In a small room in a corner of the Getty Villa in Los Angeles, a gorgeous full-body bronze sculpture of a young athlete crowning himself with an olive wreath, dating back to Greece from between 300 and 100 BC, is on display. The museum’s catalogue calls the figure *The Victorious Youth* (see Figure 1), and describes it in these terms:

In the traditional pose of a victorious athlete, a relaxed and confident youth crowns himself with a wreath, probably olive. The olive wreath was the prize for a victor in the Olympic Games and identifies this youth as a victorious athlete. He may have carried palm branches, another attribute of victory, in his left hand. The figure’s eyes were once inset with stones of glass paste to create a naturalistic impression. This statue probably commemorated an athletic triumph at Olympia, where the olive wreath was given as a prize. It may have stood in the sanctuary there or in the athlete’s hometown.  

Although this is a self-coronation in an athletic rather than a political context, the statue’s iconographic motif proves that the ancient world was familiar with the custom of placing a crown on one’s own head. From the start of the Christian era, this gesture of

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1. I do not give you sign or word: // free, upright and whole is thy will: // ’twere a fault not to act according to its prompting: // wherefore I do crown and mitre thee over thyself’ (Virgil’s declaration to Dante at the Paradiso’s thresholds, in Dante, *Divina Commedia, Purgatorio*, Chant 27, verses 139–42). See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 483–95.


3. I do not intend to engage with the intensive historiographical debate on the meaning of the gesture of this statue, which I noticed on my first visit to the Getty Villa museum. Rather,
I just take it as iconographic data for this book, taking into account its most probable sense. The text describing the statue has actually changed several times in the past few years, and the latest inscription states that the victorious athlete ‘is about to remove his wreath’ rather than ‘crowning himself’. The most extensive work on the sculpture is Carol C. Mattusch, *The Victorious Youth* (Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 1997). She adds another example of the apparent self-crowning in a figure of the goddess Eros (Mattusch, *The Victorious Youth*, 9, figure 9).
royal self-coronation has conventionally been considered a transgression of tradition on the part of the sovereign who practises it. The sovereign who puts a crown on his own head clearly defies the priest, to whom it naturally falls to act as mediator between the divinity that confers temporal power from above and the person receiving this authority on earth. The popularity and spread of the rite of self-coronation reached its zenith with Napoleon’s imperial self-coronation in Paris on 2 December 1804, an event that achieved world notoriety in large part because of the monumental painting by the court artist Louis David, currently on display at the Louvre (see Figure 2).

The scene actually represents the coronation of Empress Josephine by the emperor, but activates an inevitable reference to the transgressive gesture of Napoleon’s self-coronation that preceded it.

Figure 2 Coronation of Empress Josephine in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris on 2 December 1804, by Jacques-Louis David, 1807. Louvre Museum in Paris, France. © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Angèle Dequier.

Notably, Pope Pius VII appears in the painting as a passive spectator, an attitude reflected in the apparently melancholy smile on his face. Received through heredity, election, military victory or usurpation, royal dignity is usually established through a solemn ceremony of investiture that tends to take multiple ritual forms. In the post-Constantinian Christian world, the recognition of self-coronation as a transgressive gesture presupposes the belief that the king should receive sacred authority, with the necessary mediation of a priest, solemnised in the ceremony of the investiture of the sovereign.

It is obvious that between the relaxed and confident figure of the Greek athlete and Napoleon’s authoritative gesture lies a complex evolution of historical context, ritual forms and iconographic motifs through which self-coronations have been enacted and represented – a multilayered development this book examines and interprets. Though Napoleon’s self-coronation in 1804 is generally taken to have been an extraordinary event that broke the long tradition of kings being crowned by bishops, research shows that the ritual of self-coronation was already known and practised by Christian European kings. Thus, considering both the imaginary representations and the ceremonial experience of self-coronation, and in order to reflect on its symbolic meaning and its ritual dimension, this book focuses on the self-coronations imagined and/or performed by sovereigns. It traces the origins of these specific rituals and their continuity and discontinuity, as well as their evolution from exceptionality to normativity, from ancient civilisations to the present, particularly focusing on the Middle Ages. It narrates the long history of self-coronations, highlighted by placing the chronological accounts of self-coronations in their own particular context. It challenges previous assumptions, since it shows that self-coronations began in the very distant past, that they were not extraordinary events at all, and they were not as transgressive or non-conventional as we might perhaps want to imagine. It poses two essential questions: one historical – ‘What is the long-term story of royal self-coronations?’ – and the other anthropological – ‘What does self-crowning reveal about the operation of ritual, and what is its symbolic meaning?’

One may naturally question the ability of coronations to generate social transformations, especially if one considers the ostensibly passive role of the king during the ceremony, as traditional scholarship on the subject has argued. Richard A. Jackson notes that ‘the king seems to play a role definitely minor’ during the ceremony of
his own investiture. Meyer Fortes states that ‘the part played by ecclesiastical dignitaries in these ceremonies is significant’ and that ‘the occupant of [the] office cannot legitimately install himself.’

That priests make kings in Europe, Africa and Asia has been posited by scholars who have published comprehensive approaches to the topic, such as Arthur M. Hocart and, more recently, David Graber and Marshall Sahlins.

Royal investment in the different kingdoms of medieval Europe was usually composed by an addition of ceremonies. The most common were the unction and the crowning by the bishop. The normative structure of the ceremony requires that, at the climax of the event, the bishop places the crown on the king’s head, as most medieval Western European iconography shows (see Figure 3).

This practice was certainly normative in England, France and Germany, and was quickly adopted in Sicily and Jerusalem. In those

European kingdoms other forms of coronations were not practised at all, with the possible exceptions of the intriguing story of the auto-investiture of King Cnut (1016–35)\(^9\) and the self-coronation of

\(^9\) Henry of Huntingdon documents that Cnut enthroned himself at the seashore. Since he was at the peak of his power, he ordered the incoming tide not to presume to wet the ruler of England. The tide, however, rose and soaked the king. Cnut then regretted his arrogance and humbly recognised that the power of earthly kings was worthless and that the only one
Richard I of England in 1189, both clearly seen as opprobrium. From the thirteenth century onwards, departure from established tradition was not really an option for the French and English, since they could not truly become kings in the medieval and early modern eras until they had been anointed and crowned by the bishops. But the variety of rituals of coronations and, crucially, the diversity of the places in which they were performed, show that the French, English and German models should not be taken as conventional elsewhere. Thus, this book aims to demonstrate that at some points in the Middle Ages, and particularly in some areas, such as Iberia and other Central and Northern European kingdoms, the coronation by the bishop was not the more common or even orthodox or conventional ritual of investiture. In these kingdoms, coronations by bishops were replaced by coronations by the kings themselves, or other forms of

 worthy of the name was He who ruled the universe. Consequently, Cnut never again wore the gold crown that he had given himself and put it on the head of Christ crucified instead (Robert Deshman, ‘Christus Rex et Magi Reges: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art’, Frühmittelalterliche Studien 10 (1976): 367–405, here 404–5). Matthew of Paris relates the same story in his Chronica Majora when telling of Cnut’s death. He confirms that ‘rex quoque deinceps nunquam coronam portavit; sed coronam suam super caput imaginis Crucifixi componens, magnum regibus futuris praebuit humilitatis exemplum’ – ‘the king never wore the crown again; it was put on the head of a Crucifix image, offering a great example of humility for future kings’ (Matthew of Paris, Mattaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica majora, ed. Henry Richards Luard [London: Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, Rolls Series, Kraus Reprint, 1964], vol. 57: 1, p. 510). The tale seems to have some basis in reality, since in 1023 Cnut recorded in a charter to Christchurch, Canterbury, that he laid ‘the royal crown from my head with my own hands upon the altar of Christ in Canterbury’ (Agnes J. Robertson, Anglo-Saxon Charters [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956], 159, n. 82, 407). A posterior list of Canterbury donors states that Christ’s crown was kept on the head of Christ in Canterbury (William A. Chaney, The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970], 139). Cnut’s regret for having put the crown on his own head sends the message that self-coronation was not approved of in England at the time Henry of Huntingdon and Matthew of Paris wrote their chronicles – the mid-twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries.

10 The chronicler Roger of Howden records that Richard I’s ceremony of investiture, performed on 13 September 1189, consisted of the usual anointing by Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury. Yet, at the moment of coronation, Richard himself picked up the crown and handed it to the archbishop, instead of the bishop taking it from the altar. However, the bishop actually placed the crown on the king’s head, with the assistance of two nobles: ‘Deinde ipse [the king] cepit coronam de altari, et tradidit eam archiepiscopo, et archiepiscopus posuit eam super caput illius, quam duo comites sustinebant propter ponderositatem ipsius’ (Roger of Howden, Chronica. Magistri Rogeri de Houedene, ed. William Stubbs. 4 vols. [Oxford: Macmillan, 1870], 3:11). In later coronations, the archbishop would take the crown from the altar in order to place it on the king’s head. Yet it is not clear if Richard I finally crowned himself or if he just took the crown from the altar (as the chronicler says) before the bishop put the crown on his head. In any case, whether or not this was an innovation, it was a real gesture of self-affirmation: John Gillingham, Richard I (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 107.
investiture, more than we tend to think. Perhaps the time has come to revise a paradigm so deeply established, not only in the popular imagination that sees Napoleon’s self-coronation as the paradigm of originality, unconventionality and transgression, but also in scholarship.

More specifically, these supposed conventional forms of coronation were not practised in Denmark and Norway until the second half of the twelfth century, in Bohemia until the thirteenth century or in Poland and Scotland until the fourteenth century, and they were only occasionally practised in other European kingdoms, especially in Wales and Ireland. Iberian rulers temporarily adopted unction and coronation or occasionally abandoned them. Uction and coronation were introduced, sought out and petitioned for by kings across the Latin West without a particular chronological or special regularity and uniformity.  

11 The general perspective provides one of the key data for this project.

Consequently, we should clarify the difference between the notions of ‘coronation’ and ‘self-coronation’, and examine the historical and symbolic implications of the latter term. While the French, English and imperial coronations by the bishops and the Pope have been largely examined, expanding this particular model to all the Western kingdoms, the allegedly unconventional strategy of self-coronations deserves more attention. Some primary sources speak clearly of the essential difference between coronations and self-coronations, beginning with Charlemagne’s initial reluctance to be crowned by the Pope. According to Einhard, if the emperor ‘had known beforehand the [P]ope’s plan, he would never have entered the church [to be crowned by the Pope].’  

12 The Franks believed Charlemagne owed his title of emperor not to papal coronation but to an acknowledgement of his power by the people he ruled.  


Further evidence of the difference between coronations and self-coronations, and their respective symbolic implications, comes from the chronicler William of Malmesbury, who documents that on 29 January 1121 Henry of England married Adeliza of Louvain at Windsor. The next day, as Ralph d’Escures, Archbishop of Canterbury, was presiding over Adeliza’s coronation, he noticed that the king was seated on his throne wearing the crown. Furious that another man had anticipated a duty he should have carried out himself, he went up to the king, just as he was, in his holy pallium. The king rose, out of respect for him. Ralph said: ‘Who crowned you?’ The king excused himself, saying he did not know. ‘You have been crowned unlawfully,’ Ralph said. ‘Either you must take off your crown, or I will not celebrate Mass.’ ‘No, lord father,’ answered the king, ‘correct the error, and do what should be done.’ Ralph therefore put out his hands to take off the crown [‘Illo ergo manus ad auferendum diadema compnente’], and the king began to untie the fastening at his chin.\footnote{\textit{Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450}, ed. James H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 211–51, here 231.}


A fourth testimony comes from the nineteenth century, when Henry de Saint-Simon argued for the hegemony of his own class of nobles, which he identified as possessing the same dignity as the old Peers of France. Thus, he stated, without their agreement, it was impossible for the king to be crowned:

The king cannot bear the great weight of the crown except with the aid of those who have placed it upon his head and who support it there. That is to say that the great affairs of the kingdom ought to be equally shared with them in writing, in counsel, in power because they equally support the Crown; that without them there is no important sanction, no law, no new structure; that they are those who come closest to approaching and supporting the Crown and are even the only who may place their hand upon it, that is to say, who may join together with the king, establish laws with the king, coexecute the most important things with him, constitute, colegislate, and validate, authorize by the power, by virtue of the whole nation residing in them, all that it pleases the king to do with their concurrence.\(^\text{17}\)

From these accounts, it would appear that the practice of self-coronation was viewed as a transgression of the norm, leading to a generalised idea that might have actually artificially projected Napoleon’s legendary self-coronation in 1804 back to those performed during the Middle Ages. Yet, as I try to show in this book, the assumption of self-coronations as a transgressive ritual is valid only for French, English and German kingdoms, where the ceremonial norm of the king being crowned by the bishop was firmly established, particularly in France, where it became a symbol ‘for the principle that political authority was sacrosanct’.\(^\text{18}\) But this was not the case for other kingdoms of medieval Europe, which witnessed very different ritual formulas of accession, self-coronations among them. Here also appears the anachronism of projecting our modern ideas about ‘secularisation’ back to the Middle Ages which, once again, leads to multiple misunderstandings.

Historians do not use the word ‘coronation’ to describe accession rituals in medieval Europe because they consider it misleading. Apart from the fact that more occurs in this ceremony than the specific gesture of the coronation by the bishop, the reduction of the royal accession to the ‘coronation’ would exclude other ceremonial forms such as self-coronations – which have not necessarily been conceived as ‘transgressive rituals’.\(^\text{19}\) I think the modern word ‘coronation’ can be obstructive because it stresses one particular act. This complicates our approach to coronations in non-inaugural circumstances. For instance, the Germans felt the need to invent the term *Festkrönung* to designate events medieval


\(^{19}\) Johanna Dale has examined medieval chronicles to see how inaugurations were described and, although chroniclers occasionally do use the word ‘coronation’ or linked words (i.e. ‘crowning’), they more often prefer other terms, particularly those linked to anointing or consecration: see Johanna Dale, *Inauguration and Liturgical Kingship in the Long Twentieth Century: Male and Female Accession Rituals in France, England and the Empire* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), chapter 3.
people simply called ‘coronations’. Other historians have highlighted the double meaning of the concept of ‘accession’: ‘The Latin word “accessio” can be translated into English both as “accession” (i.e. enthronement or the adoption of royal status) and as “access” (i.e. the right of non-royal persons to approach or petition the person seated on the royal throne).’

In any case, no one can deny that the specific gesture of ‘putting the crown on the king’s head’ has a special relevance relating to the other ceremonies of the investiture, because of its intrinsic symbolic meaning and ritual dramatisation. Then, the decision of who places the crown on the king’s head in the ceremony of investiture is not a trivial choice, since the formula of royal investiture as declared in the first imperial ceremonies clearly states that ‘the Pontiff [or bishop] must stay at the altar and put the diadem on the emperor’s [or king’s] head.’

In opposition to what is usually believed, there are multiple forms of transferring the office of the kingdom to an individual apart from ecclesiastical mediation. Björn Weiler has analysed the theme of the rex renitens, in which ‘reluctant kingship was not merely confined to being hesitant before assuming office; it could also, and just as frequently, include an unwillingness to accept the trappings of office, that is the title, insignia, or ceremonial of kingship’, as happened with Saint Ladislaus of Hungary, Henry I of France and Godfrey I of Jerusalem. Jacek Banaszkiewicz gives details of Conrad II of Germany’s peculiar investiture – or its propagandistic narrative – in which four petitioners with a separate claim and an individual complainant approach the king. Conrad had to attend to these four claimants – a peasant, an orphan, a widow and a vagabond – before being anointed. Philip Lane details some of the ‘rituals of ruling’ in medieval Scandinavia, in which ‘the

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21 Reinhard Elze, Ordines coronationis imperialis (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1960), 18 (Pontifical of Mainz, in which is included the Ordo Coronationis of Ottonian kings).
crown was normally placed by nobles’ under the archbishop’s supervision; in others, ‘German emperors conferred the crowns on Danish princes or kings in return for an act of submission’.  

Dusan Zupka offers a variety of rituals of accession enacted by Central European rulers in Germany, Bohemia and Hungary. He describes several forms of these ceremonies, whose variation depended on specific occasions and circumstances. The sources do not always allow us to identify clearly demarcated boundaries among them: Erstkrönung, Festkrönung, Mitkrönung, Beikrönung, Unter-Krone-gehen and Kronentragen, among others.

Another variation of the alleged conventional ritual (the bishop crowning the king) is the practice of self-coronations. When a king decides to crown himself, this gesture not only has symbolic implications which affect the content of the ceremony, but it also reshapes the entire ritual and subverts participants’ expectations. So the self-crowned kings analysed in this book, such as Alfonso IV of Aragon (1328), Alfonso XI of Castile (1332), Peter IV of Aragon (1336), Charles III of Navarra (1390), Martin I of Aragon (1399) and Ferdinand I of Aragon (1414), were using their agency to emphasise their authority as well as their autonomy in temporal matters over the sacred hierarchy. Certainly, there can be many types of self-coronation, as many as there can be self-investitures. In the first place, the self-coronation could occur in the context of the royal consecration Mass, which would therefore be a properly sacred context. That was the case with the fourteenth-century Iberian kings, whose self-coronations preserved all the ceremonies established by the rituals, except at the solemn moment of the actual crowning, when the kings placed the crown on their heads themselves. In the second instance,
self-coronation may be orchestrated directly by the king crowning his heir without resorting to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as happened in some Byzantine and Carolingian investitures. Finally, there may be a self-coronation (or, more properly, a ceremony of wearing the crown) without the presence of a sacred minister or any ceremony and therefore, strictly speaking, without consecration, as appears to have been the case with Frederick II in Jerusalem.

Previous scholarship has rarely analysed self-coronations. Carlrichard Brühl uses the concept of self-coronation in 1984, in an article which referred to the practice of self-coronation by kings and emperors from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries. Hans E. Mayer documents the (supposed) self-coronation of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen in Jerusalem in 1229. Teófilo F. Ruiz discusses this in his article on the self-coronation of Alfonso XI of Castile in 1332, connecting it with the concept of (de)sacralisation. Marta Serrano-Coll and I use the concept in our historical and iconographic analysis of Peter IV of Aragon’s self-coronation in 1336. Finally, Christopher Clark and Philippe Buc have published valuable articles on the self-coronation of Frederick I of Prussia (1701).

In addition to the analysis of these ceremonies of self-coronation, this book also focuses on what the Byzantinist André Grabar calls ‘celestial coronation’ or ‘symbolic coronation’ (couronnement symbolique) to refer to the imaginative iconographic dimension of the ritual of self-coronation developed in the East by ancient and medieval empires such as Persia and Byzantium. Rather than the emperor being crowned by the priest, those


societies developed the iconography of the divinity Ahura Mazda (in Persia) or Christ himself (in Byzantium) crowning the ruler. This peculiar iconography conveys the idea of the divinity of the sovereign, who need not be crowned by the priest-mediator because he already has direct access to God. Yet paradoxically, and contrasting with these symbolic self-coronations, we have historical evidence that the ritual of coronation was performed by the priest or the patriarch in most cases, in both Persia and Byzantium.

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I have used three different primary sources for analysing the ritual of self-coronation: historiographical, liturgical and iconographic imprints.

First, and guided by my own work on medieval historiography in the book *Authoring the Past*, I have employed the descriptions written by witnesses of those coronations as well as the historical narratives produced by chroniclers at the time or shortly after the event. The use of narrative texts in the analysis of the ritual connects with debates around the correct understanding of these sources to enter the substance of the rituals. Here the core of the issue is divided into two main problems: first, on the veracity of the sources and, second, on the danger of projecting modern interpretive categories back to the medieval spirit of these sources. In his study on the *rex renitens*, Weiler gives one of the keys for approaching the first of these dilemmas:

Many of our sources contain anecdotes, legends, and episodes which bear little or no resemblance to what we know to have happened. At the same time, their veracity is of only marginal concern here. Although an awareness of the wider background will be useful, it is not our primary aim to establish whether a king had really been reluctant, but rather why a particular author may have described him as such.  

To deal with medieval self-coronations is thus not only to try to establish what really happened, especially when we can base our historical knowledge of the event on a variety of sources – as in the case of Peter the Ceremonious’ self-coronation, for which we have the narrative account, the liturgical ordo and some iconographic representations. It is also, and crucially, to learn how a particular ritual of self-coronation was represented and interpreted by people at the time or by the next generations of chroniclers.

As for the second issue, the projection of modern interpretive categories, Buc has alerted historians to the danger of constructing their interpretations of medieval rituals on modern social scientific models rather than on medieval hermeneutics and theological models. This was especially

34 Weiler, ‘*Rex Renitens* and Medieval Ideas of Kingship’, 3.
notable in interwar Germany, where Percy E. Schramm developed his work. In his influential *Dangers of Ritual*, Buc opens a lively debate between history and anthropology of the rituals to medieval studies, which I analyse in Chapter 1.\(^{35}\) Buc’s perspectives are particularly useful for my own theories on the practice of self-coronations since this book is in part an inductive demonstration that ‘the ceremonies that the early modernist takes for granted were not central to medieval kingship at all times and in all places.’\(^{36}\) As I argue, it is wrong to take the coronation enacted by the bishop as a model for ceremonies of royal accession in the Middle Ages, as a plurality of ceremonies, self-coronations among them, existed.

One of Buc’s main conclusions is that ‘medieval sources seldom present a ceremony as it actually happened.’\(^{37}\) Yet Buc does not promote scepticism towards these sources because, though subjective, they constitute our only access to medieval rituals. The same heuristic scepticism could be actually applied to all narratives and historiographical texts used as sources of all aspects of the past.\(^{38}\) Yet the very existence of narratives implies the explicit recognition of the ritual, as well as its relevance beyond its actual enactment. More properly, these narrations of the rites by the medieval chroniclers ‘meant not so much to report a ritual as to influence how a ritual would come to be interpreted. . . . It was not some magical power of ritual but rather a ritual’s reception that shaped society and politics.’\(^{39}\)

Buc concludes that the process of interpreting ritual began at the time of performance and continued thereafter.\(^{40}\) To be sure, the record of a ritual constitutes an event in itself: although of a narrative nature, it

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\(^{36}\) Buc, ‘1’701 in Medieval Perspective’, 94.

\(^{37}\) Buc, ‘1’701 in Medieval Perspective’, 110.


\(^{39}\) Buc, ‘1’701 in Medieval Perspective’, 110.

generates a new historical reality, as we consider its effects on its audience. The act of remembering ‘changed the very nature of what would be preserved’. As David A. Warner argues:

In any case, whether the ritual in question actually occurred or not, the ability to impose a particular reading on it implied a kind of power or authority, which, in the case of literary account, had the potential to increase as the event itself receded into the past and competing, nonliterary accounts faded.

Compared to legal briefs, notarial documentation and chancellery records, narrative sources are probably less reliable from a strict heuristic point of view. But they convey more accurately the richness of cultural manifestations, and the historian should not discard them because of their heuristic ambiguity or epistemic complexity. Actually, in some of the self-coronations analysed in this book, particularly those of Frederick II of Germany and Peter IV of Aragon, we explore how the informant has manipulated the historical account to articulate an approach to reality in order to achieve certain political aims. Thus, the story narrated by the chronicler should be contrasted with other documents. This comparative analysis of sources, though useful, nonetheless cannot provide a detailed and definitive reconstruction of the facts. Since the question of whether the ritual narrated ‘really happened’ and ‘in what form’ is certainly relevant but unanswerable in the end, it is perhaps more useful to analyse what criteria might have led a chronicler to include an account of a ritual in his historical narrative, how these criteria affected the content of his work and how the narration was shaped and the event remembered.

In addition to narrative accounts, I have also used sources of a liturgical nature: missals, pontificals and ordines and, for the fourteenth century onwards, the books of ceremonies or liturgical collections. Since verbal and gestural ritual are too easily corrupted by the passage of time, lapses of memory and deliberate falsifications, ecclesiastics firstly and rulers later commissioned liturgical ceremonials, before or after the events, in order to establish and validate the ritual performed in the ceremonies of

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42 Warner, ‘Ritual and Memory in the Ottonian Reich’, 256.
investiture. Some historians have turned to royal consecration ordines for insights about medieval kingship. These ordines were subsequent to royal consecrations since they first emerged in Carolingian Europe. Liturgical texts prescribe the actions and words during a rite. The theological discipline of the liturgy, mostly applied to medieval and early modern religious ceremonies, has been of great value for the interpretation of this kind of resource: any ceremony connected with the sacred represents the liturgification of a ritual. Coronation orders, liturgical plays and the ceremonial scripts fill the signs of rulership with life through the codification of the most auspicious and politically important ceremonies and spectacles of the Middle Ages. Though they are not always accurate descriptions of what really happened in a ritual, ordines provide us with primary evidence for the motives, perceptions and beliefs of their promoters and compilers. The ceremonial commissioned by Peter the Ceremonious to consolidate the specific gesture of self-coronations (see Chapter 10) has been particularly useful in my research on this ritual. Johanna Dale is right when she states that ‘the narrative and liturgical testimonies are rarely complementary’, so that Peter’s propagandistic programme – gathering narrative, liturgical and iconographic evidence – has provided us with an extraordinary ensemble of sources and inspired historical interpretations.

In my analysis of the ceremonies of the investiture through liturgical sources I have also used as a model some works published by medievalists interested in the ritual dimension of the coronations. Ritual studies has...
shifted between a comparative-presentist tendency, privileging the analysis of contemporary rituals in some traditional societies preserved in different places of Africa, America, Australia and Asia, and the very influential ‘myth-ritual school’ of Cambridge in the 1920s–1930s, entirely based on ancient studies. Therefore, medieval and early modern rituals did not fit well between these two poles, so the scholars of ritual studies have not usually paid attention to those intermediary periods. Nevertheless, three very qualified exceptions serve as forerunners of current medieval ritual studies: Marc Bloch’s *Les rois thaumaturges* (1924), Ernst Kantorowicz’s *Ladies Regiae* (1949) and Percy E. Schramm’s *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste* (1968). In the 1980s, British medievalists, notably Janet L. Nelson, connected medieval studies on investitures with the best of the Cambridge ancient studies developed in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, certain French medievalists of the mentalités, notably Jacques Le Goff and afterwards Jean-Claude Schmitt, Eric Palazzo and Philippe Buc, were inspired by classic historians of the first generation of the Annales like Marc Bloch, and they found their own path to medieval ritual and liturgy. In addition, Central European and American medievalists, including Gerd Althoff, Geoffrey Koziol, János Bak, Teófilo Ruiz and Patrick Geary, also found different ways to approach the rituals of accession, and engaged themselves in an interesting debate on the nature of medieval rituals and the limitations of the negotiation with anthropological ritual studies and social sciences-oriented approaches. Finally, a new generation of scholars, such as Björn Weiler, Johanna Dale, Simon John, Nicholas Vincent, Christina Pössel and Simon MacLean, most of them trained in the British historiographical tradition pioneered by Timothy Reuter and Janet Nelson, have approached medieval rituals of accession blending narrative and liturgical sources, have provided a convincing analytical prospection, and have taken the best of the recent debate on medieval rituals just mentioned. Since self-coronations occurred mostly in medieval Iberia, I have also based my research on the work of scholars such as Bonifacio Palacios, José Manuel Nieto Soria and Peter Linehan, who have analysed Iberian royal coronations in depth.


Bonifacio Palacios Martin, *La coronación de los reyes de Aragón, 1204–1410* (Valencia: Anubar, 1975); Peter Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain* (Oxford:
In addition to narrative and liturgical sources and to this rich tradition of scholarship, I have collected numerous iconographic representations of self-coronations. These primarily include reliefs, sculptures, mural pictures and coins for the chapter on the forms of mediation in antiquity (Chapter 2), and miniatures, pictures and mosaics from the Middle Ages. Some of these images reveal coronations performed historically while most of them show coronations without historical referentiality, as an event imagined by artists or promoted by their patrons. Nevertheless, I deploy both forms of images, the referential and the non-referential, as examples of ‘symbolic’ or ‘heavenly’ coronations, and they provide us with keys to the meaning of self-coronations as well. Relevant literature has been published on the historical function of miniatures and other medieval images, especially those promoted by or connected with royal power. They teach us how to locate the images in their textual and historical context. This operation of ‘putting the events and the images in context’ shapes my research on self-coronations since, as Robert Darnton argues, ‘symbols work not merely because of their metaphorical power but also by virtue of their position within a cultural frame.’

Understanding the specific ritual of self-coronation involves comprehending both its metaphorical dimension (the general meaning encoded in this ceremony and its location in the entire system of the nature of the ritual to which it belongs) and the particular context in which this dimension is enacted. Thus, we comprehend both its common system of meaning and how this meaning is socially shared.

Nevertheless, the operation of taking the iconographic sources for historical inquiry should take into account the function of the audience of these images. Most of the images I have used as historical evidence – particularly those miniatures I discuss in the chapters devoted to Iberian monarchies – were limited to an aristocratic and clerical audience. They were usually placed in ceremonial books, which were read by a small audience (see Figure 4).


Figure 4 One of the pages of the *Ceremonial de consagración y coronación de los reyes de Aragón*. Annex to the *Ordinacions de Cort*, second half of the fourteenth century. Biblioteca de la Fundación Lázaro Galdiano, reg. 14425, fol. 19 r. © Museo Lázaro Galdiano. Madrid.
The subject and the composition of the image inserted in one of the pages of Peter the Ceremonious’ ceremonial, in which the king crowns his wife (see Figures 27 and 30), is strikingly similar to David’s drawing of Napoleon’s self-coronation (see Figure 2). Yet the former was designed for contemplation by a small ecclesiastical and noble elite, and probably just for practical purposes, while the latter was intended to be seen by multiple visitors to the ruler’s palace. Actually, the later story of both images validates their designers’ original purpose. Peter’s miniature was produced for a reduced contemporary audience and for a few scholars who have been fortunate enough to see the manuscript, which lies in a corner of the Lázaro Galdiano Library in Madrid. By contrast, Napoleon’s imposing painting is visited by hundreds of thousands of people a year in the Louvre museum in Paris.

Paradoxically, images related to ceremonies of royal investiture usually develop a more elaborate symbolic language so as to reinforce the authority of the king. As John Elliott argues:

It is as if a form of ‘Avis principle’ operates in the world of imagery and propaganda: those who are only second try harder. Where ... the supremacy of the king is taken for granted, political imagery can be studiously understated, and there is no need to deck out the ruler with elaborate allegorical trappings.  

This would also justify the distinction between the symbolic and ritual self-coronations that govern the structure of this book. Those powerful kings who were able to perform self-coronations such as Frederick II of Germany, Alfonso XI of Castile or Peter IV of Aragon did not need to return to the iconographic motif of Jesus Christ crowning the king, unlike the Byzantine emperors or Roger II of Sicily.

Apart from these historical sources, this project has also been framed by methodological choices and theoretical assumptions such as the emphasis on political theology, the use of long-term chronology and cultural comparative exercise, the concept of agency, and the use of the ritual studies and theories.

Political theology, as first developed by the political philosopher Carl Schmitt in the 1920s, is based on the analysis of the transferences between the spiritual and the temporal, the sacred and the profane, the political and the religious. It is therefore a useful methodological tool that

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55 Carl Schmitt, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985) and Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political
recognises the affinity between the systematic structure of theological and juridical concepts and the political consequences that this resemblance or analogy entails. This analogy is relevant because all significant concepts of the theory of the modern state are secularised concepts. For instance, the state of exception in modern jurisprudence would be the secularised version of the miracle in theology just as the ‘king’s two bodies’ would be the secularised version of the doctrine of the two natures of Jesus Christ in theology. The monarchical sovereignty would be the secular version of the monotheistic conviction in religion just as the idea of utopia would be the secularised version of paradise, and the communist ideal would be a secular version of chiliastic eschatology.\textsuperscript{56} As Schmitt declared in his foundational definition of the term in 1922:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent law-giver – but also because of their systematic structure.\textsuperscript{57}

Schmitt offers a methodological tool that has also been relevant for the examination of the development of political and religious ideas and cultural practices. To be sure, Schmitt conceived this methodology for the analysis of the early modern and modern eras rather than the medieval. Nevertheless, some medievalists have used it, more or less explicitly, in their studies, and scholars of law, theology and sociology have expanded it to their respective disciplines. Kantorowicz is probably the most relevant of them, in applying it to his monograph \textit{The King’s Two Bodies} (1957), which he subtitled \textit{A Study on Medieval Political Theology}.\textsuperscript{58}


\textsuperscript{57} Schmitt, \textit{Political Theology}, 36.

Kantorowicz was aware of the dual nature of the concept, which embodies both historical-temporal development and systematic-normative structure. This normative structure allows the concept to be applied to the examination of any period, but particularly those after the Christianisation of the Roman Empire after the fourth century.

Approaching medieval self-coronations under the light of political theology allows us to discern parallels, contrasts, transferences, transpositions, filters and dualities between the temporal power exercised by kings and the spiritual authority proper to bishops. Political theology avoids misunderstandings in the necessary dual approach – from the temporal to the spiritual – in royal coronations since ‘a world wholly demystified is a world wholly depoliticized.’\(^5^9\) Philosophers of religion such as Mircea Eliade and historians of kingship such as Arthur M. Hocart have arrived to the same conclusion after their ambitious comparative approach: ‘When it is prayed that he [the king] may defend the “fortresses of God”, it is as . . . to say whether these fortresses are material or spiritual. The fact is, they are both, for the material and the spiritual cannot be separated.’\(^6^0\) The question of the universality of kingship and its eventual divinity has allowed historians and anthropologists to approach it through cross-cultural, multidisciplinary and cross-temporal comparisons, as visible in the collective volumes edited by Nicole Brisch, Rolf Gundlach and Hermann Weber, Franz-Reiner Erkens and Declan Quigley.\(^6^1\) This approach promotes general visions and theories, so that anthropologists such as Michael Puett have related the conviction of the divinity of kingship with the development of and reaction to imperial policies.\(^6^2\)

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Thus, the practice of self-coronation, with all its symbolic implications, serves as an excellent field from which to discuss the tensions and transferences between these realms: spiritual and temporal, religious and political, supernatural and natural, ecclesiastical and civil and transcendent and mundane. In addition, the use of the political theology allows us to evade the presentism and anachronism that might arise from applying contemporary concepts, such as that of ‘political religion’, to medieval cultural phenomena.\(^{63}\) In the public sphere, a nuanced approach to the relationships between the spiritual and temporal spheres avoids in its turn artificial fusions between the religious and the political which could potentially damage social stability.\(^{64}\)

My second methodological strategy assumes the long-term approach that compares the sixth century BC with its establishment of the new Persian-Achaemenid dynasty to Napoleon’s self-coronation in Notre-Dame of Paris in 1804, although certainly privileging my own speciality of medieval history, and its extensive geographical framework from Spain to Persia and from Sicily to Sweden. This broad approach carries the risk of falling into historical anachronism and diachronism, but it activates the aim of all historical narration, what Reinhard Koselleck calls ‘the synchrony of the anachronism’: the historian uses synchronic and diachronic procedures simultaneously, ‘favoring synchrony when he describes, and diachrony when he narrates’.\(^{65}\) As Alexander Beihammer argues, ‘approaching rituals and symbolic communication as historical phenomena of longue durée stretching from the early Middle Ages to the early modern period and as phenomena shared by different cultural and religious spheres is no doubt a forward-looking and future-oriented viewpoint.\(^{66}\)

This tactic is not new in the scholarly approach to ceremonies of investiture. Traditional anthropology began working on parallels among the royal investiture ceremonies of kings from Africa, Europe, America, Asia and Oceania from different periods and ages, namely


Arthur M. Hocart, Meyer Fortes and Robert S. Ellwood. More recent anthropologists such as Roy Rappaport and Catherine Bell still believe that there is something universal and common among, ‘say, rites such as the Catholic Mass, the Sun Dance, the rites of passage in the deserts of Central Australia, Papua New Guinea curing rituals, and human sacrifice in Aztec Mexico’. They have tried to explore ‘what makes us identify some acts as ritual, what such a category does for the production and organization of knowledge about other cultures, and how we might assess the assumptions that create and constrain the notion of ritual’. Francis Oakley has published a general review on the nature of kingship, arguing that kingship may be the most common form of government known to humankind, beyond the formal differences among the pharaohs of Egypt, the emperors of Japan, the Maya rulers of Mesoamerica and the medieval popes and emperors of the European monarchies. All these general approaches demonstrate that rituals have been one of the privileged fields of anthropological studies, beyond theoretical assumptions or methodological concerns supporting their approach: ‘functionalism with authority, Marxism with contradiction and change, structuralism with binary contrast and equivalence, phenomenology with the construction of experience’, as Andrew Apter notes.

Though I am aware of the limitations of the essentialist method, I argue that this comparative approach may be still revisited, not only from the geographical-synchronical terms within which it has been traditionally practised, but also in its chronological-anachronical dimension – which particularly interests me in my long-term approach to royal self-coronations. In this way I have tried to diminish the natural divergence between ‘the theoretical and the observational language’, as Wolfgang Stegmüller puts it in his analysis of the language of theory in the hard

67 Hocart took as a case study ceremonies performed ‘from the Aegean to the Ganges’ (Hocart, Kingship, 98) and he enumerates twenty-five common features of these royal coronations. See also Reginald M. Woolley, Coronation Rites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 165–76, section ‘The Inter-relation of the Different Rites’.

68 Meyer Fortes argues for the ‘confirmation for the thesis in Hocart’s study, namely, that installation ceremonies have much the same structure, use similar procedures, and serve broadly the same ends in all societies’ (Fortes, ‘Of Installation Ceremonies’, 19).


sciences. Approaches on self-coronations actually oscillate between the two opposing points of view: synchronicity and diachronicity. Anthropologists privilege the study of culture as a system of meanings which encapsulates the primordial values of a specific community. From this point of view, coronation rituals may be read synchronically and, as a consequence, analysed like a text, as a coherent script or a master narrative that actors follow and participants believe. Historians, on their part, privilege the specificity of each ritual, given its particular context, circumstances and the agency of its promoters. They consequently proceed diachronically, acknowledging the manipulation, artificiality and historicity of the ritual rather than its essentialist, permanent and universal nature. This approach adopts a perspective through which each ritual performance constitutes one link in a chain of causes and consequences extending through time.

The progressive specialisation of modern historiography, which has privileged micro- rather than macro-historical approaches, has alerted us not to fall into abstract and, ultimately, imaginative generalisations. But recent historiographical trends argue in favour of a more comprehensive chronological perspective, in order to establish reasonable comparisons among agents from different places and ages, and to provide society with historical models that may empathically connect with an audience beyond the academic world. Since my story of the self-coronations is, in the end, the genealogy of a ritual, it requires a large-scale temporal and comparative approach rather than a microscopic historical analysis. This larger-time-scale approach also facilitates a more multilayered contextualisation of the ritual of self-coronation, within the general system of coronations. Thus, I have moved from the necessary detailed historical account of the singular events in each chapter to the comparative and comprehensive anthropological approach in the conclusions.

To take advantage of what each discipline has to offer, I have tried, in this book, to analyse like a historian and to interpret like an anthropologist. I have followed Marshall Sahlins’ attempt to blend the

78 See an interesting example of this double approach in Clark, ‘When Culture Meets Power’.
methods of history and anthropology rather than simply searching for more mutual collaboration between the disciplines: ‘The problem now is to explode the concept of history by the anthropological experience of culture so that the historical experience will surely explode the anthropological concept of culture – structure included.’ Royal rituals share ‘universal characteristics of the symbolic construction of authority and also gain specific meaning through their adoption and adaptation of symbolic forms which organized non-royal life.’ Structure and symbol, particularism and generalisation, system and individual, and analysis and interpretation naturally converge in my medieval self-coronation approach since, as Victor Turner argues, ‘we see the meaning of a symbol as deriving from its relation to other symbols in a specific cluster or gestalt of symbols whose elements acquire much of their significance from their position in its structure.’ Thus, one self-coronation must be connected, in comparative terms, not only with its particular historical context and with the historical reality of other self-coronations performed in medieval Europe, but also with the whole system of that ritual perceived as a ceremony of investiture. In this direction, I question, in this book, up to what extent self-coronations are a simple ‘variety’ of the ritual of investiture, or rather are an ‘anomaly’ or ‘failure’ of the form, or even another kind of ritual.

Most of these questions require deep reflection on the historical context in which self-coronations were enacted. That is why I open each chapter with the temporal, geographical, political, social and cultural circumstances of each self-coronation analysed. The exercise of contextualising each ritual is necessary so as to understand that the degree of transgressivity of each event does not depend only on the nature of the ceremonies enacted within the ritual itself, but also, and more properly, on the particular circumstances during which they were performed. In the Crown of Aragon, for instance, the most transgressive self-coronation was probably that of Alfonso the Benign, while his successors Peter, John, Martin and Ferdinand used the same ritual, following an ‘established’ tradition. Thus, one understands Turner’s insistence on the ‘semantic bipolarity’ of ritual symbols which involves the diverse meanings resulting from the different circumstances in each ceremony. An accurate knowledge of the performance context is necessary to determine which particular

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80 Maurice Bloch, Ritual, History and Power (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 188.
connotations are intended, because ‘the same symbols have varying significance in different contexts.’ As Clyde Kluckhohn puts it, myths and rituals may convey symbolic realities, since they ‘may express not only the latent content of ritual [depending on the ceremonial itself] but of other culturally organized behaviours [depending on the context in which the ritual is inserted].’

This leads to my scepticism regarding the alleged transgressivity of self-coronations. This label was probably established because of the great symbolic power of Napoleon’s self-coronation in 1804 and the uncritical projection of Capetian – and successively English – coronation models onto other medieval and early modern realms. Weiler explains,

As a kind of historiographical commonplace, high medieval European is often equated with Capetian kingship. As with historians of feudalism who experience an existential crisis on realizing that in their chosen region patron–client relationships did not resemble those of the Mâconnais, many historians of kingship also set their regional case against the image of kingship as developed by the learned denizens in and around St. Denis in the decades after the 1270s. . . . That is, the prestige claimed by the descendants of St. Louis may have led modern historians to project backwards in time a cultural hegemony that only emerged, and only for a short period, in the closing decades of the thirteenth and the first quarter of the fourteenth century.

Medieval rituals are rather inserted in a general context in which the ritual behaviour and symbolic gestures become relevant, but they may passively express or actively react against their own context. Rituals are conditioned by tradition, since they must reiterate an earlier performance, and they depend on the precise repetition of specific words or symbolic gestures. Of course, there were variations in the rites, but it is difficult to find sources which describe the attendants’ reactions to them. But we have enough evidence to assert that the emphasis of the medieval rituals was placed on the ability to repeat certain formulas in the proper order and in the proper language. Nevertheless, it is also true that some royal rituals, such as the royal and triumphal entries in the cities, ‘though with certain recognizable elements maintained over long periods of time, were quite malleable, and the symbols displayed in these performances quite fluid. Exact reiteration, such as that of the Mass, was not required: changes and slight variations could occur.

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Thus, based on this long-term approach, I analyse the (historical) action-field context in which the ritual enacted is simply a phase, and the (anthropological) cultural context in which symbols become clusters of abstract meanings. I also include a third approach, the historical-genealogical perspective, which blends both the event and interpretations of the whole system. I do not merely describe and interpret each coronation, but also read its place within the entire cultural system of ‘self-coronation’ – in the end, not a cultural event but a conceptual construction. Combining these three approaches (the action-field, the cultural context and the interpretation of the cultural system) allows me to clarify the meaning of the particular symbols that emerge from this complex ritual. They are full of cultural rather than material implications: what distinguishes self-coronations from other rituals is that their performance is not concerned, like most traditional rituals, with natural phenomena, technological processes, human life crises or the breach of crucial social relationships, but with the emergence, legitimation and representation of the complex reality of power. In addition, this comparative approach helps gather the three basic coordinates in which all rituals are encompassed: the spatial (the physical and architectonic context, usually sacral such as the cathedral, but also civil, such as the royal palace), the temporal (the development of the ritual following the rhythm of the liturgy) and the visual (the iconographic representations and the artistic programme conveyed in the ceremony itself).

The third key concept I use in my reading of self-coronation is an emphasis on agency. Self-coronations are dense crossroads of semiotically charged royal ceremonies that require both an anthropological and a historical approach. They arise from a tradition that obeys the symbolic logic of European kingship, anchored on the solid foundation of the culture of a given society, but at the same time they are highly purposive and manipulative, an opportunity to activate their actors’ agency. This fits well with the formula proposed by Lisa Wedeen and Christopher Clark, who see the rituals as ‘processes of meaning-making’ in which ‘the intentions and strategies of actors interact with language, ritual and other symbolic systems’.

As Gabrielle Spiegel argues, we are experiencing a partial restoration of the concept of agency, after the double determinism of social (Marxist) and subsequently cultural studies constructionism, via methodologies associated with the linguistic turn, postmodernism and post-structuralism:

Rather than being governed by impersonal semiotic codes, historical actors are now seen as engaged in inflecting the semiotic constituents (signs) that shape their understanding of reality so as to craft an experience of that world in terms of a situational sociology of meaning, or what might be called a social semantics. This shift in focus from semiotics to semantics, from given semiotic structures to the individual and social construal of signs – in short, from culture as discourse to culture as practice and performance – entails a recuperation of the historical actor as a rational and intentional agent.  

As Goethe wrote recalling the investiture of Joseph II at Frankfort:

A politico-religious ceremony possesses an infinite charm. We behold earthly majesty before our eyes, surrounded by all the symbols of its power; but while it bends before that of heaven, it brings to our minds the communion of both. For even the individual can only prove his relationship with the Deity by subjecting himself and adoring.

Thus, part of the interest and, as Goethe would say, the charm of self-coronation is that it responds to the action of individual agency rather than to social structures. In the end, the interest for ritual studies among medievalist since the 1990s, in which they have applied the theories and practices that emanated from symbolic anthropology during the 1970s and 1980s, is the result of an attempt ‘to move away from structure and to find new ways of talking about individuals’ agency’. Historians and anthropologists have argued, in one way or another, that ‘in the institutions of a given society changes are slow and subtle; transformations are mostly the result of an adaptation to exigencies of the moment, rather than of conscious innovations.’ Yet some rituals show that sometimes new traditions – or, at least, variations of traditions – are shaped by conscious innovations by individuals.

My own interest in issues associated with the concept of agency has materialised in my projects on authorship in the Middle Ages and modern historians’ autobiographies. Now, I see in the practice of self-coronation not only a palpable manifestation of human agency

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susceptible to systematic analysis, but also that move ‘from culture as discourse to culture as practice and performance’, as Gabrielle Spiegel puts it, which has inspired my approach to anthropological studies via studies of ritual. Medieval kings actively employed the language of ritual to one extent or another, since their opportunities to shape the form through which they governed were limited to certain solemn occasions.  

Emphasis on agency has also allowed me to reflect on the bipolar nature – active and passive – of the ritual of self-coronation. To be sure, agency is not the only force behind a self-coronation since, as Mary Douglas explains, ‘rituals, as a form of social interaction, will be suspect when social interaction itself is troubled’. The practice of self-coronation shows that when political authority and social stability are in danger the king searches for the symbols through which to recover normality, even if he may be accused of transgressing a tradition. Then, the king’s aggressive agency in ritual reflects social transformation in context.

Finally, the concept of self-fashioning complements that of agency and helps to discern how individuals or groups define or express identity and authority through a variety of performative practices. In the creation and expression of identity, authors and historical agents employ inherited attributes, acquired skills and performed actions to persuade contemporaries in ways that exemplify – and, in the case of some self-coronations, challenge – the traditional values and expectations prevalent in their historical context. In fact, Stephen Greenblatt uses Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture to argue that self-fashioning is ‘the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment’. Subjects and authors are connected by texts and contexts and their ability to highlight authorial agency and to self-create a new identity. From this perspective, self-coronations become an artfully manipulative process in which a new identity is purposefully created and then presented to the world – a process which fits very well in the cases of Alfonso XI, Peter IV, Charles III, Frederick II and Frederick of Prussia. This concept of self-fashioning has been applied extensively to literary and historical texts, yet

94 Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols (New York: Routledge, 2003), 144.
95 Margaret Thompson Drewal, Yoruba Ritual (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
97 Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 4–5.
may be also a good instrument for the interpretations of rituals, ceremonies and performative practices – what we could call gestural or performative self-fashioning.

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The analysis, description and interpretation of and the comparative approach to the rituals of accession without ecclesiastical mediation I propose in this book are governed by a double dimension. On one hand, I provide the particularised analysis of each of the ceremonies in its specific context, which immunises against an eventual static, essentialist and ahistorical vision of these rituals. On the other, I establish these rites’ long-term development, which examines their continuities and discontinuities. If history allows us to fix the relationship between the particular characteristics of each of the self-coronations and to look for continuities in long-term historical processes, anthropology may serve to analyse the symbolic dimension and the meaning of these ceremonies. 98 Thus, the structure of this book reflects this long-term transformation of the ritual of self-coronation from ancient pagan societies to late antiquity and the early medieval Christianised world (‘Tradition’), and from being considered as a transgressive ritual (‘Opprobrium’) to its Iberian normativity (‘Convention’) and early modern theatricality (‘Dramatisation’). Another basic plot is the distinction between imagining how the world can be (symbolic self-coronations: Chapters 2–6) and how things actually are (performed self-coronations: Chapters 7–12).

The first chapter provides a theoretical exposition of the key theories around the ritual nature of self-coronation and its symbolic implications, focusing on historians and anthropologists’ theoretical perspectives. The second chapter explores diverse forms of mediation in pre-Christian civilisations, from the Israelite to the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Persian and Greek monarchies, and the symbolic meanings connected with the idea of ‘consecration without mediation’. Based on textual, epigraphic and iconographic evidence, it privileges the analysis of the royal investiture ceremony in Achaemenid and Sassanid Persia, since the practice of self-coronation decisively influenced subsequent periods, reaching Islamic and even contemporary Persia (including the self-coronation by Shah Reza Pahlavi in 1926 and his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1967) and expanding beyond its borders, to Byzantium and

98 I am thus particularly sympathetic to try to find that ‘middle ground’ between the historical and anthropological approaches and between facts and interpretation argued in Maclean, ‘Ritual, Misunderstanding, and the Contest for Meaning’, 99.
central Asia. We learn from these data that the practice of self-coronation was certainly not unprecedented.

The third chapter examines the iconography of the ‘hand of God’ spread during the late Roman Empire from the mid-third century onwards, and in the context of interactions between the pagan, Jewish and Christian cultures. This particular iconography leads directly to the idea of self-coronation – although still an iconographic rather than a performative reality – since it conveys the emperor being crowned by a celestial hand from above, without priestly intervention. Numismatic sources emerge here as crucial evidence, particularly in the case of third- and fourth-century Roman emperors. The iconography of the emperor being crowned by the hand of God did not extend to early Byzantium, but survived in medieval art through the iconography of the king or emperor being crowned by Jesus Christ.

With the expansion of Christianity throughout the Mediterranean, self-coronation and the mediation of priests became a point of divergence. Emperors in Christian Byzantium are thus to be crowned by the patriarchs in the ritual practice, but they are frequently crowned by the iconographic representation of the ‘hand of God’. Thus, the fourth chapter analyses what scholars have called ‘symbolic’ or ‘heavenly’ coronation in Byzantium. It engages in a comparative analysis of the reality of the church’s intervention in the real performative ceremony of the imperial coronation and the imaginative fiction of the crowning of the emperor directly by Christ and his angels and saints, as established in some iconographic representations. In Byzantium, imperial art was given the task of translating into a visual and symbolic – but not necessarily referential – language the values and ideology that prevailed in each dynasty concerning the source of its power.

The fifth and sixth chapters explore the sacralisation and liturgification of the royal investiture ceremony in eighth- to eleventh-century Western Europe, with the progressive fusion of the rites of unction and coronation in the same ceremony and the increasing prominence of the bishop as its ordinary minister. This sacralisation, particularly among Carolingian, Anglo-Saxons and Ottonian rulers, preludes the allegedly transgressive nature of the performance of self-coronation among some Western late medieval kings, in which the mediating function of the priest will be modified. The iconographic Christ substitutes (or, perhaps more accurately, is transferred from) the pagan and theocentric models of pre-Carolingian ceremonies and rites, and they symbolise that the office of king must be bestowed by the priest. These chapters show that the error of considering self-coronation a transgressive act arises from the projection of the French and, to a lesser extent, English models – clearly a heritage of Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon and Ottonian ritual and iconographic models of coronation – to other areas of medieval Europe.
The seventh chapter focuses on the image of Roger II of Sicily being crowned by Christ, as depicted in the mosaic in the Martorana Church in Palermo, one of the strongest indications of the Christocentric evolution outlined in the sixth chapter, and a formidable example of symbolic self-coronation. Roger II’s respect for his Muslim Arab subjects, as well as his attempt to assimilate Arab and Byzantine cultural traditions, are at the root of his iconographic programme: the visual language could be understood by Arabs, Normans, Greeks and Latins. This supra-linguistic, multinational, multi-ethnic and multicultural form is a typical inheritance of the Norman kingdom of Sicily, and would without doubt have inspired the universalist and imperial politics of Roger II’s grandson Frederick II, specifically at his majestic self-coronation in Jerusalem.

The eighth chapter explores the possible occurrence of Frederick II’s self-coronation in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Sunday, 17 March 1229, an event that remains shrouded in mystery. It is still difficult to discern the borders between reality and fiction, desire and its realisation, invention and propaganda. This chapter engages the question of the extent to which we can affirm the historicity of Frederick II’s self-coronation. It addresses the crucial issue of the nature of this gesture, recognised as transgressive by posterity – but, important, not always by its contemporaries – in the context of preconceived ideas about the relationship between the temporal and spiritual.

Roger II’s iconography in Palermo and Frederick II’s crowning in Jerusalem complete the triple point of divergence of medieval royal coronations: the rulers of the West are to be crowned by the priests, by God or by themselves. This last ritual was prevalent in medieval Iberia, and the rest of the chapters of this book are devoted to some of these royal self-coronations. It is not by chance that this ritual practice began in the thirteenth century, when Europe had overcome that transitional moment of the twelfth century which, in Koziol’s words, moves ‘between the sacred liturgies of pontifical kings and the political theatre of statist monarchs’, and shifts ‘toward the sophisticated administrative apparatuses of the later medieval state while still publicly avowing the political morality of the Carolingians’.99 The practice of self-coronation of Iberian kings seems to respond to this growing influence of the political theatre of the new monarchs and a sophisticated administrative machinery rather than to the sacred liturgies.

The ninth chapter focuses on the practice of self-coronation among medieval Castilian kings and its religious, political and ideological

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implications. It takes Alfonso XI of Castile’s self-coronation (1332) as a central event, establishing its conceptual genealogy, significance and relevance and deploying Visigothic, Asturian, Leonese and Castilian chronicles as the main sources. The case of Alfonso XI deserves particular attention, as it throws some light on the debate about the allegedly secular kingship of Castilian kings.

The tenth chapter explores the practice of self-coronation in the Crown of Aragon. It centres on Peter the Ceremonious’ self-coronation in Zaragoza (1336), where the king implemented a conscious triple strategy in order to ensure that his ceremony, performed previously by his father, King Alfonso IV the Benign, would not remain an isolated gesture but would become tradition. First, he constructed an autobiographical historical account that would serve as the primary version of the event. Second, he fixed the rite of self-coronation by writing a new ceremonial. Third, he propagated an iconographic tradition through images of himself in miniatures, seals and coins, and, above all, of his gesture of self-coronation. Historiography, liturgy and iconography are brought into play by the king so as to perpetuate the memory of his self-coronation and thus ensure, through repetition, its transformation from an isolated event into a consolidated practice and part of inherited tradition.

The eleventh chapter centres on the self-coronation of Charles III of Navarra (1390), a gesture full of both symbolic meanings and juridical implications. The chapter traces the evolution of Navarrese royal accession ceremonies which emphasise two specific characteristics of Navarrese politics: resistance to ecclesiastical mediation and consensualism. The presence of the oath and the gesture of self-coronation in royal accession ceremonies involve both legal effects and a ritual symbolic dimension. This endows them with enormous force, both in semantic content and in the ritual form that their representations take.

The twelfth chapter traces a general vision of the survival of some self-coronations during early modernity, focusing on the tradition of Aragon after Peter the Ceremonious, especially the self-coronation of Ferdinand I (1414) and the cases of Frederick I of Prussia (1701) and Napoleon (1804), and the most recent examples in the twentieth century, as the practice is globalised and dramatised. The crucial question here is to what extent these self-coronations have lost the actual content carried by their medieval precursors, even if they maintain the same ritual forms in a secularised context. Finally, based on the inductive analysis of the previous chapters and the summary of the ritual’s evolution during modernity, the conclusion provides closing remarks on the historical, political, religious and symbolic meanings of the practice of self-coronation among medieval kings, using a long-term approach.