



Staging the *leader's divinity*. Introduction
Escenificando la *divinidad del líder*. Introducción
Escenificant la *divinitat de l'líder*. Introducció
Encenando a *divindade do líder*. Introdução

Mirko VAGNONI¹

Sociological and politological as well as historiographical analysts have observed that various systems of political communication – including those conveyed in relatively secularized twenty-first century democracies – make use of religious languages and imagery to legitimate their power. Indeed, the Bible itself has very often been used by politicians to support their worldviews. Similarly, scholars have highlighted the political function of the public display of religiosity on the part of a leader of a specific social group. This was especially so in the Middle Ages, a time when Christian monarchs ruled over faithful subjects and when personal religious beliefs were publicly displayed.²

Generally, historians have focused particular attention on *sacred kingship* (also referred to as *royal sacrality*): the construct of political power that is conveyed through a setting that reveals the special relationship between the king and the divine or represents the ruler as a particularly pious and obsequious subject of the Church, a monarch who has been ordained by God himself. Classic studies by Marc Bloch, Percy Ernst Schramm, and Ernst Kantorowicz – as well as more recent investigations by Stefan Weinfurter, Franz-Reiner Erkens, Ludger Körntgen, and Francis Oakley – have documented this phenomenon.³

¹ Qualified as Associate Professor in Medieval Art History. E-mail: mirkovagnoni@libero.it.

² GAFFURI, Laura; VENTRONE, Paola (eds.). *Images, cultes, liturgies: les connotations politiques du message religieux*. Rome-Paris: École française de Rome and Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2014; ANDENNA, Giancarlo; GAFFURI, Laura; FILIPPINI, Elisabetta (eds.). *Monasticum regnum. Religione e politica nelle pratiche di governo tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*. Münster: Lit, 2015; HERRERO, Montserrat; AURELL, Jaume; MICELI STOUT, Angela C. (eds.). *Political Theology in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Discourses, Rites, and Representations*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016.

³ BLOCH, Marc. *Les Rois thaumaturges. Études sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*. Paris-Strasbourg: Librairie Istra, 1924; SCHRAMM, Percy



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In this school of interpretation, special attention has been given to the analysis of the iconographic sources and, more specifically, to representations of royalty - especially the blessing and crowning of a monarch by either Christ or by the Hand of God. As objects that embodied ideological concepts such as *a Deo coronatus* (crowned by God), *rex et sacerdos* (king and priest), and *christomimetes* (resembling Christ), these representations were intended to visualize their subjects' claims to power (*Herrscherbilder*). However, recent researches concentrating on these types of images have resulted in interesting findings, highlighting that the divine coronation and blessing scenes did not seem to have anything to do with celebratory purposes or ideological messages of legitimation of power but, on the contrary, that they appeared to be inspired by devotional sentiments and prayers to God.⁴ This calls into question and reformulates traditional ideas about the use of religion in medieval society, shifting the undue emphasis that has been placed on the political and propagandistic aspects of religion back to a consideration of its devotional use.

In pre-Modern society where so many things were ascribed to the Divine Will and immersed in religious devotion, did monarchs not share the same *intimate* and *private* beliefs as their subjects? Is it right for modern scholars to interpret their acts – as a matter of course – as being politically motivated? In the *hyper-sacred* context of the pre-Modern Ages, is it possible to consider royal consecration a ritual that was used to transform monarchs into special beings who were worthy of particular veneration and respect from their subjects?

Ernst. *Die deutschen Kaiser und Könige in Bildern ihrer Zeit. Bis zur Mitte 12. Jahrhunderts (751-1152)*. Leipzig-Berlin: Teubner, 1928; KANTOROWICZ, Ernst Hartwig. *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957; WEINFURTER, Stefan. "Idee und Funktion des 'Sakralkönigtums' bei den ottonischen und salischen Herrschern (10. und 11. Jahrhundert)". In: GRUNDLACH, Rolf; WEBER, Hermann (eds.). *Legitimation und Funktion des Herrschers. Vom ägyptischen Pharao zum neuzeitlichen Diktator*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992, p. 99-127; ERKENS, Franz-Reiner. *Herrschersakralität im Mittelalter: von den Anfängen bis zum Investiturstreit*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2006; KÖRNTGEN, Ludger. *Königsherrschaft und Gottes Gnade: zu Kontext und Funktion sakraler Vorstellungen in Historiographie und Bildzeugnissen der ottonisch-frühsalischen Zeit*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001; OAKLEY, Francis Christopher. *Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (to 1050)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

⁴ VAGNONI, Mirko. *Dei gratia rex Siciliae. Scene d'incoronazione divina nell'iconografia regia normanna*. Naples: Federico II University Press, 2017; VAGNONI, Mirko. *Epifanie del corpo in immagine dei re di Sicilia (1130-1266)*. Palermo: Palermo University Press, 2019.



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Following these suggestions, this issue of *Mirabilia Ars* aims to revitalize the debate surrounding the meanings and functions of royal sacrality in society by analysing the staging of the *leader's divinity* and his special relationship with God in images, texts, and rituals. In particular, it aims to stimulate a better comprehension of royal sacrality in order to understand if it was exclusively a political fiction and the outcome of a specific governmental strategy to legitimate power or, instead, if in some particular situations the relationship between the king and the sacral elements could have a different function, namely if it was to simply manifest a personal devotion and an authentic and real religious sentiment.

This will shed light on Europe's past *and* present political discourse. Indeed, although the continent has changed in very significant ways, the use of religious imagery persists in European politics as **Nicolas Humphris** (Institut Catholique de Paris, France) pointed out in his text. The author undertook to develop in depth the theme proposed for this issue, analyzing its medieval roots and its permanence in contemporary republican France.

The section *Varia*, once again, reinforces the international prestige and multi-thematic character of *Mirabilia Ars*. **Sara Fernández Rubín** (Univesidad de Salamanca, Spain) introduces us to women as a source of aesthetic pleasure – and their relationship with dance and musical forms – in late medieval India.

Alexandre Emerick Neves (Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Brazil) proposes an *anachronistic reading*, based on the methodology developed by Georges Didi-Huberman, on the two-faceted crucifixes of the *Manueline Style* in Portugal and the *survival* of these artistic motifs in contemporary aesthetic reflections.

Finally, **Laura Pintado Marín** (Universidade Complutense de Madrid, Spain) takes up the theme of the female presence in the art world with an extensive and profound biographical approach to Elizabeth Sidall, model and artist of the iconic pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

The thematic and institutional diversity of the papers and authors of this fourteenth edition reaffirms *Mirabilia Ars'* commitment to international academic cooperation, interdisciplinarity and high-level intellectual production. We thank all the colleagues



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who contributed to this issue and reiterate our desire to always provide the research community with a high-impact publication, allocated to more than eighty indexers.