However, another celestial mission (perhaps inspired by this one, perhaps independent) occurred on the Continent, on the other shore of the English Channel. A French poet of the thirteenth century sang that if the kings of western Europe had to resort to apothecaries for the oil necessary for their anointing,⁷³ the kings of France received theirs directly from heaven:

Et molt li doit bien souvenir
 Qu'en toutes autres regions
 Convient les rois lor ontions
 Acheter en la mercerie.

And they remember well
 That everywhere else
 Kings need to seek ointments
 For sale, in shops.

In the ninth century the archbishop of Reims, Hincmar (845–82),⁷⁴ asserted (*Vita Remigii*, 21) that his predecessor in his episcopal see, Saint Rémi, having to baptize Clovis, the king of the Franks (496 is the conventional date), did not receive in time the chrism that a priest was to bring, since a large crowd at the door of the church prevented his passage. He asked the help of the Lord, and a dove descended, carrying an ampoule with inexhaustible balm. Hincmar, who in all likelihood was the inspiration for the *Ordo* of 866 for Queen Ermentrude at Soissons, crowned Charles the Bald in 869 (“iniunxit eum Hincmarus archiepiscopus de chrismate ad dextram auriculam, et in fronte ad sinistram auriculam, et in capite” [Archbishop Hincmar anointed him with the chrism, on the right ear, the forehead, the left ear, and on the head]) and Louis the Pius in 877.⁷⁵ The motives that inspired creation of such a legend could not have been much different from the one that made an angel with a crystal book descend over the island of Iona. As the custodian of the ritual of coronation, Hincmar had to defend himself from the growing presence of the Abbey of Saint-Denis, which, as the necropolis of kings, became the custodian of another not-less-important ceremony—funerals.⁷⁶ Pope Innocent II appealed to the legend of the Holy Oil for the *sacre* of Louis VI (1131).⁷⁷ For this, even the pope used the oil of the Holy Ampoule.⁷⁸ A hundred years later its use had definitively become a part of the ceremony. It was codified by the *Ordo* of Reims of 1230⁷⁹ and by the one that followed it in

72. “Alio in tempore, cum vir praedicabilis in Himba commoraretur insula, quadam nocte in extasi mentis angelum domini ad se misum vidit, qui in manu vitreum ordinationis regum habebat librum.” Jones 1883, 519–21; Wallace-Hadrill 1971, 55ff.; Enright 1985, 7. For the question mark, see Nelson 1986, 285–86.

73. Richier 1912, vv. 814off.; Schramm 1960a, 150; Bloch [1923] 1961, 220.

74. Devisse 1976.

75. Schramm 1960a, 146–50; Bautier 1989, 11–12; Nelson 1990; Jackson 1995, 25. The text for Ermentrude is in Jackson 1995, *Ordo* vi; for Charles the Bald, *Ordo* vii.

76. *Histoire de l'Abbaye Royale* 1606.

77. Schramm [1929] 1960b, 112–20.

78. Schramm [1929] 1960b, 147; Oppenheimer 1954. On Hincmar, see Nelson 1986, 133ff.; Jackson 1994.

79. Bruhl 1950; Schramm 1960a, 145–48; Jackson 1984, 190–91.

1250.⁸⁰ The kings of France based their right to be called “Most Christian” on the possession of this oil. As the *Ordo* of Reims explained: “inter universos reges terre hoc glorioso prefulget privilegio, ut oleo celitus misso singulariter inungatur” (he outshines all the kings of the earth by the glorious privilege of being anointed with an oil sent from heaven).⁸¹ Charles V of France wore a cap throughout his life to preserve the oil received in his coronation from any external contact,⁸² and he specified in his own *Ordo* that the anointed shirt be burned.⁸³ The veneration was so great that Louis XI, feeling himself close to death on 14 July 1483, wanted to receive a new anointing (so much did it give a new life!). He was told this was impossible, anointing being a sacrament that could not be repeated. He contented himself with summoning the miraculous flask “so as to observe the devotion we have to it.”⁸⁴ On the other hand, when Edward III wanted his anointing to be repeated, requesting this dispensation from the pope, John XXII granted it, arguing that royal anointing “in anima quicquid non imprimit!” (makes no mark upon the soul).⁸⁵

As Shakespeare wrote: “Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king” (*Richard II*, III, 2). Could it have been less for English kings? Saint Thomas à Becket, in exile at Sens in France, had a vision: the Virgin (more than an angel!) had consigned a flask to him, saying that the oil contained in it should anoint future kings of England. Becket consigned the miraculous flask to a monk of Poitiers, and this monk hid it under a stone in the Church of St. Grégoire. There it remained until a holy man at the time of King Edward III revealed its existence, consigned the flask to the duke of Lancaster, who gave it to the Black Prince, who locked it in the Tower of London. It was found there by his son, Richard II, who wanted to be anointed. He was told that coronation could not be repeated. Thus the Virgin’s oil was first used in the succeeding coronation, that of Henry IV.⁸⁶

All these legends show one thing essentially, the supernatural importance of royal anointing. In France a long discussion occurred about whether descent from the Capetian dynasty or anointing was what gave thaumaturgic powers to the king.⁸⁷ The formula repeated when touching those sick with scrofula—“Le roi te touche, Dieu te guérise” (The king touches you, God cures you)—recalled the sacrament of anointing (Fig. 11). But it is worth mentioning that other monarchies also claimed thaumaturgic powers, which were implicitly associated with anointing. The kings of England, for instance, specialized in curing epilepsy by distributing coins with their image, which were later reduced to rings (cramp rings), and like their fellow monarchs across the Channel, they also touched people sick with scrofula (glandular tuberculosis—thus called “the king’s evil”).⁸⁸ Even the Angevin kings of Naples claimed thaumaturgic powers. Tolomeo da Lucca affirmed this explicitly in speaking of Charles of Anjou, brother of Saint Louis and imperial vicar of Tuscany. He said that the king’s gift to cure the sick derived from “divina influenza super eos, ex ampliori participatione entis” (a divine influence over kings, their greater par-

80. Flodoardus 1854–55; Le Goff 1990a; Bonne 1990.

81. Villette 1611, 206ff.; Chevalier 1900, 224.

82. Sherman 1969, 26; 1971.

83. *Coronation Book* 1899, 32–33.

84. Marlot 1846, IV:240–45 and 669–72; Basin 1963.

85. *Three Coronation Orders* 1900, no. X:72.

86. Taylor 1820, 60; Legg 1896; Ullmann 1957. For the repetition of this fable, see Bettelheim 1976.

87. Bloch [1923] 1961, particularly chap. IV.

88. Bloch [1923] 1961; Thomas [1971] 1973.

Image not available

Fig. 11 The royal touch: Francis I in Bologna, touching the sick at the time of his meeting with the pope Leo X in 1515. Bologna, Palazzo d'Accursio.

icipation in God), specifying that this privilege belonged to kings of France, to “dominus noster rex Karolus” (our king Charles), and, it was said (“fertur”), even to English kings.⁸⁹ It is quite possible that later, when the Aragonese replaced the Angevins, the new Neapolitan monarchy did the same, especially considering the care Alfonso the Magnanimous took to present himself as a *sacerdos*. That this dynasty also had thaumaturgic powers is based on the observation that Don Carlos de Viane, the heir of Aragon and Navarre, who died on 23 September 1461, was the font of a cult, although it was not recognized by the church. A reliquary containing his hand, it was said, cured people of scrofula.⁹⁰ The further history of the Aragonese dynasty, following the expedition of Charles VIII of France to Italy and then the submission of the kingdom of Naples to Ferdinand the Catholic, interrupted this development. We know that the Aragonese of Naples had the ceremony of anointing in their coronations.⁹¹ But it does not seem that Iberian kings, from Sancho IV onward, ever tried to heal the sick.⁹²

In the Eastern Empire, as well, there is no trace of anointing until the tenth century, even if Theodoros Balsamòn, a canonist of the twelfth century from Byzantium, in his commentary on the canons of the Twelfth Council of Ancyra,⁹³ said that the chrism of

89. Tolomeo da Lucca 1909, 39. See Bloch [1923] 1961, 133.

90. Bloch [1923] 1961, 133 and 152–53. For Aragonese coronation, see Blancas 1641.

91. On the Aragonese of Iberia, see the works of Palacios Martin.

92. Schramm 1960a, 61.

93. PG, CXXXVII:1156.

anointing canceled out the sin with which John I Tzimisces was marked through the murder of Nicephorus II Phocas (969), since this sacred unguent had the same power as baptism.⁹⁴ It is possible that the example on which the introduction of anointing into the Byzantine coronation rite was based came from Jerusalem, from the coronation of the Latin kings there (from 1108), this latter based in turn on French ritual.⁹⁵ The Byzantines, however, had the term *Christòs Theou* (the anointed one of God) in their liturgical formula, even before the eighth century, still without having physically introduced the specific sacrament of anointing. Perhaps they held “that the emperor, already for the very fact of being ‘chosen’ by God, was *ipso facto* also ‘anointed by God.’”⁹⁶

Giorgio Pachymere describes how the ceremony was eventually enacted.⁹⁷ The *Ottoman Pontificale* dictated that the “episcopus Ostiensis ungat ei [the emperor] de oleo exorcizato brachium dextrum et inter scapulas” (the bishop of Ostia should anoint the emperor with the blessed oil on the right arm and between the shoulder blades).⁹⁸ A minute description for Italy was left by Johann Burchard, who was sent by Pope Alexander VI to Naples in 1494 to direct the coronation ceremony of Alfonso II of Aragon (the son of Ferrante), in his *Diarium, sive rerum urbanarum commentarii*. At the moment of unction the sovereign lay on the ground, on four cushions: one under his knees, two under his arms, the fourth under his stomach. Thus prostrated, the apostolic legate anointed him with his right thumb, tracing the sign of the cross first on the right arm at the wrist, then, opening the special shirt put on for the ceremony, between the shoulder blades.⁹⁹ One can see how similar this ceremony was to the ordination of a priest,¹⁰⁰ and medieval kings always wanted also to be recognized as priests, as *rex et sacerdos* in their role as vicars of God.¹⁰¹ The chrism was always perceived as a potent assurance of the immortality of the sovereign. When King Henry III, son of Henry II of England, died at Martel (11 June 1183), the body was dressed with the vestments anointed at the time of his coronation.¹⁰²

An anointed body was a sacred body that could only show itself rarely. The *parousia* was an event limited to particular ceremonies.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, all the actions of the sovereign were “public” in the sense that his body was “public” (any community of subjects would recognize his “mystical” body). Pliny the Younger said in his *Panegyricus Traiani* that the prince should even open his private chamber. “Great fortune requires that nothing be covered, hidden; it opens up not only the houses of princes but even their bedchambers and their intimate recesses; all their secrets are exposed by Fama.”¹⁰⁴

An enormous importance was thus attributed to the body of the king. The whole court gravitated around his *cubiculum* (bedchamber), and the hierarchy of courtiers was assessed in relation to their distance from that body. In Byzantium the *kiouboukleion* repre-

94. See Pertusi 1976, 548.

95. Mayer 1967.

96. Pertusi 1976, 555.

97. Pachymere 1669, II:106.

98. Elze 1960, I–2, *Der Römische Ordo in Ottonischen Pontifikale*. For the insignia, see also Eichmann 1942, 43ff.; Pertusi 1965 and 1976.

99. Burchard 1883–85, II:138–39.

100. See Wickham Legg, introduction to the *Coronation Order* 1902, xxxviii ff.

101. Maccarrone 1959.

102. Hope 1907, 520.

103. See here, Part II, Chapter 8.

104. Pliny the Younger 1975, 319ff.

sented the ideal nucleus of the sacred city,¹⁰⁵ just as in the papal Lateran Palace the complex of rooms gravitated around the *cubiculum*.¹⁰⁶ A decree at Mantua in 1470 weighed the gravity of punishments, for any discovered in the court armed, by the distance from the ruler's apartment.¹⁰⁷ The bishop Antonio de Guevara, in his *Aviso de privados y doctrina de cortisanos* (1539), lamented that courtiers competed to obtain rooms close to the royal bedchamber, and not to the chapel.¹⁰⁸

A series of rules of etiquette arose with regard to the king's body. When a subject turned to the sovereign, he could not look him in the eye. Patrizi Piccolomini recommended keeping the eyes lowered when one addressed the pope, explaining this through the need to express modesty when talking with someone superior to oneself.¹⁰⁹ In the Bamum's ceremony, a different explanation is given—to look a sovereign in the eye might make him think his words had not been understood. “When you speak to the king or the king speaks to you, do not look at him directly. You should not look him in the face unless he himself has ceased to look at you. If he still has his eye on you, look at him furtively. If he asks you to speak, give him only quick imperceptible glances. Should he notice, while you speak, that you are looking at him intensely, he might think you didn't understand what he was saying to you.”¹¹⁰ In reality, neither of these explanations approached the truth. The norm—even in such distant places and times—was dominated by a single preoccupation, to avoid the danger of evil eye. As the English proverb said: “A cat can look at a king; curiosity killed the cat.”

In the same way, the king never responded directly, but rather through an intermediary. At the Byzantine court an official, the *logoteta*, spoke for the emperor. Pier delle Vigne was *logoteta* for the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. When the king of France entered Rouen in 1449, the citizens offered him their assistance to further the war against the English: “The king heard them with benevolence, he responded by way of his chancellor, and thanked them for their good will.”¹¹¹

Since the king had a mortal body, the problems relating to his death were enormous. In his study *Social Origins* (1954) A. M. Hocart affirmed that “the first kings had to have been dead kings,” since funerals had an important integrating function for members of any community.¹¹²

However, one could add that there were also dormant kings. In A.D. 350, when the Arian heresy was at its height, the death of Constantine was a severe blow to his subjects, giving rise to a prophecy of the Tibertine sibyl: the emperor was not dead, but closed in a deep sleep. In his absence, Rome would be conquered and the poor oppressed by tyranny. But the emperor would awake, bringing an age of gold. Then the Jews would be converted, and the twenty-two nations of Gog and Magog defeated. Finally, the emperor would raise his insignia on Golgotha, bringing the age of gold to an end. This would be followed by the reign of the Antichrist, who would in turn be defeated by the appearance

105. See Ebersolt 1910.

106. On the Lateran, see Herklotz 1985 and Scrinari 1991; also Rasponi 1656; Rohan de Fleury 1877; Lauer 1911.

107. Mazzoldi 1961.

108. On the organization of the court of Burgundy, see Cartellieri 1970; on that of France, see Boucher 1982; Le Roy Ladurie 1982; on England, Starkey 1987; on Spain, Brown and Elliott 1985; Lison Tolosana 1992; Soria 1993.

109. Dykmans 1980–82, II:451ff.

110. Tardits 1985, 194.

111. Mathieu d'Escouchy 1863, I:243.

112. Quoted in Huntington-Metcalf 1985; see also Adler 1992.

of Jesus for the Day of Judgment. Another prophecy with the same apocalyptic tone was that of the Pseudo-Methodius, which spread at the end of the seventh century among the Christian populations of Syria subjected to Muslim domination.¹¹³

Paul the Deacon (I, 4) relates that in Germany, in “a cave under a cliff, no one knows for how long, seven men lay in a deep sleep, so well preserved both in body and clothing, and for so long, that they had become objects of veneration for those ignorant barbarous people. From the fashion of their clothing one would say they were Romans . . . perhaps some day, since they seem to be Christians, their preaching will bring the inhabitants of that place to salvation.”¹¹⁴

Denying the death of their sovereigns, communities denied their own dissolution. At the time of the siege of Constantinople by the Bulgars, in 812, the crowd broke down the gates that led to the imperial tombs and dragged the body of Constantine V from its sarcophagus, crying: “Arise! Save your endangered people!” These people even arrived at the point of believing they had seen the emperor fight to defeat the barbarians.¹¹⁵ If we consider a holy patron to be the head of a particular community (*patronus in celestibus*), we could add the Roman example of Saint Peter, who, according to Procopius, in his *Bellum gothicum*, defended a breach in the walls against besieging Goths; or another, of Saint Ambrose, *dux* of the Milanese in the *Historia mediolanensis* of Landolfo, who, according to Galvano Fiamma, was seen on horseback with his *scutica*, or *flagellum*, in hand, fighting at the head of the army of Luchino Visconti during the battle of Parabiago of 1339.¹¹⁶

In the Carolingian period, the legend of *Carolus redivivus* developed along these same lines.¹¹⁷

Another similar reaction was that of the peoples of Flanders at the time of the fourth Crusade. Their sovereign, Count Baldwin, recently made king of Constantinople, was captured by the Bulgars and killed. When, in 1224, a stranger rode through the country announcing the return of Baldwin, no one doubted that the king had awakened from his long sleep. A few decades later, some Joachimites spread the word that the emperor Frederick II was not dead, but was sleeping. In Sicily, where the emperor had passed a large part of his life, people continually repeated a phrase of the sibyl: “Imperator vivit et non vivit” (The emperor lives and does not live). But also whole generations of Germans waited for his return—exactly like the whole generations of Franks who awaited Charlemagne’s return to life.¹¹⁸

That the relationship between sovereign and subject was an osmotic one is well expressed figuratively in a frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* published in London by Crooke in 1651. The king was projected over his territory, composed of cities and countrysides; his arms were spread and held the double symbols of kingship: sword and crozier (alluding to the English particularity of the king at the same time ruler of the kingdom and of the church). Even his body was composed of an infinite number of small bodies, who were his subjects.

In a world where care of the body was based on the Galenic principle *homo homini salus*

113. Cohn 1976.

114. Paolo Diacono 1988, 7–9.

115. McCormick 1986, 137.

116. Bertelli 1978, 151–52.

117. Folz 1973a, 134–42.

118. Cohn 1976, 71ff., 113; Jackson 1969; Bercé 1990, 244–47.

(“man is the cure of himself”; thus on use, in pharmacy, of the human body and its secretions),¹¹⁹ the most important body was certainly the royal one. Plutarch recounts a version of the death of Romulus different from the one usually recounted (*Romulus* 27.6). He was perhaps killed by senators, who, dissecting him, each carried a piece to his own dwelling.¹²⁰ Plutarch wrote in the first century of the Christian era and thought that the senators, by doing this, wanted to conceal their crime. This shows that in his time the deeper meaning of a rite had been lost, though the memory of it remained, which contrasted with the certainly more celebrated meaning of apotheosis. In reality, this was the distribution of the body of the leader among his followers (in the terminology of Max Weber: *Vertrauensmänner*). It was a distribution not dissimilar to the Eucharistic one of the Last Supper, with the breaking of bread by Christ and its distribution among the Apostles. Was this also the trace of an ancient custom?

If not the same rite, we can trace something not so different in the monarchies of the early Middle Ages. In 877 Charles the Bald died at Brios while he was crossing the Alps. In order to transport the king to Saint-Denis, his followers tried to embalm the body. It was eviscerated and treated with spices and wine. “They took out the viscera, put them into an infusion of wine perfumed with the herbs they could find, and sealed it; and they started out toward the monastery of St. Diogène, where they intended to bury it. But the smell was so great that they were unable to carry it. Thus they put it into a chest lined inside and out with leather.”¹²¹ When the emperor Otto I died, in 973, the body was eviscerated, the intestines were buried at Memblen, and the body was transported to Magdeburg. The custom of a double burial, while not limited to the region of Germany, was eventually called “*mos teutonicus*.”¹²²

This division of the body (heart, viscera, and remains) became so common from the twelfth century on that Pope Boniface VIII felt obliged to intervene with the bull of 27 September 1299, *Detestande feritatis* (Hateful ferocity).¹²³ In this the pontiff speaks of a horrible custom (“*mos horribilis*”), which consisted in cutting up the body and boiling the pieces to separate flesh from bone (“*aquis immersa exponunt ignibus decoquenda*”); finally the bones, liberated from the flesh (“*et tandem, ab ossibus tegumento carnis excusso*”) were taken to the selected place of burial (“*ad partes predictas mittunt seu deferunt tumulanda*”). Can we find here a trace of the belief, common to many ethnic groups, that the deceased were not completely dead or received in the hereafter if they were not freed from the flesh? This is what Elisabeth Brown suggests, referring to the essays of Hertz and of Levy-Bruhl on the collective representation of death.¹²⁴ But some further examples show that in reality there is no single explanation; we are confronted with an act that had multiple meanings.

If the custom of dissecting the body was born essentially from the need to confront long voyages to reach the locality originally destined for burial (the place of birth, the family chapel, the royal necropolis), then these macabre means were adopted so as not to

119. Manara 1668; Scarlatini 1683; Camporesi 1983.

120. See Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1968, 11:56.

121. “*Ablatis intraneis, et infusum vinum ac aromatibus quibus poterat et impositum locello coeperunt ferre versus monasterium sancti Dyonisii, ubi sepeliri se postulaverat.*” *Annales Bertiniani* 1883, 137; Erlande Brandenburg 1975, 28.

122. Schaefer 1920; Bradford 1933.

123. Digard 1890, *Registre* 3409.

124. Brown 1981, 223; Hertz 1978; Levy-Bruhl 1927.

leave the sovereign's body in a foreign land. When Henry VII of Luxemburg died unexpectedly at Buonconvento (August 1313), his body was boiled in wine and aromatics and taken to Pisa for burial. But sometimes there was the pious wish to be buried in a particular holy place: Frederick Barbarossa was on a crusade when he died (1190). His body was boiled, and the bones were removed and sent to Tyre (the midpoint of his pilgrimage) for burial.¹²⁵ In the same way, Robert the Bruce, king of Scotland, when he died in 1329, asked that his heart be buried in Jerusalem: "Emportés mon coeur avec vous, pour presenter au Saint Sepulcre, là où Nostres Sires fu ensepelis, puis que li corps n'i poet aler" (Take my heart with you to give to the Holy Sepulchre, where Our Lord was buried, since my body can no longer go there).¹²⁶ On the other hand, Richard the Lion-Hearted asked that his heart be buried at Rouen, out of filial piety, beside the tomb of his father; his brain, blood, and viscera at Charroux; and the rest of his body at Fontevrault, where his mother, sister, and part of the remains of his father were buried.¹²⁷ In the sixteenth century, the heart of Francis I was also buried separately (see Fig. 12).

For our purposes, however, another, different example has a greater interest. When Prince Charles of England was wounded in the siege of the castle of Chaluz (1189) and knew he was going to die, he wanted his body to be buried "apud Fontem Ebraudi," beside his father "cujus proditorem se confitetur." But the heart was to go to the "ecclesiae Rothomagnsi"; the viscera to the rebel "barones Pictaviae." He gave his body to his father, who had sired him, his heart to the church at Rouen for the fidelity its people had shown him, and his viscera to the barons of Poitiers, who had betrayed him; they were not worthy of a better part.¹²⁸

At least with regard to royal burials, one must recognize that the practice condemned by Boniface VIII was still observed in the sixteenth century. On the tomb of Louis XII of France an epitaph states: "Cy gist le corps avec le coeur de très-haut, très-excellent, très-puissant Prince Louis XII, Roy de France, lequel trepassa à Paris à l'Hostelles de Tournelles le premier jour de Janvier l'an 1514. Ses entrailles sont avec son père aux Celestins dudit Paris." (Here lies the body and heart of the high, excellent, and powerful Prince Louis XII, King of France, who died in Paris at the Hospital of Tournelles the first day of January 1514. His entrails are with his father in the Celestine monastery in Paris.)¹²⁹ His wife, Anna, "since she was the daughter of the last duke of Brittany, . . . left her heart to the Bretons to be buried in the Charterhouse of Nantes, in the tomb of her ancestors."¹³⁰ On the death of Louis XIII, his heart was given to the Jesuits "for the Church of Saint-Louis in Paris"; the viscera "were carried to Saint-Denis, but the canons of Notre-Dame de Paris obtained them from the queen that very day, and Monsieur de Ventadour, one of the canons, took them to Notre-Dame the day after."¹³¹

Thus, one would not say that the practice of dissecting a cadaver and burying the parts in several different places was dictated only by the need to transport the most important remains (the skeleton) to the place earlier chosen for burial. We are rather in the presence of a spatial distribution of the noblest parts of a sacred body: the heart, the head (in a

125. Schaefer 1920, 478–79, 483–85.

126. Froissart 1869, 1:79.

127. Schaefer 1920, 496.

128. Roger de Wendover 1886, 283.

129. Félibien 1706, 563.

130. Félibien 1706, 374.

131. Félibien 1706, 469.

Image not available

Fig. 12 The heart of Francis I in the cathedral of Saint-Denis.

Carolingian abbey in Dauphiné a relic of the head of Saint Theobald came to be known as “Saint Chef”—the Holy Head!),¹³² the viscera, the skeleton. Besides the tentative interpretation of Elisabeth Brown, Alain Boureau has suggested that this might reflect a desire to multiply prayers for the dying person. “One could obtain three times the prayers, and from three different religious communities.”¹³³ In fact, this was the thesis advanced (to be disputed) by the medieval jurist and theologian Godefroi de Fontaines at the time of a dispute over the division of the remains of King Philip II Augustus of France. Money, it was thought, should be distributed to obtain prayers from many holy places, not the body.¹³⁴ It is difficult to accept this explanation for nobles and prelates, and still more so for the sovereign. We have seen how the viscera of Louis XIII were thought to be relics, and the debate over the remains of Philip II had the same presupposition. But not even the transformation of mortal remains of sovereigns into relics of saints is entirely satisfactory. I have noted that Prince Charles of England distinguished between the faithful subjects of Rouen and the rebellious barons of Poitiers, who were only worthy to receive his excrement, but that other illustrious viscera became relics, worthy of presentation to the canons of Notre-Dame de Paris. Moreover, the legend of Romulus narrated by Plutarch tells us that the division of a sacred body facilitated the diffusion of the sovereignty associated with it through an entire ruled territory. In many medieval cases we are confronted with this distribution of the body over territory, a multiplication of the presence of the sovereign after death. In short, the point of view expressed by Alain Boureau needs to be reversed. By distributing their bodies, kings anticipated requests from below; they gave rather than asked. Another form of distribution of the kingly body was the feudal kiss on the mouth, with a light emission of saliva into the mouth of the vassal. With this, vassals would take with them a part of the royal body that would serve, wholly and for all, as a representation of the king in a peripheral and distant territory.

In revolutionary France, that is, far from religious “superstition,” a heart was nonetheless publicly exhibited at the Cordeliers hall: the heart of Marat.¹³⁵

132. Martene and Durand 1717.

133. Boureau 1988, 36. There is a long list of bodies in Bradford 1933.

134. “Pecunia est res distribuenda et dividenda diversis pro suffragiis impetrandis; corpus autem non est res dividenda vel distribuenda pro talibus.” Godefroi de Fontaines 1924, 92.

135. Clark 1994.