Ritual Dynamics
and the Science of Ritual

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State, Power, and Violence

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Section I
Ritual and Violence
Edited by Margo Kitts

Section II
Rituals of Power and Consent
Edited by Bernd Schneidmüller

Section III
Usurping Ritual
Edited by Gerald Schwedler and Eleni Tounta

Section IV
State and Ritual in India
Edited by Hermann Kulke and Uwe Skoda

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In the run-up to attaining royal dignity as King of Prussia, the precise terms of acknowledgement, the Agnoscirung by the emperor and the European monarchs, were investigated by the Prince Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick III. Beside the political and legal conditions, the ceremonial conditions were also considered. On 10 June 1700, for example, the ambassador of Brandenburg in Warsaw, Werner, brought Fredrick III a piece of advice from Lithuanian Vice-Chancellor Szruka about the ceremonial coronation: as in England, Sweden, and Denmark, the ceremony must be performed through a bishop and an anointing must be included, otherwise the title of “Holy Majesty” for the new King of Prussia might be refused:

“Wegen des Ceremoniels der Krönung, wrote Szruka, es nothwendig durch einen Bischof geschehen müsste: weswegen denn auch selbige in England, Schweden und Dennemark conserviretwären; und könnte man widrigenfalls, wenn das Sacrum der Salbung nicht geschehe, Difficultät machen, den Titulum Sacra Regia Majestas wie gebräuchlich zu geben.”

The coronation ceremony, which inevitably led to self-coronation and thus the self-elevation of the person through the new establishment of royal dignity, had to include certain acts, in particular those of a sacral nature such as anointing, so that the title of King of Prussian would, in the end, have to be acknowledged by the other crowned heads of Europe, who strongly opposed it. For this reason the aulic council (Dignitäts-Conseil) and the ceremonial master of Brandenburg, von Besser, had to establish a ceremony which would embed the individual form of the coronation, necessarily carried out by the future monarch himself, as well as the concept involved of a Prussian monarch, in European traditions of coronation, and by means of this act legitimise the apparent right to this title. This necessitated copying the basic parts of other coronation ceremonies.

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1 Agnosere means “to recognize” or “to accept”. Zedler 1732: cols. 799–800.
2 Memorandum from the ambassador Werner of 10 June 1700, in: Lehmann 1878: No. 332, 465. I would like to thank my student assistants Shuo Wang and Michael Roth for their help in research.
In the following I would like briefly to describe the course of coronation in Königsberg, and then introduce the patterns underlying certain parts of it. After that I shall discuss whether there was a usurpation of other, different coronation ceremonies in the case of the Prussian coronation, as seen from a legal and historical perspective and contemporary views of the origins of ceremonies. Moreover, is a ceremony itself a means to usurp royal dignity? Finally, I shall derive and formulate general conclusions about the deed of usurpation, as opposed to the mere reception of ceremonies in the Early Modern Era, from this description of an individual case.

1. The Course of Coronation

On 18 January 1701, Frederick III had himself dressed by his senior chamberlain at 8 o’clock in the morning in his bed-chamber at Königsberg Castle, and appeared shortly afterward in the audience chamber. In front of chosen courtiers he himself placed the crown upon his head and took the sceptre. After that he went to the antechamber of his wife, Sophie Charlotte, and placed her crown on her head. Instead of homage being paid – Prussia had already paid homage to Frederick as Prince Elector – he was greeted and acclaimed as King. With this regalia he and his wife strode beneath baldachins held by the noblest persons in Brandenburg and other guests, to the Lutheran castle church, where they were greeted by kettledrums and trumpets, and where they sat down on their thrones. The reformed court chaplain, who had been appointed summus episcopus and bishop by Frederick, Benjamin Ursinus von Bär (1648–1720), gave a short sermon, in which Fredrick was already addressed as King. Then his Lutheran colleague, who had also been appointed bishop, Bernhard von Sanden (1666–1721), anointed the royal couple on their foreheads and wrists with the oil brought by the ruler himself. A courtier assisted him, who also wiped off the oil from the monarch.3

Following this, the coronation feast took place in the castle, with a parallel folk festival which was staged in the castle courtyard, where an ox was roasted over an open fire and wine flowed from two fountains decorated with eagles. The King was also given a dish of beef and a mug of wine, in order to express his solidarity with the people. Fredrick threw the people many coins. After the immediate ceremony had ended, the people took the cloth on which the King had walked from castle to castle.

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3 The first ordo of coronation was developed around the middle of the ninth century, in which the clerical part in the ceremonial of proclaiming the ruler became steps of completion and the spoken text was fixed in written form. A liturgy was created around the three highlights: anointing, coronation, enthronement, in which the interaction of the divine and terrestrial ruler was eulogized and the enthronement, accompanied by worship, was declared the preliminary stage for coronations in the future, and co-leadership in heaven. On the imperial ordo cf. Elze 1960.
church, as a kind of tangible relic. After some weeks of festivities, with illuminations, visits to and from institutions, amnesties of prisoners, and the founding of charitable organizations, the new royal couple proceeded back to Berlin. This return journey was intended to serve as a journey for homage and jubilation, with its highlight being the splendid entry into Brandenburg.

This is a brief description of the coronation festivities. While scholars have long since comprehensively investigated and interpreted the reversal of the order of acts, tending to view this as an absolutistic statement made by Frederick about himself, this article will emphasise the many and conspicuous borrowings from other European ceremonies of coronation.

2. Examples

In keeping with English practice, Frederick and Sophie Charlotte, wearing their crowns, strode across the castle courtyard to the Lutheran castle church beneath a canopy decorated with black eagles and crowns.

The church service of anointing was patterned in its procedure on the conventional imperial order of coronation (Krönungsordines), but it was modified by deliberately Protestant elements: Thus, elements of the Latin coronation mass were replaced by German versions (e.g. Herr Gott dich loben wir instead of the Te Deum, Allein Gott in der Höh’ instead of Gloria); The congregation sang Lutheran songs in German; the church service included a sermon, in contrast to the Frankfurt coronation ceremony for the emperor; there was no reverential bow by the king in front of the altar; the king was not given a ring or pontifical robes; and there was no communion. The break with the Frankfurt ceremonial tradition was simultaneously a shift toward the ceremony of anointing carried out for the Danish king Christian V in the year 1671. Christian had changed the location of his unction to the court church as a clear signal of his understanding of absolute rule. On the morning of 7 June 1671, he appeared in front of his courtiers in royal regalia with crown, sceptre, and other insignia. Then he had himself anointed. Frederick followed this example, thus paying homage to God as the only bestower (eintzigem Geber) of the crown.

Contemporary witnesses had already noticed obvious parallels to the anointing ceremony carried out for Carl XII of Sweden in 1697 in a further detail of the anointing ceremony. Johann Gottfried Lünig, a compiler of records of different European rituals and ceremonies of state in early modern times, reported the following procedure in Sweden in his Theatrum ceremoniale historico politicum:

4 Duchhardt 1983.
5 Olden-Jorgensen 2002: 192.
6 Quoted in Duchhardt 1983: 90.
“Da beydes [music and sermon] sein Ende genommen, gingen Ihre Maj. zum
Altar, nahmen vor der Salbung, welche der Erzbischof von Upsal verrichtete,
die Crone selbst vom Haupt, und setzten selbige nach der Salbung wie
neulich auch der König in Preussen gethan, zum Zeichen, daß er ein
Souverain und König von unumschränkter macht sey, selbsthen, ohne sich
helffen zu lassen, wieder auf.”7

(“As both [music and sermon] had now ended, His Majesty went to the altar
and, prior to the unction, which was carried out by the Archbishop of
Uppsala, took his crown off himself, and, following the anointing, he set the
crown upon his own head again, without any help, as was done recently by
the King in Prussia, this being a sign that he is a sovereign and king of
unlimited might.”)

Frederick, then, had also taken the crown off by himself before his anointing,
putting it on again afterwards. His knowledge of the anointing ceremony of Karl
XII was based on a copy of the Swedish ceremony provided to him by England in
September 1700.8

A last example shall be given here to make clear again a case of the recourse
taken to the imperial coronation ceremony: the provision of food for the people.
The procession of the crowned Emperor – I refer especially to the coronation of
Leopold I in 1658 – in Frankfurt on Main led past the “von Holtz auffgebawte[n]
Küch” (“the kitchen built of wood”), erected by the city council, “worin der Ochß
gebrauten worden” (“in which the ox was roasted”). This ox, together with wine
from a fountain and a huge pile of oats, was one of the three gifts presented by the
city to the emperor for (symbolically) exercising the duties of the highest offices.
This symbolic exercise of duties was commenced before the eyes of the numerous
guests and citizens of Frankfurt during the coronation procession. While the envoy
of the Saxon Prince Elector and Imperial Marshall, Count Papenheim, fetched a
Fruchtmass (an old German measure of volume) of oats and then took it to the
square in front of the Frankfurt town hall, known as the “Römer”, the representa-
tive of the Prince Elector of Brandenburg and Imperial Treasurer rode to a fountain
to fill a silver pitcher with fresh water and fetch a towel, and then he, too, went to
the Römer. According to the description given in the coronation chronicle (Krö-
nungsdiarium) by Caspar Merian, “Herr Graff Truchseß von Zeil / holte sich ein
Stück von dem gebratenen Ochsen in einer Silbern Schüssel / und begabe sich
damit gleicher gestalt auf den Römer Saal.”9 (“The Count Steward of Zeil fetched
himself a cut of the roasted ox in a silver dish, and then betook himself with this to
the Römer hall.”) After the symbolic exercise of the duties of high office had been

7 Lünig 1719: 1394–1395.
8 Waddington 1888: 273 n. 2.
9 Merian 1658.
successfully brought to a conclusion, the soldiers let the people take charge of the pile of oats, the ox, and the fountain of wine. In this manner, the Emperor’s subjects could take partake of and participate in the coronation feast, thus cementing the ties between ruler and people. The symbolic feeding of the people by providing free wine and the roasted ox was also used by Frederick after his coronation, and, like the Emperor, he let the first piece of beef be brought to his table by his two court chamberlains (Hofmarschälle).\(^{10}\)

3. Reception or Usurpation?

The question now poses itself of how earlier examples influenced the form of Frederick’s coronation in 1701.

Julius Bernhard von Rohr remarked in the preface of his Einleitung zur Cere
monielwissenschaft der Grossen Herren of 1733 that the ceremonial was different in all courts and that it was to be regarded as a part of public law of every country:

\["[Das] Ceremonien-Wesen [ist] an allen Höfen gänzlich unterschieden/ und als ein Stück des Juris Publici eines jeden Landes anzusehen."\(^{11}\)

Lünig even assumed, in agreement with Stieve’s Europäischem Hof-Ceremoniel of 1715, that ceremonies had a legal foundation and were based on the privileges (Praerogativa) of a noble family. In the sense of a symbol of law a ceremony possessed normative quality.

Stieve’s classification shows, on the one hand, the significance of the ceremonial for the constitution of sovereign princely rule. On the other hand, wisdom in state matters dictated that the monarch takes care to keep all insignia and the ceremonial rights of his majestic dignity to himself: “sorgfältig bey und für sich allein [zu] behalten”.\(^{12}\) This was especially valid with regard to the ruler’s own subjects, in order to preserve class order, but it was also valid with a view to other rulers. After all, none of these monarchs had provided Frederick with descriptions of their own ceremonies; rather, he had received copies of such ceremonies from their envoys, which had been present at such occasions.

But how did other monarchs behave? Or, to revert to the example of Frederick III, how could he, a sovereign Duke in Prussia, strive for royal dignity as a King in

\(^{10}\) Bernd Sösemann describes the procedure, but without discussing its relationship to imperial ceremonial. Cf. Sösemann 2002: 108.


this territory and thus to be accepted in the extremely limited association of monarchs in Europe? The master of ceremonies in Brandenburg, von Besser, described the difficulties faced by Frederick in achieving acknowledgement of his royal dignity. The higher the rank, the more difficult it was to achieve. Monarchs competed against each other, attempting to limit their number so as not to be forced to share privileges and advantages.

“Aber je höher diese Würde, je schwerer ist es, sie zu erlangen. Die Könige, die es am meisten angehet, eyfern auch am meisten darüber; und wollen nicht gern, umb desto mehr unterschieden zu bleiben, die Zahl ihrer Mitgenossen vermehren, noch andere, die es nicht sind, zur Gemeinschaft, dieses ihres Vorzuges lassen. Man weiß, wie schwer es falle, bloß in Stücken des Ceremoniels, die geringste Veränderung mit ihnen zu treffen.”

(“But the higher the dignity, the more difficult it is to attain. The kings, for whom it is most important, also strive the most for it; and are unwilling to increase the number of their fellow rulers, nor to allow others, who are not kings, to join the community of privilege, in order that these kings may remain the more distinguished. We know how hard it is to obtain their agreement to changes in even the least part of a ceremony.”

But scholars of ceremony, in particular Christoph Heinrich Amthor in his *Collegium Homileticum De Jure Decori* of 1730, advised precisely those princes whose governments were not altogether stable, or who had limited rights of rule, to simulate powerful princely rule by holding elaborate and costly court. The deliberate use of charismatic rule was intended to counter any deficits in constitutional law, and to suggest those it addressed that an increase of power was being made visible.

But scholars of ceremony were quite careful not to actually provide any prescriptions for concrete action. Nevertheless, it is clear that this naturally had an effect on the form and use of ceremonies. Claims and the self-conception of a ruler had to be anchored in these and communicated outwardly, forms and procedures had to be adapted to the status claimed.

Johann Christian Lünig, in the first volume of his *Theatrum ceremoniale historico politicum* of 1719, to Stieve’s court ceremonial lists the following options for a sovereign’s arrangement of a ceremony, with reference to Stieve’s court ceremonial:

“Es ist aber das Ceremoniel eine unter souveränen, oder ihnen gleich geltenden Personen aus eignen Bewegniß und Willkühr / durch einen stillschwei-
The ceremonial is order, introduced under a sovereign or persons equivalent in rank to such, through that sovereign’s own motivation and power, and by a silent consensus, express comparison, usurpation, possession, and prescription.

Because ceremonial, as described above, was regarded as being part of the foundations of law and the traditional hierarchical structure of any high-ranking family, and of the old Holy Roman Empire or European States, respectively, it is not surprising that, in the context of the development of ceremonies apart from original creation by a prince or ancient possession by a family, legal concepts such as usurpation were used and thus illegal appropriation or use were named. Interestingly, Lünig gives no examples of the usurpation of ceremony. It may, however, be assumed that a usurpation of ceremony existed when the public proclamation of a new, as yet not established legal claim on the part of a person or institution was carried out by means of the compilation and thus the use of individual elements of other European ceremonies, or ceremonies from the territories of the Empire. The ceremonies were not under copyright like today, and were not kept secret, but by borrowing and by using some parts of them, the foreign user – in our case Frederick III of Brandenburg – expressed his claim to equality with the other European, and especially the other Protestant, monarchs, a claim established (in his view) by his self-coronation and anointing from 18 January 1701 onward. In particular, he conveyed the message to the Emperor that he had the same relation to his now royal subjects as sovereign ruler of Prussia as the Emperor did with respect to his subjects in the Empire.

The usurpation of ceremonial set-pieces was, in fact, of the greatest significance with regard to his intention and later acceptance. Recall the advice from his representative in Warsaw, who had passed on the Lithuanian advice that His Majesty would only be accepted as such once his person had been anointed. Frederick III thus had to refer to a certain conventional range of coronation traditions within Europe, and thus had to have fulfilled all conditions necessary for true legitimation of his actions in the sense of diplomatic recognition beforehand. Frederick’s closest adviser, von Ilgen, put the matter quite rightly:

“Es ist nicht genug, jekrohnt zu werden, man mus auch versichert seyn pro Rege anerkannt zu werden.”

15 “Praescription” means “command”. In legal affairs it can, however, also mean “to acquire by adverse possession” (“das Ersitzen von Rechten nach einer gewissen Zeit”) and “to become time-barred” (“Verjährhen”). Zedler 1741: col. 53.
(“It is not enough to be crowned; one must also be sure of being acknowledged as King.”)

But how did the European monarchs deal with the usurper of their status and their ceremonial? While European newspapers presented exact descriptions of the course of the coronation, with all its superlative splendours, the royal courts of Europe remained obstinately silent concerning the coronation ceremonies in Königsberg. They simply ignored the festive production, not even bothering to send representatives.

Lünig, in his article on the development of ceremonial, mentions silent consensus or compromise, apart from usurpation. Consensus and compromise could also be, however, a response to ceremonial usurpation: The consensus of individual monarchs and thus the legitimization of the ceremonial act of coronation, or, in other words, the legitimization of Frederick I’s new status, was temporally strongly displaced as a result of diplomatic practice. Not until this occurred was there public tolerance of the membership of the King of Prussia in the circle of monarchs. In addition to the consensus, political compromises were reached, in which in a legal sense the “Ungewissheit der Parteien über ein Rechtsverhältnis im Wege des gegenseitigen Nachgebens beseitigt wird.”

As early as 19 February 1701, Denmark, one of only a few such countries, sent Frederick a letter of congratulation on the basis of a secret treaty enacted in April 1700, in which Brandenburg had promised to help Denmark in the Nordic War against Sweden; following rapid recognition, Brandenburg reneged on its promise.

Despite this “positive neutrality” on the part of Brandenburg in favour of Sweden in the Nordic War, Sweden did not accept Frederick’s claim to royalty until 1703. France did not acknowledge the royal dignity until the Peace of Rastatt in 1714, but thwarted the acknowledgement by the allied Estates of Empire in the years before – e.g. Bavaria.

But also at the ceremonial level compromises were reached. Emperor Leopold, for instance, assured Frederick, prior to the latter’s coronation, that he would champion the cause of Frederick’s acknowledgment as new King by the Estates of the Empire and the European states: “[…] in summa zwischen S. Ch. D. und anderen europäischen Königen, in specie den König von Schweden, Dennemarck und Pahlen, [so that] in der titulatur und anderen ehrenbezeigungen kein unter-

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17 http://juristisches-lexikon.ra-kdk.de/eintrag/Vergleich.html. “[The] uncertainty of the parties concerning a legal relation by means of mutual accommodation is eliminated.”
18 Baumgart 2001: 175.
19 S. Ch. D. means the title of the Prince Elector of Brandenburg “Seine Churfürstliche Durchlaucht”. (His Most Serene Highness).
What Leopold wanted was that the European monarchs acknowledged Frederick, and that there should be no difference between them. At the same time he forbade the Prussian King to address him, the Emperor, with the words “Majesty, my brother”, which is how the other monarchs handled the question of address. Furthermore, Frederick was prohibited from adding the word “Liebden” when addressing the Emperor.

In practice, then, “equal treatment” was of a purely formal nature; the Emperor was not willing to permit Frederick the same familiarities as he did other monarchs. It is clear that the Emperor was strongly interested in keeping a distance of rank between himself and the Prussian monarchy.

The other Estates of Empire wanted no change in the ceremonial relationship between the Emperor and Frederick in his function as an Estate of Empire either, despite Prussia’s rise in rank. Johann Stephan Pütter wrote in his Historischen Entwicklung der heutigen Staatsverfassung of 1798 that the envoys of the non-royal Estates were very watchful that no changes or innovations be introduced to the ceremonial of the Imperial Diet: “Im Reichstagsceremoniel sind die Gesandten der nicht königlichen Stände desto aufmerksamer darauf gewesen, keine Neuerungen aufkommen zu lassen.” In fact, this was confirmed again as late as 1764 in the electoral capitulation caused by Prussia, that no difference in ceremony should be introduced anywhere among the Princes Elector.

What is interesting in this context is that there was borrowing from other European models in many coronation ceremonies in Europe, e.g. the Danish imperial council followed the French and English models of the late Middle Ages, insofar as from the coronation of King Johann in 1483 onward an archbishop was appointed to place the crown on the King’s head.

In Poland the order of coronation of 1434 followed the Bohemian model, while Hungarian elements were added in the sixteenth century.

In such cases ceremonial elements were passed to and fro on the same hierarchical level. But adaptation of the court ceremonial of the Princes Elector to that of the Viennese court ceremonial was also common in the Early Modern Era. Vienna, of course, rather welcomed this, as it generally was accompanied by a very close political association with the Imperial dynasty, as in the case of the Catholic Princes Elector of the Palatinate, of the house of Neuburg. The criti-

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20 “... altogether between His Most Serene Highness of the Prince Elector and other European kings, specifically those of Sweden, Denmark, and Poland, [that there] be no more differences in title and other honourary designations.” So-called “Krontractat”, in: Moerner 1867: 814. Cf. also Baumgart 2001: 173.
21 “beloved”.
22 So-called “Krontractat”, in: Moerner 1867: 815–816.
23 Pütter 1798: 361.
24 Hoffmann 1983: 60.
cal point was reached when a ruler appropriated a rank, without being regarded as
equal in this rank.

To end with, I would like to answer a question which you probably have been
wanting to ask throughout my whole paper. Why, out of all others, has the example
of the Prussian coronation been chosen for an analysis of ceremonial usurpation in
the Early Modern Era? A very simple answer can be given, which, however,
requires a rather long explanation. The usurpation of ceremony implies the unlaw-
ful appropriation of power, position, or authority. But the Early Modern Era, in
contrast to antiquity or the Middle Ages, is lacking in examples. Why?

An answer shall be attempted for the area of sovereignty in the Old Empire. In
the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries a limited number of dynasties connected
to each other were able to rise to power, thanks to the arrangement of a binding le-
gal order of succession. They had succeeded in regulating the critical instant of
transition of rule by means of internal laws and the reception of Roman law, in a
binding and written form, and thus to avoid interregna with their danger of possible
attempts at usurpation. With the process of dynastic stabilisation, they succeeded in
legalising their rule and applying their rights against other aristocratic elites, as po-
tential competitors, or against the church. Moreover, through this legalisation they
succeeded in institutionalising and thus also depersonalising their power. Power, as
a rule, was now passed on within a limited princely society, using formal legal
processes that hindered arbitrariness and produced a specific authority for the ruler
as the successor of his successful ancestors, based on a political, dynastic, and legal
construction. Concepts of the divine right of kings and a patriarchal system of
rule, with close ties between ruler and people, and based on feelings of responsibil-
ity and thankfulness, stabilised the power of these dynasties and left fewer vulnera-
bilities for usurpations in this framework.

This stable system changed around 1700 through the increased attempts on the
part of local princes to conquer more land and thus new crowns. With this, the old
order and superior exclusiveness of European monarchs was forcibly enlarged by
the upward climber. The class cooperative had to be acknowledged and the new-
comer had to be given a place in this order, one for whom there was no ancient
ancestry, ancient rights, or legally-based claims. In fact, Frederick III (as Prince
Elector) and I (as King of Prussia) established his royal dignity through his own
act. This amounted to usurpation of a position in an order and of a rank, to both of
which he was not entitled. The recourse to elements of royal ceremonial and its use
as a representation of his majesty represents an encroachment on the instruments of
rule and the rights of domination of European monarchs, and thus a further usurpa-
tion. Nevertheless, the usurpation of ceremony was important, because it followed
basically the old, accepted traditions, yet, through the compilation of older models,

26 The fundamental paper on this is Weber 1998: 104–129.
it created something new. Frederick acted in every respect as a sovereign and monarch in creating his own coronation ceremony, thus, according to Bodin, exercising the sovereign power of law-giving, the legal *potestas*. At the same time he corresponded to the idea of sovereign power as put forth by Justus Lipsius. Lipsius had focused mainly on authority of the ruler, which is increased by *admiratio*, by emotion and which connects majesty primarily with reputation. Authority and reputation – in the long term monarchs had to acquire them in order to legitimise the usurpation of title, status, and ceremonial. For Prussia this was only a matter of time. The foundations of kingly rule had been established.
References


