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978-0-521-42018-1 - Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe

Gabor Klaniczay

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Introduction

In 1309, eight years after the death of the last of the Arpadians, it looked as if, in the person of Charles Robert, grandson of Charles II, King of Naples, the Angevins would finally succeed in ensconcing an Angevin king on the Hungarian throne. Charles Robert certainly had the support of Cardinal Gentile di Particino da Montefiore, the papal legate, who had urged the former's claim before the assembled Hungarian Estates as follows:

By the grace of Divine Providence, the Kingdom of Hungary has had Catholic rulers for some time now. The first one, the saint king, Stephen, has merited inclusion in the catalogue of saints, and so have several others. They left legitimate successors, under whose propitious reigns this kingdom was fertile and prospered, secure in the sweets of peace, and in the unity of spirit that bound its inhabitants to one another. Since foreign kings have usurped this kingdom, however, fertility has given way to sterility, the sweets of peace to the rumble of storms, and unity of spirit to detestable discord. We, who have been charged by the Holy See to reform the state of this kingdom, and aspire to find a salubrious remedy to all this, hereby summon the prelates, the barons and the nobles to a general council, where the prelates and the barons might, as a body, recognise the magnificent prince, the Lord Charles – a true descendant of the first saints – as the rightful and legitimate King of Hungary, and their natural sovereign.¹

The Cardinal advanced some noteworthy arguments to show Charles Robert worthy of the Hungarian crown. The fact that there were saints among the early founders of the dynasty is adduced by way of substantiating the descendant's claim, the implication being that Charles Robert would possess his holy ancestors' virtues by dint of *heredity* – virtue was simply in his blood. We also learn

¹ 'Sane, per divinam providentiam, regno Hungarie reges catholici preferunt, quorum primus, sanctus rex Stephanus, et alii nonnulli sanctorum cathalogo meruerunt ascribi, relinquentes ex se legitimos successores, sub quorum felici regimine regnum ipsum fertilitate floruit, obtinuit pacis dulcedinem, et inter ipsius incolas viguit unitas animarum. Ex quo non [sic] regnum ipsum reges exteri usurpabant, fertilitati sterilitas, pacis dulcedini tempestati fremitus, et concordibus

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that the rule of the 'holy kings' had brought the country various benefits: *fertility* and *prosperity*, the sweets of *peace*, and a *unity of spirit*, all of which were lost once foreigners usurped the throne. The holy ruler's special relationship to the powers on high – we are given to understand – guarantees his country's welfare in some mysterious way. What all of this adds up to is the religious legitimization of secular power in terms of *royal and dynastic sanctity*, the medieval variant of *sacral kingship*.

Let us, thus, start with the notion of *sacral kingship*. If we examine the fifty or so papers on the subject delivered at the international congress on the history of religions held in Rome in 1955 and published a few years later, or the anthologies and historiographic surveys of the topic that have appeared subsequently,² we shall see that the questions of the origin of kingship in magic and its sacral functions are as seminal today as when Sir James George Frazer raised them a hundred years ago. Through the comparative study of a vast variety of sources (on primitive peoples, ancient Near Eastern cultures, classical Greece and Rome, medieval European kingships, the mikados of Japan and so on), Frazer arrived at a whole series of evocative images expressive of the mysterious powers of the god-king, the embodiment of *mana*:

His person is considered, if we may express it so, as the dynamical centre of the universe, from which lines of force radiate to all quarters of the heaven; so that any motion of his – the turning of his head, the lifting of his hand – instantaneously affects and may seriously disturb some part of nature. He is the point of support on which hangs the balance of the world, and the slightest irregularity on his part may overthrow the delicate equipoise. The greatest care must, therefore, be taken both by and of him; and his whole life, down to its minutest details, must be so regulated that no act of his, voluntary or involuntary, may disarrange or upset the established order of nature.

The sacral power of the god-king, as Frazer saw it, lay primarily in his putative ability to influence the workings of nature, a matter of the first importance from

animis dissensio detestanda successit. Nos itaque ad eiusdem regni status reformationem per sedem apostolicam destinati, cupientes super his omnibus salubre remedium adhibere, prelatorum, baronum et nobilium convocavimus generale concilium, in quo prelati et barones iidem communiter magnificum principem dominum Carolum, ex primorum sanctorum vera progenie propagatum, recognoverunt verum et legitimum [sic] regem Hungarie ac eorum dominum naturalem . . .', *Acta legationis cardinalis Gentilis – Gentilis b̄boros magyarországi követségének okiratai*, Monumenta Vaticana Historiam regni Hungariae illustrantia I/II (Budapest, 1885), p. 269.

² *The Sacral Kingship. La Regalità Sacra*. Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955) (Brill, Leiden, 1959); Luc de Heusch (ed.), *Le pouvoir et le sacré* (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, 1962); Valerio Valeri, 'Regalità' in *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Torino, 1980) xi, pp. 742–71; Alain Boureau and Claudio Sergio Ingerflom (eds.) *La royauté sacrée dans le monde chrétien*. Colloque de Royaumont (March 1989), (Éditions de l'ÉHESS, Paris, 1992).

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the point of view of the community, whose strict control over this function took the form of a whole series of rites and taboos centring on the person of the sacral ruler. Ritual regicide of one sort or another was the most common resolution to the fact that the king's sacral power always proved ephemeral; it was to circumvent this threat to social stability that the sacral functions came to be separated from the secular (the person of the sacral ruler being dispensable, as it were, while the person of the *effective* (secular) ruler was not).³

Frazer saw every society that ever was as grist for the comparativist's mill, and his critics have made much of this all-inclusiveness. And yet, it was precisely his belief in the essentially analogous nature of all social formations that allowed him to frame questions whose novelty and graphic imagery would prove provocative of further research in several disciplines. The results were not long in coming. In those last days of the declining dynasties, the notion that the rulers of yore played a sacral role seems to have impressed a Europe psychologically ready for 'charismatic' new leaders. The subject was attractive from the professional standpoint as well, allowing political historians, art historians and historians of religion alike to propose new interpretations of some long-standing 'verities'.

Classical Antiquity, of course, provided the bulk of the sources available for re-examination; the problems that emerged here will be addressed when we look at the historical antecedents of the medieval ruler cults.⁴ The medieval ideal of kingship was probed for traces of the sacral ruler in two highly influential monographs: Fritz Kern's *Kingship and Law*, published in 1914,⁵ and Marc Bloch's *The Royal Touch* of 1924,⁶ which drew its inspiration from both Kern and Frazer.

Fritz Kern argued that all medieval rulers derived the legitimacy of their rule from one of two sources: the one supernatural ('by the grace of God'), the other socio-historical ('social contract'). What is of interest to us is the former, discussed by Kern in the first part of his book, where he distinguishes three different aspects of supernatural legitimation: *Heil* or *felicitas*, a supernatural gift which members of the German ruling dynasties (*Sippe*) inherited from divine ancestors and passed on through direct descent; *consecratio*, the king's actual consecration within the framework of a religious-cum-political rite; and

³ Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*. Abridged edition (Macmillan, London, 1925), p. 168; *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (Macmillan, London, 1905); and *The Magical Origin of Kings* (Macmillan, London, 1920).

⁴ C. M. Edsman, 'Zum sakralen Königtum in der Forschung der letzten hundert Jahre' in *The Sacral Kingship*, pp. 3–17. See also ch. 1 below.

⁵ Fritz Kern, *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandsrecht im früheren Mittelalter: Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Monarchie* (Leipzig, 1924); English trans. by S. B. Chrimes: *Kingship and Law in the Middle Ages* (Harper & Row, New York, 1970).

⁶ Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges. Étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Faculté des Lettres, Strasbourg, 1924, Gallimard, Paris, 1983³ – I have been using the latter edition). English trans. by J. E. Anderson, *The Royal Touch* (Dorset Press, New York, 1961).

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elements borrowed from the pre-Christian ruler cults, elements kept alive by the periodic revivals of classical learning, and by the coveted example of the Byzantine empire. Kern reviews the medieval transformations of each of these elements in turn, looks at the inherent contradictions within each of the elements and at the incongruities of the system as a whole, and describes the attempts made to restrict and undermine the forms of supernatural legitimation, and give priority to forms of legitimation based on political categories such as 'social contract' and 'the right of resistance'. It is no exaggeration to say that it was Fritz Kern who inspired Percy Ernst Schramm's medieval symbology of the state,⁷ as well as the school of medieval political theology associated with Ernst Kantorowicz,⁸ Walter Ullmann,⁹ and M. J. Wilks.¹⁰ It was likewise Kern who introduced the postulate that the German tribes of the Early Middle Ages had charismatic kings, a hypothesis that we shall return to later.

The other basic book on the subject, Marc Bloch's, is noteworthy for being the wellspring – as Jacques Le Goff demonstrated in his preface to the 1983 edition¹¹ – of practically every important methodological principle of modern French history writing: taking *la longue durée* as the significant time span; comparative analysis within well-defined parameters (as opposed to Frazer's all-inclusive approach); and the history-of-ideas point of view. Marc Bloch analyses the rise, function and demise of the various sacral functions of the ruler within concrete historical contexts. Le Goff speaks of his having given the 'total history' of the royal touch for the King's Evil (a reference to the anthropologist Marcel Mauss's famous methodological requirement,¹² formulated in the same years and inspired by the same intellectual milieu as Bloch's work), and emphasises how much the 'new political history' and modern 'historical anthropology' have to learn from him.

⁷ Percy Ernst Schramm, *Der König von Frankreich I-II* (Weimar 1937); and *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik I-III* (Hirseman, Stuttgart, 1954–6); for an evaluation of the Schramm oeuvre see János M. Bak, 'Medieval symbology of the state. Percy E. Schramm's contribution', *Viator* 4 (1973), pp. 33–63.

⁸ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae. A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Medieval Ruler Worship*, University of California Publications in History, 33 (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1946); and *The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957); for an evaluation of Kantorowicz, see Alain Boureau, *Histoires d'un historien. Kantorowicz* (Gallimard, Paris, 1990).

⁹ Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1955); for an evaluation of Ullmann, see Francis Oakley, 'Celestial hierarchies revisited: Walter Ullmann's vision of medieval politics', *Past and Present*, 60 (1973), pp. 3–48.

¹⁰ M. J. Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1963).

¹¹ Jacques Le Goff, 'Préface', Bloch, *Les rois*, pp. i–xli.; for other recent evaluations of Bloch's oeuvre, see Frank Barlow, 'The King's evil', *English Historical Review* 95 (1980), pp. 1–27; Jacques Revel, 'La royauté sacrée. Éléments pour un débat' in Boureau and Ingerflom (eds.), *La royauté sacrée*, pp. 7–17; Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution. The Annales School 1929–89* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990), pp. 17–19.

¹² Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', in Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (PUF, Paris, 1973), pp. 145–279.

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Marc Bloch's book is about a belief and practice associated with French and English kings from the late eleventh century to the eighteenth, namely, their putative ability to heal scrofula by their touch. In both countries, the anointed king would ritually touch people suffering from 'the King's Evil' on certain specified occasions. Bloch analyses the circumstances that motivated the Capetians to start featuring this miraculous ability, and convincingly demonstrates that every new dynasty felt the need to come up with some new form of sacral legitimation by way of counterbalancing the sacral prestige of its defeated rivals. We see this already in the case of the Carolingians, where the anointing of the king introduced by Pepin the Short was made into the central element of the consecration ceremony. In the context of the Capetians ascending the throne in France and the Plantagenets in England, touching for the King's Evil emerges as one of the forms of the rivalry between England and France: the Plantagenets' insistence on their 'priority' when it came to the royal touch – Edward the Confessor having been the first to effect such cures – was an attempt to find a sacral counterweight to the fact that the king of England was the vassal of the king of France.

Examining the documentation of centuries of touching for the King's Evil, and relating it to other royal ceremonies and the commentaries of observers, believers and non-believers alike, Bloch compares the discrete and yet parallel development of the practice in France and England, and demonstrates that for all the changes over the centuries, the beliefs attached to the king's sacral functions show a remarkable stability. It was probably the regular reinterpretation of the ritual that allowed the practice as such to endure for so long.

The questions raised by Marc Bloch have played a significant role in my own research on royal sainthood. The problem central to my investigations, however, has more to do with the controversy about the charismatic nature of Germanic rulership. Sparked by Fritz Kern's interpretation, the question was immediately taken up by scholars of German and Scandinavian prehistory and mythology,¹³ and became a major historiographic issue in Hungary, too, in the inter-war years.

It was Elemér Mályusz who – building on Max Weber – first used the term 'charismatic kingship' to characterise the extraordinary religious prestige of the Arpadians, a dynasty famous for its numerous saints. Written in 1933, Mályusz's

¹³ 'Charismatic kingship' is not used here in the broad historical and sociological sense given it by Weber. See Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (Mohr, Tübingen, 1985), pp. 140–8. It merely refers to the belief in the hereditary nature of the capacity for the supernatural within the ruling dynasty. See H. Mitteis, *Die deutsche Königswahl. Ihre Rechtsgrundlagen bis zur Goldenen Bulle* (Baden, 1938); Hans Naumann, *Altdeutsches Volkskönigtum. Reden und Aufsätze zum germanischen Überlieferungszusammenhang* (Stuttgart, 1940); Otto Höfler, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum, I. Der Runenstein von Rök und die Germanische Individualweihe* (Tübingen; Münster and Cologne, 1952); Jan De Vries, 'Das Königtum bei den Germanen', *Saeculum* 7 (1956), pp. 289–309.

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study antedated the wide international currency of the term among medievalists, particularly in German medieval studies.¹⁴ But it was József Deér who raised the question of continuity between the sacral beliefs of the pagan Magyars and the medieval cult of saintly Christian rulers in his *Pogány magyarság – keresztény magyarság* published in 1938.

The Attila tradition combined with the Turul myth served to invest the ruling dynasty with a mystic authority, so that the Magyars, too, came to believe – and would believe for centuries – that the fate of the nation was tied to the fate of the dynasty, and that nothing could sustain and nourish the people except the prince's – and his descendants' – supernatural genius for leadership. . . . So overwhelming was this conviction that not even in the Christian era could people free themselves of it.¹⁵

As an example of the reinterpreted version of the pagan 'dynastic belief' living on 'inside the pillars of the Christian state', József Deér cites Anonymus, the late twelfth-century chronicler of the acts of the Magyars, who recounted Emese's dream – which showed the pagan Magyars' ruling dynasty to have been descended from *Turul*, a mythical bird – and then went on to give the following interpretation of Prince Álmos's name: 'He was called Álmos, which means "saint", because his offspring would sire saintly kings and princes.'¹⁶ From this Deér draws the following conclusion:

The elect status of the ancestral clan, thus, explains the sanctity and Christian virtues of the Christian descendants, including St Stephen, St Ladislav, and St Emeric; virtue is in their blood: it is the fruit of their ancestry, even as noble birth and military prowess were the birthright of their pagan forefathers.

Deér also called attention to the fact that the royal charters of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries spoke not just of specific saintly rulers, but more and more of '*sancti predecessores nostri*', i.e., the sanctity of the entire dynasty. That the term was not simply the plural form (referring to St Stephen, St Ladislav, and St Emeric, for example), but indeed implied the sanctity of the entire dynasty was the burden of the impressively documented argument with which Deér countered Emma Bartoniek's critique in 1937.¹⁷

¹⁴ Elemér Mályusz, 'A karizmatikus királyság' /Charismatic kingship/, *Társadalomtudomány* 13 (1933), pp. 37–49; 14 (1934), pp. 153–78.

¹⁵ József Deér, *Pogány magyarság–keresztény magyarság* /Pagan Hungarians – Christian Hungarians/ (Egyetemi Nyomda, Budapest 1938), pp. 50–1; see Deér, *Heidnisches und Christliches in der altungarischen Monarchie* (WBG, Darmstadt, 1969²).

¹⁶ '*vocatus est Almus, id est sanctus, quia ex progenie eius sancti reges et duces erant nascituri*', Gabriel Silagi (ed.), *Die Gesta Hungarorum des anonymen Notars. Die älteste Darstellung der ungarischen Geschichte*. (Thorbecke, Sigmaringen, 1991), p. 38; earlier edn by A. Jakubovich, in *SRH* I, p. 38.

¹⁷ Deér, *Pogány*, pp. 118–22, 138–41; Deér, *Heidnisches*, pp. 40–50; and *Az Árpádok vérségi joga* /The blood-right of the Arpads/ (Budapest, 1937); Emma Bartoniek, 'A magyar királyválasztási jog a középkorban' /The legal framework of elective kingship in medieval Hungary/, *Századok* 70 (1936), pp. 358–406.

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It is surprising to find no reference to József Deér (who lived in Germany after 1945) in the works of Karl Hauck, the most influential of the German proponents of the same thesis, who published his powerful study, 'Geblütsheiligkeit', in 1950.¹⁸ Here, Hauck traces the cult of the holy kings and aristocratic saints of the Middle Ages back to the hereditary supernatural gifts (*Königsheil*) specific to the Germanic ruling dynasties, whose members were considered to be descended from the gods. Hauck's point of departure is the famous passage of the letter that Bishop Avitus addressed to Clovis in 508: 'Let the King of the Franks renounce the gifts [*felicitas*] inherited from his "divinised" ancestors, and in return he himself shall be the wellspring of a Christian dynasty's sanctity [*sanctitas*].' Hauck generalises Bishop Avitus's proposition to frame his hypothesis that the cult of dynastic saints was, in fact, a trade-off: it was what the medieval dynasties received in return for giving up their pagan sacral prestige.

Hauck provides a whole series of graphic examples pointing to the two areas most in need of clarification from the point of view of his hypothesis: the sacral typology of the medieval rulers who converted their peoples to Christianity, and founded the 'new' Christian dynasties; and the matter of *Adelshelligkeit*, the hereditary sanctity tied to aristocratic descent.¹⁹ Later researchers would be indebted to him for pointing out the extraordinary abundance of the sources on the royal saints of Anglo-Saxon England. Hauck himself presented a broad panorama of dynasty-associated medieval cults of saints from the Carolingians to the Habsburgs, and was the first to suggest a coherent model of the development of this rather widespread cult type.

Hauck's powerful hypothesis provoked criticism that was no less authoritative, specifically, from the outstanding Czech medievalist, František Graus. In his 1965 monograph on the cult of saints in Merovingian times,²⁰ Graus approached the problem from the point of view of the century-old research methods originating from the Bollandists. After giving a typological analysis

¹⁸ Karl Hauck, 'Geblütsheiligkeit', in *Liber Floridus. Mittellateinische Studien. Paul Lehmann zum 65. Geburtstag gewidmet*, eds. H. Bischoff and S. Brechter (Sankt Ottilien, 1958), pp. 187–240; Hauck, 'Lebensnormen und Kultmythen in germanischen Stammes- und Herrschergenealogien', *Saeculum*, 6 (1955), pp. 186–223; Hauck, 'Die geschichtliche Bedeutung der germanischen Auffassung von Königtum und Adel' in *Congrès International des Sciences Historiques (CISH)*, XIe, Stockholm 21–8 August 1968. *Rapports* III, pp. 96–120.

¹⁹ Karl Bosl, 'Der *Adelshellige*. Idealtypus und Wirklichkeit, Gesellschaft und Kultur im merowingischen Bayern des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts', in *Speculum Historiale. Festschrift Johannes Spörl*, ed. Clemens Bauer, Laetitia Böhm, Max Müller (Alber, Freiburg and Munich, 1965), pp. 167–87; Friedrich Prinz, 'Heiligenkult und Adelsherrschaft im Spiegel merowingischer Hagiographie', *Historische Zeitschrift* 204 (1967), pp. 529ff.; for a fierce criticism of this thesis see František Graus, 'Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der Hagiographie der Merowinger und Karolingerzeit. Die Viten der Heiligen des südalemannischen Raumes und die sogenannten Adelsheligen' in *Mönchtum Episkopat und Adel zur Gründungszeit des Klosters Reichenau*, Vorträge und Forschungen 20 (Thorbecke, Sigmaringen, 1974), pp. 131–76.

²⁰ František Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger, Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (Nákladatelství Československé akademie věd, Praha, 1965).

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of the legends and of the various categories of saints, and distinguishing the hagiographic elements from the non-hagiographic ones, Graus turned to the larger problem behind Hauck's assumption that the Christian cult of dynastic saints was the continuation of the 'charismatic' ruler cult in another form. It is a problem that has haunted historians of religion since David Hume suggested that the escalation of the cult of saints in the fourth century was, in fact, a return to the polytheism of the pre-Christian era.²¹ 'Saints: the Pagan Gods' Successors' was how the eminent French folklorist, Pierre Saintyves – building on the findings of late nineteenth-century classical philologists such as Hermann Usener, for example – encapsulated this interpretation in the title of his monograph of 1907.²² Subsequent historians of religion would marshal legions of evidence to show how much the cults of the saints of late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages had 'salvaged' of the classical hero-cults, the cults of the various pagan deities, and the sundry 'barbarian' nature-cults and mythologies.²³ It took Hippolyte Delehaye's revival of the Bollandist methodology²⁴ to redress the balance in favour of hagiography proper, and show up the weaknesses of the folklorist approach. The new trend focused on a more rigorous definition of the late-antique and early medieval cult of saints and the related belief in miracles; sought to clarify the ways in which the legends of the saints – admittedly an amalgam of a great variety of traditions – could be used as authentic historical sources; and emphasised the primacy of the contemporary monuments of a saint's cult in any evaluation of his or her historical role.

The deification and ceremonial veneration of the rulers of antiquity – and the bearing that these ruler cults had on the Christian cult of saints – is, obviously, one of the key issues of the subject at hand. Graus's work can safely be placed within this tradition. Sceptical, quite rightly, of theories of continuity resting on nothing more substantial than an uncritical ear for analogies,²⁵ Graus, too, brings a Bollandist rigour to his investigations of the sources and stereotype motifs pointing, on the one hand, to the Germanic 'charismatic' tradition, and the documents and legends of the Merovingian royal saints, on the other. He finds that the two types of cult have very little in common. The royal saints of

²¹ David Hume, 'The Natural History of Religion', in *Essays Moral and Political* (Longman & Green, London, 1875) II, p. 334; see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981), pp. 13–15.

²² Hermann Usener, *Legenden der heiligen Pelagia* (Bonn, 1879); Pierre Saintyves, *Les saints successeurs des dieux* (Paris, 1907).

²³ E.g. Stephan Czarnowski, *Le culte des héros et ses conditions sociales. Saint Patrick héros national de l'Irlande* (Paris, 1919).

²⁴ Hippolyte Delehaye, *Cinq leçons sur la méthode hagiographique*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 21 (Brussels, 1934); *Les légendes hagiographiques*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 18a (Brussels, 1955⁴); *Sanctus. Essai sur le culte des saints dans l'Antiquité*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 17 (Brussels, 1954²).

²⁵ Cf. Graus, *Volk*, pp. 18–25 for a detailed criticism of a variety of these positing continuity with Antiquity, and Celtic and Germanic traditions.

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Merovingian times earned their title to sanctity not by way of a sacral corollary to their kingly status, but rather in spite of it, by renouncing their royal rank, and assuming the role of a sacrifice, a ‘martyr’. As for the suggestion that the cult of the Merovingian royal saints had some ‘ideological-dynastic’ function, he finds no early medieval sources to substantiate it.²⁶

Graus’s greatest merit lies in his having raised and thoroughly examined also the other side of the question, namely, the attitude of the early medieval Church – and hagiography in general – to the Christianised versions of pagan beliefs and practices, and its ultimate positive evaluation of kingship.²⁷ The official Church position, we learn, was not wholesale disapproval. Quite a few pagan customs and notions ‘lived on’ in the legends that grew up around the Merovingian saints; and hagiographers and ecclesiastical authors – in their attempt to increase the influence of the Church – were more and more likely to speak well of the wielders of secular power (except, of course, in extreme cases). However, it is just this historical context, properly understood, that makes it most unlikely that the medieval notions of dynastic sanctity were a direct adaptation of the sacral ruler paradigm. For, the borrowing and the spontaneous syncretism notwithstanding, the ecclesiastical authors’ basic attitude remained one of hostility to paganism as such, and to the idea of the sacral nature of rulership specifically.

Thanks to Graus’s exhaustive analysis and polemic tone, medieval kingship was soon the topic of a whole series of papers and monographs. Writing in 1968, Karol Górski offered a comparative typology of the holy kings of Europe from the ninth to the twelfth century. He demonstrated the ubiquity of this type of saint, and the importance of the ideological role that these cults played – independently of their origin, ‘charismatic’ or otherwise – in the lives of the nascent feudal states.²⁸ William Chaney’s book, published in 1970, presented new archaeological, historical and mythological arguments in support of the theory of pagan–Christian continuity, at least as concerned the impressive number of Anglo-Saxon saintly kings (a group which Graus concedes to have been a special case).²⁹ All this helped lay the groundwork for Erich Hoffmann’s

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 300–34, 399–432.

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 166–95, 217–99, 334–89.

²⁸ Karol Górski, ‘La naissance des États et le “roi-saint”’. Problème de l’idéologie féodale’, in Aleksander Gieysztor and Tadeusz Manteuffel (eds.), *L’Europe aux IXe–XIe siècles. Aux origines des États nationaux* (Warsaw, 1968); Górski ‘Le roi saint. Un problème d’idéologie féodale’, *Annales ESC* 24 (1969), pp. 370–6.

²⁹ William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England. The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1970); see Graus, *Volk*, pp. 415–25; for a criticism, see R. Brentano, *Speculum* 47 (1972), pp. 754–5; for a reappraisal, see D. W. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1989), pp. 115–29.

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10 Introduction

challenge to Graus's thesis, published in 1975.³⁰ In a comparative analysis of the sources dealing with the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian royal cults, Hoffmann offered corroboratory documentation of Hauck's contention that the cults that grew up around the founders of the new Christian dynasties (*der heilige Spitzenahn*) were most important for their sacral-ideological function. He traced the process through which the cult of a dynasty's saintly forebears came to be a valuable weapon in times of struggle for the succession. He documented the development of the Christian royal saint as a hagiographic type which blended kingship with martyrdom by way of analogy with Christ. And he showed that there was a good probability that certain examples of the Christian ruler cult had indeed incorporated some of the pagan notions of sacral rulership.

While studies dealing with individual saint kings continued to appear one after the other (these we shall have occasion to consider later), the 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of some major works on the cult of saints as such. New analyses using the excellent research tools and the exacting techniques of source criticism accumulated since the Bollandists – the works of Evelyne Patlagean, Jacques Le Goff, Sofia Boesch Gajano, Jean-Claude Schmitt, and Patrick Geary – introduced to this field the new methods of the '*Nouvelle Histoire*', a kind of history of mentalities developed into historical anthropology.³¹ Of special interest from the point of view of sacral rulership is Peter Brown's book on the rise of the cult of saints in Late Antiquity. It is in the light of Brown's analysis that we really come to understand a point already made by Graus, namely, why it was that the Merovingian Church – which, otherwise, was a confederate of the ruling dynasty – shied away from recognising certain deceased members of the dynasty as *saints*. The reason, in a nutshell, was that originally the saint, the *vir Dei*, was necessarily the adversary of the secular ruler; having won supernatural powers through his martyrdom, his function in his afterlife – exercised through his relics and miracles – was to redress the wrongs done by his earthly rival.³² This notion of sanctity survived the age of

³⁰ Erich Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern. Königsheiliger und Königshaus* (Wachholtz, Neumünster, 1975).

³¹ Evelyne Patlagean, 'A Byzance: ancienne hagiographie et histoire sociale', *Annales ESC* (1967), pp. 780–91; Jacques Le Goff, 'Ecclesiastical Culture and Folklore in the Middle Ages: Saint Marcellus of Paris and the Dragon' in *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980), pp. 159–88; Sofia Boesch Gajano (ed.), *Agiografia altomedievale* (Mulino, Bologna, 1976); Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press; Princeton, 1978); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound. Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press; Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Cambridge, 1983); Stephen Wilson (ed.), *Saints and Their Cults. Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983).

³² Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; other important works by him on this subject: 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), pp. 80–101; repr. in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982), pp. 103–52; 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity', *Representations*, 2 (1983), pp. 1–25; *Authority and the Sacred. Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World*, The Tanner