

## ABSTRACT

Syncretism: The Presence of Roman Augury in the Consecration of English Monarchs

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The purpose of this study is to offer insight into the reason for an eagle's presence in the English royal consecration of the monarch. This trans-era study examines the impact of the Roman practice of augury on the ecclesiastical history of the early Church and the medieval French and English churches. Fresh insight is also provided regarding the possible meanings of the dove at Jesus' baptism for Luke's authorial audience. The prevalence of augury in the milieu of the early church likely led the first-century readers of the gospels to interpret the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism to be functionally the same as Roman augury regarding royal inauguration but antithetical in form from the bird usually associated with divine confirmation of emperors, the eagle. Several times in the early church, the flight of a dove functioned in the likeness of Roman augury in the selection and divine confirmation of ecclesiastical leaders. This study provides information on additional examples on how the Greco-Roman culture influenced the early and medieval Christian Church and the impact of augury on Christian thinking. There is little doubt that the English eagle Ampulla was an adaptation of the French *Sainte Ampoule*. This ninth-century French myth was preceded by the miraculous

Visigothic royal anointing of Wamba in an effort to bolster the royal claims of the king over would-be contenders. The French legend followed with the account of miraculous avian delivered oil, which first appeared during the reign of Charles the Bald as a means of strengthening the French king's assert to the throne and later bolstering French claims to having the supreme Christian King of the world. The English adapted the French legend with the myth of St Thomas' Holy Oil under the reign of Edward II. Richard II later altered the story once again to include the Roman symbolism of an eagle that reflected his imperial aspirations. The eagle Ampulla failed to secure Richard's kingship and never reached the political significance that he French *Sainte Ampulla* achieved.

Syncretism: The Presence of Roman Augury in the Consecration of English Monarchs

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

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To Gordon Fee, who demonstrated scholarly excellence and a passion  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *The General Background to the English Ampulla*

Ancient coronation ceremonies with regalia presently survive only in England and the Roman Catholic Church, and unless the royal consecration changes radically, the archbishop of Canterbury will anoint the next British monarch with oil dispensed from the Ampulla, an object shaped like an eagle made of gold. While ampullae in the Middle Ages were common vessels for storing and dispensing precious liquids, only the British and French made claims that their ampullae and the oil in them were sent from heaven. Each of these kingdoms made independent claims to the superiority of their monarch based on the divine origin of their royal anointing oil and its container. The British referred to their special flask in the shape of an eagle as the Ampulla, and the French called their dispenser of the supposed divinely provided oil the *Sainte Ampoule*.<sup>1</sup> The French *Ampoule* was lost during the French Revolution, but the British Ampulla remains in the Tower of London among the Crown Jewels.

The Ampulla's overall height is about nine inches, the diameter of its base is three and a half inches with a wing span of seven inches, and it weighs ten ounces. The relic stores six ounces of oil in a cavity of its body and has an opening in its beak through which the oil is dispensed during the royal consecration ceremony. Although the practice

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<sup>1</sup> The English Ampulla, as an eagle and part of royal consecration, is atypical in design and one of a kind. The French *Sainte Ampoule* conformed in shape to the more common ampullae. References to the English relic in this dissertation capitalize the first letter (Ampulla); the French anointing coronation relic is referred to as the *Sainte Ampoule* or simply the *Ampoule*.

of anointing a king in the Jewish and Christian communities has obvious Old Testament origins,<sup>2</sup> the connection of an eagle in the anointing of a Christian sovereign who is the supreme leader in the Church of England is less apparent. This dissertation attempts to answer the question; what is an eagle doing in the Christian consecration ceremony of the sovereign of England, who is also the head to the Church of England?

The eagle Ampulla first appeared in the English coronation service of Henry IV in the late fourteenth century. Although every coronation service since Henry's (1399) has utilized the Ampulla, the significance of the eagle diminished and was subsequently forgotten after the coronation of Henry VIII in the sixteenth century. The coronation of Edward VI of England in 1547 established a precedent for the diminution of meaning that anointing with the holy oil from a bird-shaped object had had from the time of Henry IV. This study will explore the symbolism of the gold eagle in the inauguration of English monarchs through its origins in the Roman practice of augury (defined as divination by the flight of birds), traceable through the early church and the medieval Frankish states to the coronation of Henry IV of England in 1399.

Monarchs in antiquity had a variety of means for gaining guidance from their gods in key life events such as getting married or engaging in war. Avian omens were common among rulers seeking divine guidance, but the Romans reduced augury to a systematic practice with definitive rules and passed it intact to subsequent generations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>For example, see the anointing of Saul (1 Sam 10:1), David (2 Sam 2:4), and Solomon (1 Kgs 1:39).

<sup>3</sup>Divination by the flight of birds and the political use of augury did not originate with the Romans. The Etruscans utilized the practice and undoubtedly influenced the Romans. When Romulus and Remus founded Rome, according to Livy and Cicero, augury was already a well-defined system. For further discussion, see John F. Hall, "From Tarquins to Caesars: Etruscan Governance at Rome," in *Etruscan Italy: Etruscan Influences on the Civilizations of Italy from Antiquity to the Modern Era*, ed. John F. Hall (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1996), 154-156.

Although Roman culture used augury in diverse ways, one of its most crucial and noted functions was the confirmation of the divine selection of emperors. Most of these auguries were the flights of eagles.<sup>4</sup>

The descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism gave the early Christian church what seemed like a divinely sanctioned model for the selection of church leaders by observing the flight of a bird. The dove identified him as God's appointed King who was inaugurating a new kingdom. The flight of a dove at Jesus' baptism as the bird of choice for a divine confirmation of a king was a striking deviation from the Roman use of an eagle. The change in the bird of omen reflected the antithetical nature of the kingdom Jesus inaugurated to that of the Roman Empire, a common theme in the gospels.

The antithetical characteristics between the baptismal dove and the imperial eagle was likely a contributing factor in the early church's adoption in the selection of ecclesiastical leaders of the Roman function of augury. The church at several points during the first five centuries of its history borrowed from the biblical account of Jesus' baptismal dove and utilized stories of the descent of a dove to bolster the claim of a person to a position of ecclesiastical leadership or prominence. For example, Eusebius (ca.260-ca.341) related the story of the church leaders choosing Bishop Fabianus from a

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<sup>4</sup>Italy has a variety of Eagles: the Imperial, Bonelli's, the Short-Toe, the White-Tail, and Gold eagles. This list reflects present day populations. This list of eagles present in regents of the ancient world would have been more numerous. See, Hermann Heinzel, Richard Fritter, and John Parlow, *Birds of Britain and Europe* (London: Collins, 1998), 70-89. The eagles present in both Italy and England include the Gold and White-Tailed. Among these eagles, the White-Tailed and Gold Eagles are also in the United States. See Kenn Kaufman, *Lives of North American Birds* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 63.

group of many candidates by a dove descending from heaven and landing on the future bishop's head.<sup>5</sup>

As Christianity grew in political influence and Christians became rulers, they turned to royal anointing as evidence of divine election to power. The earliest extant record of a Christian royal consecration in Western Europe is of the Visigoth King Wamba in 672. Julian of Toledo (642-690) told the story, which included the supernatural intervention as evidence of divine royal election, to bolster Wamba's claim to the throne in the face of a strong challenge from a political rival.<sup>6</sup> So as early as the seventh century, royal anointing in itself was insufficient to confirm and secure political power; accounts of anointing with divine intervention was utilized to trump rival claims to political authority.

An important link in the development of the legend of the Franks' *Sainte Ampoule* is seen in some artwork of the medieval era. Several pieces of art connect the dove at Jesus' baptism with the act of anointing with oil by showing a small flask of anointing oil in the baptismal dove's mouth. The legend of *Sainte Ampoule* stated that in 500 C.E. a dove descended from heaven with a flask of oil, which was later identified as the *Sainte Ampoule*, in its beak for the baptism of Clovis, the first Christian king of the Franks. The Franks and later the French claimed that this oil set their kings apart from royal domestic rivals and also distinguished their kings from among other European monarchs as the most Christian king. According to the French, this Holy Oil of the

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<sup>5</sup>See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.29. This chapter is an introduction and therefore functions as a guide to the direction and methodology of the dissertation. The examples and evidence for the claims made here receive greater support and documentation in the following chapters.

<sup>6</sup>See Julian of Toledo, *The Story of Wamba: Julian of Toledo's Historia Wambae Regis*, trans. Joaquin M. Pizarro (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 2005), 175-221.

*Sainte Ampoule* was divinely self-perpetuating (God supposedly supernaturally replenished the oil from consecration to consecration over the centuries) for anointing French monarchs as “The Lord’s Anointed” and “The Most Christian King” in the world. The use of the *Ampoule* and the divinely provided oil continued in the consecration of French kings as late as the nineteenth century.

The legend of the English heavenly sent oil first appeared in the midst of the long-established French claims to royal superiority. The French based their assertion of kingly pre-eminence on heavenly sent oil. These claims of royal advantage occurred in the midst of growing political and ecclesiastical tensions between the two countries. In 1318, during the reign of Edward II, a legend arose in England about divinely provided oil.<sup>7</sup> The first coronation service to utilize an expanded version of the English legend of Holy Oil, which included the addition of a gold eagle, was eighty-one years later in the inauguration of Henry IV. The legend evolved over those eight decades to include not only heavenly sent oil but also an eagle Ampulla that descended from heaven to Thomas Becket by the hand of the Virgin Mary. An eagle, a Roman symbol familiar to fifteenth-century English people, represented imperial might and supremacy. According to Roman symbolism, the English gold eagle Ampulla would have eclipsed the French claims to a superior coronation status, which was based on a dove.

Consecration with the oil from the English Ampulla before the Tudor Dynasty was a key point in arguments for expanding the king’s ecclesiastical authority. The anointing set the king on the same level as bishops, as seen for example in his ability to receive communion in both kinds (a practice denied to the medieval laity). Efforts to

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<sup>7</sup>See Pope John XXII, “Letter to Edward II,” in Legg, *English Coronation Records*, 73. Legg, 69-76, has provided a complete copy and translation of the pope’s letter.

expand the ruler's ecclesiastical influence were obsolete in coronations after Henry VIII. Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) made it clear in a sermon at Edward VI's coronation that God's election of Edward as the earthly sovereign outstripped the anointing by the oil consecrated by the Archbishop.<sup>8</sup> The legend of a heavenly sent gold eagle became archaic in regard to the king's claims to ecclesiastical authority; sixteenth-century law, not merely royal claims, acknowledged the monarch as the Head of the Church of England. Thus, the content of the symbolism of the eagle faded and eventually was forgotten.

This study of the Ampulla is significant in that some of the history and symbolism of a present royal practice has been lost. The modern reader is unlikely to connect "inauguration" and "augury" beyond linguistic etymology, and historians have failed to recognize or explain the syncretism of the eagle at English coronations. On the one hand, historians anticipate finding a combination of secular and sacred symbolism in the English monarchy during the Reformation because of the ruler's dual authority in the State and the Church. An amalgamation of Christian and pagan practices, however, is less expected. On the other hand, it is not surprising to find this syncretism in light of the profound cultural influences of the Roman Empire on the western world in art, literature, language, architecture, engineering, law, and religion. The Church, through its interaction with the surrounding cultures over the centuries, has taken many practices and traditions that it considered pagan and Christianized them (i.e., Christmas and Easter). This dissertation will examine one thin slice of Christian syncretism: the Church of England's incorporation of Roman symbolism in the consecration and coronation ceremony of the monarch.

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<sup>8</sup>See P. E. Schramm, *A History of English Coronation* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1937), 139

### *Methodology*

The chronological starting point for this dissertation is ancient first-century Rome for three reasons. First, this study is an ecclesiastical history and therefore focuses primarily on how the early church interacted with augury in the first-century milieu. The primary focus is the immediate surrounding political/social culture that the Church interacted with, not a general history of the religious and political practice of augury. The birth of the Church occurred in the first-century Roman world, so the primary focus is on augury in that context. Although further study of Roman augural roots would prove interesting and beneficial, such an investigation is not the objective here.

The ecclesiastical nature of this study also limits the tracing of augury in the Roman world to the traditions and stories that were present in the decades surrounding the birth of the Church. The concern here is the perception of first-century Christian readers, not a recounting of Roman Regal augury. I focus primarily on the Greco-Roman writers surrounding the dawn of the Church and their treatment of augury in the Roman Regal period. These ancient historians connect augury with four of the seven kings: Romulus, Numa Pompilius, Tarquinius Priscus, and Tarquin Suberbus.<sup>9</sup> The fact that scholars now consider most of these kings as mere legends has little bearing on this study since the aim here is the first-century perception of augury and claims to power.

Second, this study begins with the Romans because fourteenth-century England and France connected themselves with ancient Rome in the context of boasting in regard to heaven-sent oil. The English and French each traced their lineages to Rome and Roman myths as part of their claims to greatness. The Etruscans, for example, heavily

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<sup>9</sup>The historian records that circulated in the first century, C. E. make no mention of augury in connection with the other three kings of the Regal era.



influenced the Roman culture and concepts of divination, but the French and English traced their heritage through the Romans and Trojans, not the Etruscans.

Third, this study follows the conclusions of John Scheid at the College de France, who recognized the limited ability to trace the Etruscan origins of Roman religion. Scheid says, “Roman divination, in particular, is claimed to stem largely from Etruscan practices and theories—as the ancients themselves said it did. But in the total absence of any means of verifying their claims and because much of the religion of the Etruscan cities is still impenetrable to us, such references explain nothing.”<sup>10</sup>

A further limitation of this present study is its focus on Western Christianity. Some references are made in passing to Eastern European history, but the main treatment is the West. Justification for this limitation lies with the dissertation’s examination of the English Ampulla. Eastern Christianity had less influence on developments in England and France. Furthermore, this study focuses primarily on the dynamics between England and France. I mention other medieval Western kingdoms briefly because of the direct parallels between the French and English legends and the lack of another kingdom making claims to heaven-sent oil justify the focus on France’s influence on England. Therefore, the Holy Roman Empire receives little attention in this dissertation. This brevity is not intended to deny the Holy Roman Empire’s influence in England, especially on imperial symbolism, but it will be demonstrated that England clearly copied the legend of the Ampulla from the French for political reasons.

In the Roman period, I consider only imperial auguries, and I limit the meaning of augury to divination by the flight, sounds, and eating habits of birds. I recognize that,

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<sup>10</sup>John Scheid, *Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh: University Press, 2003), 12.

especially in the later Roman period, the term became more eclectic and included a variety of prognosticative practices, but for simplicity of expression, I restrict the meaning of augury in this dissertation to prediction by interpreting the actions and sounds of birds with particular attention to their flight.

The ancient Roman sources for this paper are not exhaustive but representative. Robin Lorsch convincingly argues in her University of North Carolina dissertation, “*Omina Imperii: The Omens of Power Received by the Roman Emperors from Augustus to Domitian, Their Religious Interpretation and Political Influence*” (1993), that Suetonius and Dio are the primary sources for imperial omens. This study broadens the field to include other key writers. Homer (ca. 700 B.C.E.) is essential because scholars in the first century C.E. recognized him as the authority on augury. Plutarch, Cicero, Livy, and Tacitus from approximately 100 B.C.E. to 125 C.E. are notable contributors as well. I also include several subsidiary Roman writers. The Perseus Project, an online digital library, provided a helpful word-search engine for Greek and Latin materials in this era. Lorsch’s dissertation was initially helpful in locating which ancient Roman sources to read first, but the Perseus Project was the key to selecting which primary sources to focus most of my efforts.

Writers in the early Church period produced a wide variety of literature that addresses augury. The list includes *The Didache*, *The Protoevangelium of James*, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Cyprian, Constantius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Origen. These writers reflect a variety of opinions regarding augury. I will compare and contrast these writings among themselves and to the Roman practice of augury.

In turning to the Middle Ages, the focus of this study shifts from augury to royal anointing, the context of the appearance of the *Sainte Ampoule* and the Ampulla. The Visigoths are important in early Middle Ages since the earliest extant reference to royal anointing comes from them. I explore the political relationship between England and France that surrounded the advent of the legends and their major developments. Although other scholars have investigated the history of the legends, no one has examined the traditions with an eye for the French *Sainte Ampoule* being a part of a trajectory from Roman augury toward a fuller expression in the English Ampulla as an imperial eagle.

In the Medieval and the Reformation eras in England, a wealth of diversified primary source material is available. I have reviewed inventory records from the Jewel House in the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey, sermons, ecclesiastical council documents, Acts of Parliament, records of Coronation protocol, Commonwealth decrees, and receipts for the sale and repair of the Regalia. I trace the history of the statue through the coronation of Charles II in 1660 because most of the regalia was lost prior to Charles' reign and subsequently recreated for his coronation. The Ampulla currently used in English coronations, however, appears to be the exception. The current Ampulla likely survived the destruction of the regalia in the interregnum period and is the same eagle statue from the fourteenth century. Metallurgists date this gold eagle to the early fourteenth century, which means that it is likely one of the few items of the pre-Commonwealth regalia to survive.

This dissertation, because it examines the history of ideas and ideological/theological syncretism, must make some inferences in some places without

direct evidence to link relationships causally. Two factors limit me in some places to provisional conclusions. First, this is a study of ideology; I am trying to discover the thought world behind the use of the English Ampulla. Often people do not readily recognize the history or ideology behind their actions, so tracing the history of a thought becomes difficult in those settings. Second, the syncretistic nature of the Ampulla and the *Sainte Ampoule* can cause problems in recognizing a pagan history behind the relics. The French and English, who prided themselves in being “Christian kingdoms,” would have been prone to deny any pagan influence regarding their sacred Holy Oil. These two countries were competing for the title and status of “most Christian” kingdom when the Ampulla first appeared in the fourteenth century. The historian should not expect to find hard evidence of Roman augural influence in the literature. A country attempting to project itself as “Christian” would be reluctant to admit that one of the most sacred rituals was in fact based in pagan practices. The research in this study illumines much of the ecclesiology and history of ideas behind the Ampulla, the practice of royal anointing, the history of augury in the early and medieval Church, and the potential meanings of the baptismal dove in the Gospel accounts for the first readers.

### *The State of the Question*

Scholars have researched the Ampulla, but it is not the exclusive focus of any historical monograph. Scholars who address the statue and the legend trace the history of the symbolism back to the French only. No one has traced the Roman influence of the eagle in the English coronation. I have found only a few paragraphs that address the influence of augury in the Church and this work is limited to the early first century. The

aim in my study is to fill this gap and to trace the migration of augury from the Roman Empire to the Church of England.

There is helpful work on the history of the English practice of anointing and the legend of the Holy Oil. P. E. Schramm, *History of the English Coronation* (1937), receives the most recognition as a voice of authority among secondary sources. Edward Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe* (1960) provides a stellar account of the French and English Ampullae and of the English acquiring and adapting the French legend, but neither of these sources considers the Roman influence.

Janos Bak's edited work, *Coronations* (1990), investigates medieval coronations and provides helpful treatment on Hincmar of Rheims. C. A. Bouman's *Sacring and Crowning* (1957) is thorough in its coverage of the anointing and coronation of kings in the medieval era, especially in identifying key passages in Hincmar, but he limits his study to the eleventh century and earlier. Francis Oppenheimer's *The Legend of St. Ampoule* (1953) is the standard for the French story and is invaluable in tracing the development of the legend from the beginning of the Middle Ages. Oppenheimer provides only a paucity of information on the English counterpart and does not examine Roman augury. *Vive le Roi* (1984) by Richard Jackson makes a notable contribution to my work; he indicates some of the Roman background to the legend of the *Sainte Ampoule*. Marc Bloch's *The Royal Touch* (1961) is a standard work for the English and French histories of the monarch's healing ability and its connection with anointing.

The dissertations of Richard Rothaus and Robin Lorsch are in-depth studies of augury but provide little treatment of a connection with Christianity. Charles Talbert at Baylor University has done ground-breaking work revealing the influence of the Roman

concept of the flight of birds on the authorial audience of Luke's gospel regarding the dove at Jesus' baptism in *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (1972), but he does not extend his study past the Lucan audience and has limited Roman sources.

### *Outline of the Research*

#### *Chapter Two: The Flight of Birds in the Roman Empire*

Chapter Two begins the process of tracing the practice of augury from antiquity toward Reformation England by examining the significance of avian omens in the Roman political world. I establish several key points: augury saturated Roman culture; the flight of birds was the surest of all omens; the eagle was the strongest and most reliable of all augural signs; the eagle symbolized the power and authority of the Empire; and augury, especially the flight of an eagle, was important in establishing an imperial candidate's claim to the throne. The last two points are of particular importance. Nations have noted Rome's use of the Imperial eagle as a symbol of the Empire's worldwide dominance throughout the centuries, especially in France and England. The flight of a bird as an instrument in divine confirmation of election to a position of authority is the basis of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule* and the English *Ampulla*.

#### *Chapter Three: The Flight of Birds in the Early Church*

Chapter Three explores the reaction of the early church community to Roman augury. Luke's gospel is of particular interest since it provides the clearest parallels to Roman augury and the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism to a non-Palestinian audience. The primary sources of the early church reveal that, on the one hand, the

churches clearly rejected the Roman practice of divination by augury. Most early church writers strongly rebuffed the Roman practice of divine prognostication by the flight of birds; they either denied the power of the practice or attributed the predictive ability to demons. On the other hand, some early Church authors utilize the flight of a dove as a means to indicate divine selection of someone to a prominent position in the Church. The *Protoevangelium of James*, for example, describes the selection of Joseph as Mary's husband by the descent of a dove that landed on him. Eusebius is a key figure in accessing augury in this period. Some readers might argue that other early-church writers endorsed the descent of the dove in the divine selection of ecclesiastical leaders because these authors were religious pluralists. Eusebius, however, clearly rejected the general use of Roman augury to predict the future as demonic, yet he fully endorsed the selection of Fabianus from among his peers as the divinely selected bishop by the descent of a dove. Eusebius' writings demonstrate the syncretism of augury in the early church era; he recognized the practice as pagan but adopted a modified, Christianized version of the flight of a bird for ecclesiastical purposes.

#### *Chapter Four: The Flight of Birds and Anointing in France*

This chapter focuses on the history of the *Sainte Ampoule* and the legend as the forerunner to the English Ampulla. I will consider the introduction and evolution of oil in the Christian rite of baptism as the foundation of the French and English Holy Oil myths. I evaluate the artwork of the early Middle Ages that depict the baptism of Jesus. Medieval art is important because it had two tasks: instruction and decoration. Beginning in the seventh century, artistic depictions of the baptismal dove show an ampulla in the bird's mouth. At least four more works from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries portray

a similar ampulla at the baptismal scene. This artwork appears to supply the kernel for the legend of the French *Sainte Ampoule*. The flight of a dove was instrumental in the inauguration of Jesus and the future claims of French kings to greatness, a notion that looks and functions much like Roman augury.

I then examine the growth and evolution of the legend over the centuries and determine how it functioned first in the record of Wamba, the Visigoth king, and later within the ecclesiastical and political life of the Franks and French. I will demonstrate that the legend of the *Ampoule* conflated Roman augury with Jesus' baptismal dove. One of the roles of this heaven-sent oil was to elevate the awareness of world dominance of the French king in the midst of growing national consciousness. This understanding of the *Ampoule* was a major contributing factor in the creation of the English legend of the gold eagle.

#### *Chapter Five: The Descent of an Eagle in England*

Chapter Five presents the central concept of this dissertation. I first examine the two-stage history behind the development of Thomas Becket's Holy Oil to compare and contrast it with the practice of Roman augury. Therefore, I consider the major stages of the development of the legend of the Ampulla with special attention to the surrounding political and ecclesiastical (both domestic and foreign) circumstances. I then look at the range of possible symbolic meanings of eagles in medieval England and compare the elements and traditions of the English Ampulla to those of Roman augury. The chapter concludes by tracing the loss of the Ampulla's significance through the Tudor/Stuart Dynasties.



*Chapter Six: Conclusion*

This final chapter summarizes the dissertation and lists the contributions it makes to current scholarship. The chapter also indicates where further study is needed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Flight of Birds in the Roman Empire

The motion picture industry has recently produced several films about Greco-Roman life, such as *Alexander* and *Troy*, that imply the importance of the flight of birds for divine guidance in the ancient Mediterranean milieu. In *Alexander*, for example, an eagle appears several times during battle scenes in a mystical way, but the movie provides no explanation of the meaning of the bird. Most Americans have lost awareness or have only a vague notion of the significant role divination by the flight of birds had in the Greco-Roman world. Remnants of the profound cultural impact of Roman augury still remain among some French-speaking Europeans. For example, a Swiss figure of speech intended to squelch the potential of a negative self-fulfilling prophecy—a common response to a pessimistic comment—is, “*Etre un oiseau de mauvaise augure*” (“You are being a bird of a bad omen”). Few such augural vestiges of Roman prognostication by birds survive in North America. The aim of this chapter is to examine the significance of augury in the intellectual and political Greco-Roman world as the foundation for the legend of the British Ampulla.

Scholars divide the history of ancient Rome into three major periods: the Regal (753-509 B.C.E), the Republican (509-27 B.C.E), and the Imperial (31 B.C.E.-476 C.E.). The primary focus in this chapter is on the initial years of the Imperial period. A close examination and listing will be given to the majority of emperors from Augustus’ rule (43 B.C.E.-14 C.E.) to the end of the Flavian Dynasty (96 C.E.) for three reasons. First, most

imperial auguries occurred during these years (It is not coincidental that the burgeoning centralized government of the Imperial period shared characteristics with the monarchy in England at the time of the introduction of the Ampulla; the two political entities had common sociological needs). Second, the fullest extant descriptions of imperial avian omens of any age are from this period, primarily due to the enduring work of Suetonius (ca. 69-ca. 130) and Tacitus (ca. 56-ca. 117). These descriptions are paramount for insight into Roman understanding of augury and its function. Third, the first centuries of the Imperial period incorporated the birth and initial reception of the New Testament documents and the growth of the Christian Church. It is important to discover the influence that avian omens in the surrounding culture had on the Church. In this chapter, I describe augury in the Roman culture and then examine the Church's response to it in the next chapter.

This present chapter begins by examining the place of augury in the intellectual and political world of the Empire with particular attention to the reigns of the emperors in the early decades of the Imperial era. Then I consider the specific importance of the eagle in the Greco-Roman political and military milieu. The importance of this chapter is to demonstrate that the impact of Roman augury was so profound and enduring that it entered the life of the Christian Church early and influenced the European political world into at least the fifteenth century with the appearance of the Ampulla in England.

### *Augury in the Roman Milieu*

Birds, although not the only means of divination in the Greco-Roman milieu, were foundational in all practices of predicting the future. Plutarch (46-127), a Greco-Roman biographer and moralist, compares the divine symbolism of statues and practices

of divination by numbers and figures (such as that of the Pythagoreans) to divine representation of animals:

If, then, the most noted of the philosophers, observing the enigma of the divine in inanimate and incorporeal objects, have not thought it proper to treat anything with carelessness or disrespect, even more do I think that, in all likelihood, we should welcome those peculiar properties existent in natures which possess the power of perception and have a soul and feelings and character. It is not that we should honor these but that through these we should honor the Divine, since they are the clearer mirrors of the Divine by their nature also, so that we should regard them as the instrument or the device of the God who orders all things. . . . Wherefore the Divine is no worse represented in these animals than in works of bronze and stone, which are alike subject to destruction and disfiguration and by their nature are void of all perception and comprehension. This, then, is what I most approve in the accounts that are given regarding the animals held in honor.<sup>1</sup>

Aelian (ca. 175-ca. 235), the Roman author and teacher of rhetoric, indicates a variety of possible animals to be used in foretelling future events that would have dramatic effect on life: “Dogs, oxen, swine, goats, snakes, and other animals have a presentiment of an impending famine, they are the first to know when a pestilence or an earthquake is approaching. They can foretell fair weather and the fertility of crops. They are devoid of reason . . . they are not mistaken at any rate in matters mentioned above.”<sup>2</sup> Plutarch referred to the crocodile as an example of a divine agent because the animal did not have a tongue, “for the divine word has no need of a voice.”<sup>3</sup> In a different treatise, he pointed to some of the reasons that birds were the primary form of divination:

So easily are [birds] diverted, serving as an instrument of the god, who directs their movements, their calls or cries, and their formations, which are sometimes contrary, sometimes favoring, as winds are; so that he uses some birds to cut short, others to

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<sup>1</sup>Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 382 B-C.

<sup>2</sup>Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals*, 6.16.

<sup>3</sup>Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 381 B. The Jewish author, Philo (20 B.C.E.-40 C.E.), in his rejection of divination by animals also includes reptiles among the animals in Roman practices of divination (*Special Laws*, 1.62). He called them “groveling reptiles which crawl out of their holes to seek food.”

speed enterprises and inceptions of the destined end. It is for this reason that Euripides calls birds in general, “heralds of the gods.”<sup>4</sup>

Greco-Roman culture looked to a variety of animals as potential sources for predicting future events, but birds were the creatures more often utilized, and the erratic nature of their flight reflected greater potential for divine influence.

Present day and ancient etymologies provide a preliminary hint to the extensive presence and significance of divination by the flight of birds in the Greco-Roman culture. Matthew Dillon of the University of New England offers valuable insight into the linguistical Greek history of augury:

*Oinos*, bird, became a general word for an omen, and meant “omen” by virtue of the fact that originally most omens would have been ornithological in nature; the verb from this, *oionizomai*, can mean divination even when no birds are involved, which shows that birds were the earliest and most important form of Greek *manteia* [prophecy].<sup>5</sup>

*Inaugurate* is an English word that has significant Roman roots and notions for this study. The fourth edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* as well as the *Oxford English Dictionary* define *inaugurate*—“To induct into office by a formal ceremony.” Both dictionaries indicate the Latin etymology—“to consecrate by augury.”<sup>6</sup> The notion

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<sup>4</sup>Plutarch, *Moralia*, 975.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew P. Dillon, “The Importance of *Oionomanteia* in Greek Divination,” in *Religion in the Ancient World; New Themes and Approaches* ed., Matthew Dillon (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkart, 1996), 102. Care is needed in utilizing etymology in any study since literary context is the prime determinate of the meaning of any word. The word *enthused*, for example has the etymological meaning of being possessed by a god. Modern and ancient usage, however, divorce the meaning of the word from its etymology; a reader would be wrong to read the idea of divine possession in a modern description of an enthusiastic leader. It would be highly unlikely that a modern writer would use the archaic sense of divine possession without fuller explanation. The modern reader would understand “enthused” to mean great excitement or interest. Forcing the archaic meaning would simply lead the reader astray. It is hoped that consideration of the root meaning of the words in this section helps uncover the significance in the historical context and augural context of earlier usage. The value of the etymology will be apparent in the next section.

<sup>6</sup>The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* is conflicted on the root of *augury*. On the one hand, it states that the etymology is uncertain being tied to either birds or fertility. Alternatively, in the entry under *divination*, Arthur S. Pease defines augury as “the observation and interpretation of the number, species,

of “inaugurating a head of state” has etymological ties with the flight of birds, and such a connection was extensively present in the Greco-Roman world. Cicero (106-46 B.C.E.) says that Romulus, the founder and first Roman king, “perceived that he had gained a throne whose source and prop was augury.”<sup>7</sup>

The Roman definition of augury broadened over the course of time to include a wide variety of divination practices. This evolution has caused some scholars to lessen or miss the significance of divination of the flight of birds in ancient Rome. D. R. MacIver, for example, says in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* regarding the importance of augury in the Etruscan religious life, “The Roman augurs and haruspices learned their arts originally from the Etruscan, who, even in the late Roman Empire, were still famous for proficiency in these arts.”<sup>8</sup> Such a conclusion is not in line with first-century opinion. Cicero observed, “Again the Etruscans are very strong in observing thunderbolts, in interpreting their meaning and that of every sign and portent. . . . On the other hand the Phrygians, Pisidians, Cilicians, and Anabians rely chiefly on the signs conveyed by the birds, and the Umbrians, according to tradition, used to do the same.”<sup>9</sup>

Cicero pointed out that the practice of augury had generally declined in his time and switched from flight of birds to haruspex in public life:

In ancient time scarcely any matter out of the ordinary was undertaken, even in private life, without first consulting the auspices, clear proof of which is given even at the present time by our custom of having ‘nuptial auspices; though they have lost

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flight, cries, eating, and other symbolic acts of birds.” The essence of the debate for this dissertation, however, is the ancient, not present, understanding and pervasiveness of the divination by the flight of birds in the Roman political arena.

<sup>7</sup>Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.48.

<sup>8</sup>“Etruscans,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

<sup>9</sup>Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.41.

their former religious significance and only preserve the name. For just as today on important occasions we make use of entrails in divining—though even they are employed to a less extent than formerly—so in the past resort was usually had to divination by means of birds. And thus it is that by failing to seek out the unpropitious signs that we run into awful disasters.<sup>10</sup>

Cicero observed that augury had become limited to confirmation in the choice of a spouse. Divination in general was being neglected, but *haruspex* was the choice of divination at that time for public ceremonies.

Cicero provided several reasons for the decline in the practice of augury: “. . . the art has undergone a change, due to experience, education, or the long lapse of time.”<sup>11</sup> Even though he argues against predicting the future by the flight of birds, he still supports the on-going practice in political and military venues: “However, out of respect for the opinion of the masses and because of the great service to the State we maintain the augural practices, discipline, religious rites and laws, as well as the authority of the augural college.” Even though he saw the practice limited in daily civilian practice, he indicated the depth of his support of the practice in military matters: “In my opinion the consuls, Publius Claudius and Lucius Junius, who set sail contrary to the auspices, were deserving of capital punishment, for they should have respected the established religion and should have not treated the customs of their forefathers with such shameless disdain.”<sup>12</sup> His statement about the masses indicates that a large percentage of people were aware of and supported the practice of augury, and they historically linked it to divination by the flight of birds.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 1:16.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 2.33.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

The English word *auspicious*—a favorable beginning—also has etymological ties with divination by the flight of birds. The word has an obvious connection with the Latin *auspicium*. The University of Notre Dame’s lexicon defines *auspicium* as “divination by means of birds, any omen or sign.”<sup>13</sup> A good beginning for ancient Romans, according to etymology as well as their own understanding, often depended on the favorable behavior of birds. Auspices came from the observation of birds in three ways. In some cases, the flights of birds provided the divination, as in the story of Romulus and Remus.<sup>14</sup> In other circumstances, birds’ song or cry determined the auspices. The ancient Roman historian, Pliny the Elder (23-79), speaks of two classes of birds, “those which give omens by their note, and those which afford presages by their flight.”<sup>15</sup> The third way of taking the auspices was observation of the birds’ eating habits, especially those of the sacred chickens used by the military.<sup>16</sup> *Auspicious* was self-descriptive of Rome’s great history because the flight of birds established the Empire.<sup>17</sup>

The ancient world also recognized this etymological link between divination and animals, especially birds. Plutarch ties the two together linguistically: “[Let me] say a few words about divine inspiration and the mantic power of animals. It is, in fact, no small or ignoble division of divination, but a great and very ancient one, which takes its name from birds.”<sup>18</sup> These etymological connections point to birds being fundamental

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<sup>13</sup><http://catholic.archives.nd.edu/egi-bin/lookdown.pl?bird>, downloaded April 25, 2004.

<sup>14</sup>Livy, *The Histories*, 1.18, provides a detailed description regarding the techniques used by augurs to divide the sky into quadrants for reading omens.

<sup>15</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 22.20.

<sup>16</sup>See pages 39-40 below.

<sup>17</sup>For fuller treatment, see pp. 26-27 below.

<sup>18</sup>Plutarch, *Moralia*, 975.



and primary in the development of predictive practices in the ancient Roman world.

While most modern readers fail to link any connotation of birds to “inaugurate,” the connection was apparent in both the thought and political life of Rome especially during the Imperial era.

### *The General Principles of Roman Augury*

The sources that best describe the Roman practice of augury come from the last decades of the Republic era. The Cicero’s treatment in *On Divination* (both for and against divination) is the fullest extant treatment of select aspects on public divination by avian omens.<sup>19</sup> Public auspices were those practices that were routine, performed within established rules for such activities as calling assemblies, confirming the appointment of a magistrate, or going to war. These public displays of divination underwent change as Rome moved from being a Republic to an Empire. Auspices were a sure sign of confirmation of magisterial decisions and challenges to those choices. With the centralization of power in Augustus, the general practice of divination became more of a formality. Private auspices had greater diversification and consistency in the Republic and the Empire. Unfortunately, either Roman authors failed to record many of the details of private practices or the writings have not survived.

Cicero argued that environmental factors determined which type of divination a state espoused:

Now for my part, I believe that the character of the country determined the kind of divination which its inhabitants adopted. For example, the Egyptians and Babylonians, who live on the level surface of open plains, with no hills to obstruct

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<sup>19</sup>Public divination in this period depended on three practices: auspices, Sibylline oracles, and haruspicy. For a fuller treatment on the last two, see Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 121-124.

the view of the sky, have devoted their attention wholly to astrology. But the Etruscans, being in their nature a very ardent religious temperament and accustomed to the frequent sacrifice of victims, have given their chief attention to the study of entrails. . . But the Arabians, Phrygians, and Cilicians, being chiefly engaged in the rearing of cattle, are constantly wandering over the plains and mountains in winter and summer and on that account, have found it quite easy to study the songs and flights of birds. The same is true of the Pisidians and our fellow-countrymen, the Umbrians.<sup>20</sup>

Cicero's statements reveal that geographical regions tended to differ in which type of divination they emphasized. He seems to imply that the flight of birds was the premiere means of Roman augury and points to some of its various functions:

Therefore [the magistrates] have no *tripudium* (a favorable omen) and they cross rivers without first taking the auspices. What, then, has become of divining by means of birds? It is not used by those who conduct our wars, for they have not the right of auspices. Since it has become withdrawn from use in the field I suppose it is reserved for city use only.<sup>21</sup>

Romans divided the empire into distinct territories and categories marked by such features as streams and rivers. The law required the magistrate to consult the auspices each time he crossed one of the boundaries. When a magistrate was on a military expedition, he was required to take an auspices everyday.

Livy provided a description of the process of augury used when he narrated the inauguration of King Numa:

[Numa] commanded that, just as Romulus had obeyed the augural omens in building his city and assuming regal power, so too in his own case the gods should be consulted. Accordingly an augur conducted him to the citadel and caused him to sit down on a stone facing the south. The augur seated himself on Numa's left, having his head covered and holding in his right hand the crooked staff without a knot, which they call a *lituus*. Then, looking out over the city and the country beyond, he prayed to the gods and marked off the heavens by a line from east to west, designating as "right" the regions to the south, as "left" those to the north, and fixing in his mind a landmark opposite to him and as far away as the eye could

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<sup>20</sup> Cicero, *de Divinatione* 2.42.93.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 2.36.76.

reach; next shifting the crook in his left hand and laying his right hand on Numa's head, he uttered the following prayer; "Father Jupiter, if it is Heaven's will that this man Numa Pompilius, whose head I am touching, be king in Rome, do thou exhibit to us unmistakable signs within those limits which I have set." He then specified the auspices which he desired should be sent, and upon their appearance Numa was declared king.<sup>22</sup>

Cicero indicated that a tradition connected with the staff of Numa had survived the centuries, and the staff was used by augurs in Cicero's day and showed the fame and function of it:

And where, pray did you augurs derive that staff, which is the most conspicuous mark of your priestly office? It is the very one, indeed, with which Romulus marked out the quarter for taking observations when he founded the city. Now this staff is a crooked wan, slightly curved at the top, and because of its resemblance to a trumpet, derives its name from the Latin word meaning "the trumpet with which the battle-charge is sounded." It was placed in the temple of the Salii on the Palatine hill and, though the temple was burned, the staff was found uninjured. What ancient chronicler fails to mention the fact that in the reign of Tarquinius Priscus, long after the time of Romulus, a quartering of the heavens was made with this staff by Attus Navius?<sup>23</sup>

The observation of the flight of birds was the preferred method of magistrates to take the auspices until the third century, when they preferred to observe these birds feeding patterns and general behavior. Cicero intimates that magistrates were abusing divination by chickens to implement their own will: "But now, when shut up inside a cage and tortured by hunger, if it seizes greedily upon its morsel of pottage and something falls from its mouth, do you consider that an auspice? Or do you believe that this was the way in which Romulus used to take auspices?"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Livy, *History of Rome* 1.18.6-10.

<sup>23</sup>Cicero, *de Divinatione* 1.17.30-31; Varro (116-27 B.C.E), *de Lingua Latina*, also speaks of quartering the heaven for reading the flight of birds, 7.7-9.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.34.73.

There were two types of auspices: *auspicial/auguria impetratius* (the auspices and auguries requested by the gods) and *auspicial/auguria oblatiua* (the un-requested auspices and auguries that occurred on their own). The “impetrative” auspices were of the kind already described. To perform this kind of divination, the magistrate or augur set up an *auguraculum*, an official place if in Rome or a pitched tent if on a military campaign. The “auspicial oblativ” could be a variety of unexpected, serendipitous events such as the appearance of a bird, lightening, or an earthquake.<sup>25</sup>

The role of the Augur was not only to read the flight of birds but more importantly to counsel the magistrate and alert him of any discrepancies in taking the auspices. Cicero observed that the office of the Augur was undergoing a change during his time: “In our forefather’s time the magistrates on such occasions [of calling for an auspices] used to call in some expert person to take the auspices—but in these days anyone will do.”<sup>26</sup> Magistrates always retained ultimate control of the public practice of divination.

#### *Augury in the Roman Intellectual Milieu*

The underlying supposition here is that what the ancient Roman people read or heard read aloud significantly influenced their thought life (especially as a pre-electronic culture). Homer’s treatment of augury (ca. 700 B.C.E), therefore, becomes indispensable for understanding augury in the intellectual life of Imperial Rome. Homeric works were likely the most read material by the first-century Roman public and the most used in Imperial Roman education.

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<sup>25</sup>Cicero, *de Divinatione* 2:71. 149.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:34.71.

Homeric popularity can be intimated by the number of copies of the epics that circulated in the ancient world. Dennis MacDonald of Claremont Graduate School cites the number of recovered manuscripts as evidence of first century Greco-Roman familiarity with Homer's writings.<sup>27</sup> Roger Pack of the University of Michigan cataloged the manuscripts from Greco-Roman Egypt in which there are an impressive 604 manuscripts of Homer; Demosthenes is a distant second with a mere eighty-three manuscripts, followed by Euripides with seventy-seven.<sup>28</sup>

The case for fluency of Homeric literature in the Roman culture during this era is advanced by the use of his epics in the established educational process. The students' exposure to Homer was early, repeated, and sophisticated. Children first learned the alphabet forward and backward. Then they progressed to two-letter syllables followed by pronunciation of words. John Townsend of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts says, "After learning his word lists, the young student graduated to texts, not simplified primers...but selections from the very best writers, especially Homer and Euripides, writers whose style would be worthy of later imitation. These selections the children would learn first to read aloud and then to recite from memory."<sup>29</sup> Quintilian (35-ca. 96C.E.), revealed the repeated exposure to Homeric literature in the general education process; he said of primary education, "It is therefore an admirable practice which now prevails, to begin by reading Homer and Virgil, although the intelligence

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<sup>27</sup>Dennis MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 3-49.

<sup>28</sup>Roger Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965).

<sup>29</sup>John Townsend, "Education (Greco-Roman World)," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2.313.

needs to be further developed for the full appreciation of their merits: but there is plenty of time for that since the boy will read them more than once.”<sup>30</sup> The initial stages of Roman education furthered the pronounced familiarity with Homeric literature throughout the Empire.

The diverse educational system broadly disseminated exposure to Homeric literature throughout the society. Ancient Hellenistic-Roman education consisted of three stages: primary, secondary, and advanced. Children started attending primary school at about age seven. Townsend points out that education was for more than solely the privileged few.<sup>31</sup> He states,

Primary education, however, was widespread and not limited to freeborn males. Girls frequently attended school along with their brothers; and in the case of slaves, many of them also necessarily received at least some education in order to perform tasks commonly assigned to them. In the Greco-Roman world of the NT, even the poor felt the need for reading skills.<sup>32</sup>

Following primary school, students had the option of entering secondary education. The work of Homer was preeminent here also. Townsend indicates the enduring influence and lasting familiarity with Homer from secondary school even in the Christian community: “Students tended to remember the authors they had studied, and Christians were no exception. Thus, Clement of Alexandria in his *Exhortation to the Greeks* cited Homer far more than any other pagan author (39 times), with Euripides placing second (9 times).”<sup>33</sup> This repeated exposure to Homeric literature throughout the various levels of

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<sup>30</sup>Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1.8.5.

<sup>31</sup>John Townsend, “Ancient Education in the Time of the Early Roman Empire,” in *Catacombs and the Coliseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity*, ed. S. Berko and J.J. O’Rourke (Valley Forge: Judson, 1971), 141.

<sup>32</sup>Townsend, *ABD* 2.313.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.314.

the Hellenistic-Roman educational system undoubtedly broadly expanded the familiarity with Homeric literature among the public.

This ancient exposure to Homer is important to this study because he was a key authority in the Imperial period regarding augury. Those who both approved and disapproved of the practice of augury cited his works.<sup>34</sup> Ancient scholars customarily quoted Homer whenever possible.<sup>35</sup> Cicero clearly demonstrated the weight Homeric augury had in the Imperial Roman milieu. He used the fame of the Homeric augurs Helenus and Calchas as a defense of the trustworthiness of augury.<sup>36</sup> Cicero drew on Homer's account of Calchas to defend the practice of augury in the first century B.C.E. Calchas was a noble leader, according to Cicero, whose skill raised the Homeric augur to leadership. Cicero says, "Homer writes that Calchas was by far the best augur among the Greeks and that his command of the Greek fleet I suppose was due to his skill as an augur and not to his skill in seamanship."<sup>37</sup> A Roman author, Aelian, (170-230 C.E.) utilized Homer authoritatively to reveal how augury was to function in the culture:

If an owl accompanies and stays behind a man who has set out on some business, they say it is not a good omen . . . that is why I think Homer knowing full well that the owl was nowhere a favourable omen, says that Athena sent a heron from the rivers to the comrades of Dioneses [sic] when they went up to the Trojans' camp—a heron, not an owl, even though it appears to be her favorite.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 257, n. 1, sees the two Homeric passages, Homer, *Iliad*, 2.308-21 and 12.200-9, used by Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.91, as stock responses in antiquity. See Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.47.106; II 2.308-321; Aelian, *On the Character of Animals*, 8.5.

<sup>35</sup>A.F. Scholfield, "Introduction to Aelian," in *On the Character of Animals*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), xi.

<sup>36</sup>Cicero, *Laws*, 2.13.33.

<sup>37</sup>Cicero, *Div.* 1.85; cf. *Div.* 1.72

<sup>38</sup>Aelian, *On the Character of Animals*, 10.37.

Homeric literature was prevalent, and his writings were authoritative during the Roman Imperial period. He both contributed to the popularity of augury and to the understanding of how it functioned. A close consideration of how Homer used augury in his literature and how it operated in the lives of the characters is in order.

Three conclusions about Homeric augury have bearing upon this study. First, augury is the most dependable and wholly reliable form of divine prognostication in the Homeric epics. Whatever the avian omens predict for the reader is surely to happen later in the story; not one time, in the midst of crooked dealings from the gods, does an augury prove to be wrong. In Homer, auguries were the most trusted of all omens, including the direct communication that comes from a theophany. Second, Homer used augury as a literary device to guide the reader by foreshadowing the conclusion of the story early in the narrative. Third, Homer depicted the flight of an eagle as the most dependable of all ornithological omens. I will examine each of these conclusions in turn.

First, illustrations abound in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* depicting the surety of augury; consideration of two is sufficient. Homer uses the sureness of avian portents to produce one of the most powerful literary devices, irony. Literary irony occurs if the readers have more information than a character in the narrative had. The certainty of augury produces irony in Homer's epics when characters refuse to acknowledge the flight of birds as reliable prognostication. The fourth occurrence of augury in the *Iliad* is in book twelve and is clearly ironic. Hector is enthusiastic to attack the Achaeans:

For an omen had come to [the Trojans] as they were eager to cross over, an eagle of lofty flight, skirting the army on the left, and in its talons it carried a blood-red, huge snake, still alive and struggling, nor was it yet forgetful of combat; for it writhed backward and struck him who held it on the chest beside the neck, and the



eagle, stung with pain, cast it from him to the ground, and let it fall in the midst of the throng, and himself with a loud cry sped away down the blast of the wind.<sup>39</sup>

Polydamas, sobered by the impropriety of speaking contrary to Hector in war, warns Hector of the impending danger the omen indicates. Polydamas states, “For many of the Trojans will we leave behind whom the Achaeans will slaughter with the bronze in defense of the ships. This is the way a soothsayer would interpret, one who in his mind had clear knowledge of omens, and to whom the people gave ear.”<sup>40</sup> Hector’s angry response is significant,

But if you are saying this in earnest, then indeed the gods themselves have surely destroyed your senses, since you are asking me to forget the counsels of loud-thundering Zeus, that he himself promised me and nodded assent. But you tell us to be obedient to birds long of wing, which I do not regard or take thought of, whether they go to the right toward the sun, or to the left toward the murky darkness. Let us be obedient to the counsel of great Zeus, who is king over all mortals and immortals. One omen is best, to fight for one’s country.<sup>41</sup>

Irony is present in that the reader of the epic knows the outcome of the story, which an avian omen had indicated: the Achaeans will defeat the Trojans and burn the city. The ultimate outcome of the entire narrative and the augury of book twelve are in tension because the Trojans gain momentum and Zeus turns to support them. However, little doubt actually exists since the reader knows that Zeus’ support is temporary until the vindication of Achilles over Agamemnon. The reader realizes that Hector, even though he is acting from the noble goal of fighting for one’s country, is foolish in ignoring the augury.

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<sup>39</sup>Homer, *Iliad* 12.197.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.224ff.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.234-243.

This episode sets two methods of divine prognostication in conflict with each other: a promise with a nod from Zeus and a bird of omen. The reader has already learned the importance and surety of a nod from Zeus. Achilles' mother, Thetis, badgers Zeus for more than a verbal agreement; Zeus must nod for surety of his word.<sup>42</sup> The omen of a bird proved to be supreme in reliability in this scene over the trustworthiness of Zeus' nod. This bird omen confirmed both the immediate outcome (the Trojans suffer devastating losses) and the ultimate result of the complete Achaean victory.

The second example in the Homeric epics also reveals the superior reliability of divination by birds over other means of divine revelation. The final augury in the *Iliad* is set up in book twenty-four with a theophany of Iris. Zeus sent the goddess to Priam, Hector's father, in response to Achilles' desecration of Hector's corpse. Iris informed Priam of Zeus' plan to send him to the Achaean ships to ransom his son's dead body. Priam told his wife, who objected to the plan, and then he responded, "For I myself heard the voice of the goddess and looked on her face—I will go, and her word will not be in vain." As Priam was about to leave in a wagon loaded with a ransom, his wife came to him and said,

Here, pour libation to father Zeus, and pray that you may come back home from the foe, since your heart urges you to the ships, though I am opposed to it. Then make your prayer to the son of Cronos, lord of the dark clouds, the god of Ida, who looks down on all the land of Troy, and ask of him a bird of omen, the swift messenger that to himself is dearest of birds and is mightiest in strength; let him appear on your right hand, so that noting the sign with your own eyes, *you* [italics added] may have trust in it and go to the ships of the Danaans of fleet steeds.<sup>43</sup>

Priam capitulated to his wife's urging, and in prayer, he requested an avian omen for his own eyes and assurance. Zeus immediately responds and sends an eagle.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 1.517-528.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 24.287-297.

Several points are noteworthy from this scene. 1) The theophany and instructions of a god are not enough for Priam's wife or apparently for him. The augury is once again the surest of omens. This passage points to augury being the ultimate reliable form of divine communication. 2) Zeus was the sender of the bird, an eagle. Coincidence of the appearance of a bird in response to prayer was not a question for either the characters or the reader. 3) Both Priam and his wife were able to trust fully in the augury. It calmed the anxiety of the characters and gave assurance in the midst of the significantly risky undertaking of riding through the entire Achaean camp to retrieve Hector's body. 4) The flight of the eagle proved to be reliable; Priam was successful and returned from the dangerous mission with the body of his son (cf. 24.700-705). 5) The eagle is the dearest to Zeus and the mightiest in strength. The reader of Homeric literature knows that a bird omen, especially an eagle, is always sure.

Second, augury also functioned rhetorically in the Homeric epics as a proleptic guide for the reader. The author used avian omens early in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to reveal the outcome of the narrative. The first occurrence of augury in the *Iliad* is a flashback in book two to a pre-war incident. Odysseus encourages the Achaeans to remain strong in battle according to the prophecy that Calchas, the augur, had given before the start of the war. Calchas interpreted a serpent eating nine sparrows as meaning the Achaeans would have victory over the Trojans in the tenth year. Although the outcome of the war is not narrated in the *Iliad*, the bird omen proved to be a reliable guide to the reader throughout the entire epic.

The first appearance of a bird in the *Odyssey* is also significant for guiding the reader. Athena appears to Telemachus disguised as a man. She says to Telemachus,

“Indeed, I will now prophesy to you, as the immortals put it in my heart, and as I think it shall be brought to pass, though I am no soothsayer, nor one versed in the signs of birds.”<sup>44</sup> She then predicts the imminent return of Odysseus. Athena departs from Telemachus by transforming into the form of a bird, which alerts the reader to the importance of augury in the narrative.<sup>45</sup>

The second augury, which follows closely behind the first, is crucial in the development of the plot of the *Odyssey*. As Telemachus finished his speech to the city council, the narrator describes the scene,

. . . far-seeing Zeus, sent forth two eagles . . . when they reached the middle of the many-voiced assembly, then they wheeled about, flapping their wings rapidly, and down on the heads of all they looked, and death was in their glance. Then they tore with their talons one another’s cheeks and necks on either side, and darted away to the right across the houses and the city of those who stood there. The people were seized with wonder at the birds when their eyes beheld them, [sic] and pondered in their hearts what was to come to pass.<sup>46</sup>

Halitherses, who is described as surpassing all people in the “knowledge of birds and speaking words of fate,” interprets the augury. He predicts that his former prophecy about Odysseus’ return from the war after twenty years is on the brink of fulfillment, and the suitors will suffer greatly if they do not change. One of the suitors, Eurymachus, insulted the elderly prophet and said,

Old man, up now, go home and prophesy to your children, for fear in days to come they suffer ill. In this matter I am better far at prophesying than you. Many birds there are that pass to and fro under the rays of the sun, and not all are fateful.<sup>47</sup> As

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<sup>44</sup>Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.197.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 1.321f. See David B. Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel* (JSNTSup 42; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1990), 115.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 2.146-156.

<sup>47</sup>Other Romans before the Christians also questioned the reliability of augury. Cicero, for example, says in the first century B.C.E. “Therefore I am inclined to think that there is no such thing as divination. There is the much quoted Greek verse to this effect: ‘The best diviner I maintain to be the man

for Odysseus, he has perished far away, as you also should have perished with him.<sup>48</sup>

These first two bird omens in the *Odyssey* faithfully foreshadowed the ultimate end of the story. Because of the surety of augury, irony is again present as the reader realizes the suitors are denying the dependability of the avian omen to their destruction, which indeed takes place at the conclusion of the narrative.

The third conclusion of augury in Homeric literature for this study is that the epics support the notion of the eminence of eagles as the surest of augural birds. The second augury in the *Iliad* describes Agamemnon attempting to encourage the Achaean soldiers. Zeus has pity on Agamemnon's tears, and the narrator reports Zeus "immediately sent an eagle, surest of omens among the winged birds, holding in his talons a fawn, the young swift hind."<sup>49</sup> The narrator explicitly points out that the eagle held the premiere position in the hierarchy of birds of omens; the soldiers also reflect this knowledge by their confidence in fighting with more vigor. The augury moreover proved reliable; the Achaeans were able to reverse the Trojan momentum immediately and ultimately.

Bird omens as a rhetorical device in Homeric literature undoubtedly heightened the sensitivity to augury and reinforced the notion of its dependability for the people of Imperial Rome. The use of augury as a literary guide early in the narrative is important in the next chapter of this dissertation as we look at the baptism of Jesus as a literary signpost. It has been established that Homer contributed to the popularity and

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who guesses or conjectures best'" (*de Div.* 2.4). Cicero later says regarding birds, "Who denies that augury is an art? What I deny is the existence of divination. . . . And I think that, although in the beginning augural law was established from a belief in divination, yet later it was maintained and preserved from considerations of political expediency" (*de Div.* 2.35).

<sup>48</sup>Ibid. 2.177-183.

<sup>49</sup>Homer, *Iliad* 8.244.

prominence of augury in the intellectual life of Rome through his repeated and rhetorical use of the practice, his understanding of its function, and the notoriety and authority of his writings in Imperial Rome.

### *Augury in the Roman Political Milieu*

Divination by birds influenced many facets of Roman culture from marriage<sup>50</sup> to travel;<sup>51</sup> these social uses kept augury continually in the minds of people. This study focuses, however, on the popularity of augury in the Roman political world; the political function of the practice made a strong impression on Roman culture. Political ornithological omens manifested themselves in four areas in the Roman world: 1) in accounts of the founding of the Empire, 2) in the political office of an augur, 3) as guidance in military campaigns, and 4) for the confirmation of the divine election of an emperor.

*Augury in the founding of the empire.* Stories about the founding of a nation tend to become familiar and common knowledge through repetition from generation to generation because national myths function to foster a sense of geo-political unity. The tradition in the Imperial era ascribed the founding of Rome and the choice of its initial kings to avian omens, and historians of the Imperial era circulated these stories widely. Livy (59 B.C.E.-17 C.E.), in his renowned multivolume history of the Empire, begins his work with a description of the founding of Rome:

Since the brothers were twins, and respect for their age could not be determined between them, it was agreed the gods who had those places in their protection

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<sup>50</sup>See Cicero, *de Divinatione*. 1.28

<sup>51</sup>See Ibid., 1.26.

should choose by augury who should give the new city its name, who should govern it when built. Romulus took the Palatine for an augured quarter, Remus the Aventine. Remus is said to have been the first to receive an augury, from the flight of six vultures. The omen had been already reported when twice that number appeared to Romulus. Thereupon each was saluted king by his own followers, the one partly laying claim to the honor of priority, the other from the number of birds.<sup>52</sup>

Cicero (106 BC-46BC) also provides a similar account of augury in the legend surrounding the founding of Rome but makes a different point:

When each would rule, they both at once appealed their claims, with anxious hearts, to augury. Then Remus took the auspices alone and waited for the lucky bird; while on the lofty Aventine fair Romulus his quest did keep to wait the soaring tribe: their contest would decide the city's name as Rome or Remora. The multitude expectant looked to learn who would be king. . . Twas then an augury, the best of all, appeared on high—a bird that on left did fly. And, as the sun its golden orb upraised, twelve sacred birds flew down from heaven and betook themselves to stations set apart for godly signs. Then Romulus perceived that he had gained a throne whose source and prop was augury.<sup>53</sup>

These two authors show that both the formation of the Empire and the choice of its first king were by avian omens. Cicero, to be more exact, defended the validity of augury in Imperial Rome by demonstrating its connection with the divine formation of the Empire.

Livy indicates a broad familiarity with the founding augural legend in the Imperial period when he states that his reason for writing the history of Rome is to “record the achievements of the Roman people from the foundation of the city . . . perceiving as I do that the theme is not only old but hackneyed.”<sup>54</sup> The augural account of the founding of Rome, which demonstrated the superiority of the Empire, remained popular into the sixth century. Justinian (527-565 C.E.) defended the supremacy of Rome on the basis of the imperial city having been established by augury: “All cities are

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<sup>52</sup>Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.6.4-7.1.

<sup>53</sup>Cicero, *de Divinatione*, 1.107-108.

<sup>54</sup>Livy, *The History of Rome* 1.1-2.

bound to follow the usage of Rome which is the capital of the world, not it to follow other cities. Moreover, it must be understood that Rome is not only the old city, but also our royal city, which, with God's favor, has been founded with better auguries.”<sup>55</sup> Justinian's comment clearly reveals a patriotic function of the augural tradition in the founding of Rome and the divine choice of its leaders. This on-going tradition guaranteed the consistent awareness of augury in the Empire, and other nations would later utilize augury for similar nationalistic purposes.

*The office of augur.* The power of the political office of the augurate also kept Roman citizens conscious of avian omens. Livy indicates that Numa Pompilius, following his ascent to the throne in 715 B.C.E., instituted the official permanent imperial position of the augurate and organized the augural college.<sup>56</sup> The office of augurate continued in Rome until the late fourth century C.E.<sup>57</sup> Pliny the Younger (63-113) reveals the elevated status of an augur,

The priesthood itself is not only an ancient and sacred institution, but has this high and hallowed peculiarity, that it is for life. Other sacerdotal honours, though they may, perhaps, equal this in dignity, yet as they are given so they may be taken away: but fortune has no farther power over *this* [Pliny's emphasis], than to bestow it.<sup>58</sup>

The political power of the augurate included the ability to remove obstacles in naming a dictator. Livy described the occasion when the Roman army was defeated by

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<sup>55</sup>Justinian, cited in Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church: a Collection of Legal Document to A.D.* (London: SPCK, 1966), 1087.

<sup>56</sup>Livy, *The History of Rome* 1.18.

<sup>57</sup>Richard M. Rothaus, “Augurs and Augury in the Late Roman Empire: Prosopography and History” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1989), 1.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Pliny, the Younger, *Letters*, 4.8.2.



the Veientes, and he attributed the defeat to the loss of a centralized form of authority:

“The nation was filled with grief for it was not used to being conquered. Disgusted with the tribunes, people demanded a dictator; therein, they said, lay the state. And when they seemed likely to be thwarted in that also, by a scrupulous feeling that no one but a consul could name a dictator, the augurs were consulted and removed the impediment.”<sup>59</sup> Aulus Cornelius became the dictator and took the name Mamercus Aemilius. Cicero also points out the supreme power of an augur:

But the highest and most important authority in the state is that of the augurs, to whom is accorded great influence. But it is not because I myself am an augur that I have this opinion, but because the facts compel us to think so. For if we consider their legal rights, what power is greater than that of adjourning assemblies and meetings convened by the highest officials, with or without imperium, or that of declaring null and void the acts of assemblies presided over by such officials? What is of graver import than the abandonment of any business day already begun, if a single augur says, “On another day”? What power is more impressive than that of forcing the consuls to resign their office? What right is more sacred than that of giving or refusing permission to hold an assembly of the plebians, or that of abrogating laws illegally passed?<sup>60</sup>

The power of an augur could be omnipotent and profoundly influential over people and activities in Rome.<sup>61</sup> Such power in a political office that primarily focused on avian portents contributed to augury being a consistent factor in the thought life throughout the Empire.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Cf. Livy, *The History of Rome*, 4.31.4; 8.23.14.

<sup>60</sup>Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2.12.31. For a more detailed discussion of the probable political role of an augur, see, G.V. Szemler, *The Priest of the Roman Republic* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1972), 25-35.

<sup>61</sup>For a complete discussion of the role and duties of an augur, see Georg Wissowa, *Paulys Real Encyclopadie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlercher, 1896), 2.2.2313-1344.

<sup>62</sup>The importance and influence of the augurate was not consistent in Rome's history. J. H. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 22-23, argues that augurs were consulted less by the time of the middle of the second century C.E. He asserts three reasons for the decline: rational arguments against the practice, an attraction to haruspicy over feeding of the sacred chickens, and augury's association with assemblies and the decline in popularity and disorganization of popular assemblies. See also, Robin Lorsch, “*Omina Imperii*: The Omens of Power

*Augury as guidance to the army.* The reports of Imperial historians indicated that augury had significant influence in military morale and decision making. Roman Emperors did not initiate an armed conflict without consulting a *pullarius* (the observer of the sacred chickens). The army kept sacred chickens in cages that always accompanied the Emperor. The *pullarius* observed and reported the eating habits of the chickens to the Emperor before the initiation of a battle. If the chickens ate well, the behavior was interpreted as favorable for victory. If a *pullarius* reported that the chickens had little appetite, it was a bad omen to go to battle that day.<sup>63</sup> Divination by birds was a key feature in military operations as an effort to assure the victories.

Roman historians recorded cases of ignoring avian omens that resulted in defeat. Claudius Pulcher initiated a battle in defiance of the sacred chickens not eating during the time of the auspices. He threw them into the sea saying, “They might drink, since they would not eat.”<sup>64</sup> He subsequently lost the battle. The Greco-Roman historians saw augury as a factor in Roman domination of the world; augury, for military reasons, could not be ignored.

*Augury and divine election of an emperor.* Perhaps augury’s most crucial role in the Empire was its function to advance an imperial candidate’s claim to power. Two situations increased the need for this verification. The first was the change in the political

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Received by the Roman Emperors from Augustus to Domitian, Their Religious Interpretation and Political Influence” (Ph.D.dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1993), 8.

<sup>63</sup>Livy, *History*, 10.40, conveys the account of a *pullarius* who misrepresented the behavior of the chickens as a positive omen before the instigation of the Third Samnite War. When the Emperor discovered the possible duplicity, he placed the augur on the frontline. A stray spear killed the augur before the initiation of the battle, and the Emperor received a favorable omen from a crow before the sounding of the battle cry. The Roman army won that battle, seeming to validate the system of augury.

<sup>64</sup>Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 2.2.

power structure from the time of the Republic to the Empire. The second was an increase in doubt concerning a candidate's right to succession because of either competition for power or the candidate's lack of a hereditary claim to succession. These two factors caused an increase in the number of reported avian omens.

There are more recorded cases of imperial avian omens in the initial decades of the Imperial era than in any other time in ancient Roman history according to the extant literature. This increase corresponds to the narrowing in the political power structure. In the Republic, the power base was broad; a number of people shared the responsibility for the fate of the inhabitants. As the power centralized into one person in the Imperial era, the health and destiny of the people depended on the fortune and future of only one person, the emperor. The broad base of shared power during the years of the Republic had less need of divine confirmation by omens. Robin Lorsch has demonstrated that during the Republic such confirmatory omens were, "for obvious reasons, relatively rare. In a state governed by a body of men the need for signs of a particular man's preeminence was minor. When such omens were to occur, they were related to a general crisis. . . . Under the empire *omina imperii* gained added importance."<sup>65</sup> The shift in the power structure also brought an attenuation of freedom for citizens and soldiers alike. Omens grounded emperors' claims to power in the gods' will, which softened the loss of liberty.<sup>66</sup> The increase in avian auguries provided greater assurance for future prosperity during the Imperial period.

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<sup>65</sup>Lorsch, *The Omens of Power*, 11.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

Although reports of augury increase from the Republic to the Empire, the number of the reported omens is not uniform but varied according to the degree of competition or doubt concerning the candidate's right of succession. Therefore, the ancient Roman historians at the dawn of the Christian history reported more avian imperial omens during open conflicts for power or with the change of a dynasty. First-century writers link the occurrence of avian omens with changes in family rule that had previously transpired in the Regal era, but with less frequency.

The writings that circulated at the time of the birth of the Church, which had the most and greatest detailed descriptions of augury, portrayed three of the seven kings (Romulus, Numa Pompilius, and Tarquinius Priscus) as having confirmation by the flight of birds. All three kings were the heads of new dynasties. Pliny, for example, described augural confirmation during a dynastic change in the earlier period. Lucius Tarquinius Priscus (r. 616-578 B.C.E.) ascended to power in Rome as a foreigner without a hereditary right to the throne. Tarquin, the future king, and his wife were relocating to Rome "when a eagle swooped gently down and took off his cap as he was sitting by his wife's side in the carriage, then circling around the vehicle with loud cries, as though commissioned by heaven for this service, replaced it carefully upon his head as it soared away."<sup>67</sup> Tarquin's wife, according to the first-century witness, interpreted the omen saying that her husband should "look for a high and majestic destiny, for such was the import of the eagle's appearance and the deity who sent it." Pliny portrayed the shift of family rule as having taken place after Tarquin became the guardian of King Ancus Marcius' sons; on the death of the king, Tarquin exiled the sons and assumed the throne.

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<sup>67</sup>Pliny, *History of Rome* 1.34; cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 3.47.3.

The augury functioned in Pliny's account to assure the people in the Regal era of divine election amidst the turmoil of dynastic change and to bolster Tarquin's claim to the throne. Romulus and Numa Pompilius, like Tarquin, represented new dynasties and were confirmed by the flight of birds.

First-century writers also depicted augury during the Regal period as playing a role at the end of a political era. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. 20 B.C. E.-ca. 30 C.E.) shows Tarquin Superbus, traditionally considered the last king of Rome, as driven from Rome and the monarchy abolished. Dionysius used augury to lessen the stress of transition and political upheaval. Augury, for Dionysius, softened the dramatic demise of Tarquin's rule and a paradigm shift in government by kingship as the will of the gods because Tarquin was "warned by numerous omens and particularly by this final one," which included two eagles.<sup>68</sup> First-century historians also noted the presence of augury with rulers in the Regal era who had no hereditary claims to the throne. Numa, for example, ascended with augury, and he was a Sabine. The Senate chose him, risking a shift in the balance of power to the Sabines, in part because of avian confirmation.

The end of a dynasty during the Imperial era was a time of political instability as multiple candidates vied for power. The potential for civil war greatly increased in the absence of hereditary succession. Such a time was ripe for augural assertions to strengthen a candidate's bid for political power. Therefore, augury appeared at the beginning of dynasties. Vespasian, for example, was the first in the Flavian Dynasty and had augural confirmation.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 4.63.

<sup>69</sup> See Livy, *History*, 1.18.

It is noteworthy that augury also signaled the end of a family's rule. During his reign, Nero (r. 37-68) killed all his family members who had hereditary claims to the throne and therefore was the last of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty. An augural omen in the last year of Nero's life signaled the end of that dynasty.<sup>70</sup> Suetonius reported many portents indicating the end of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, especially two, one of which was avian. In the early years of the family's Imperial rule, Livia, Augustus' wife, was walking when "an eagle which flew by dropped into her lap a white hen, holding in its beak a sprig of laurel." Suetonius implied the trustworthiness of the omen by pointing out the prolific reproductive capacity of the hen and the strong growth of the laurel propagated throughout the lives of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty until both the chickens and laurel died in the last year of Nero's life. Suetonius noted that the reign of the Caesars ended with Nero, yet the avian omen assured the people that such a loss was in the control of the gods.

The basic perception and function of omens changed on occasions when doubt about succession increased. In the other roles of augury (the tradition of the founding of Rome, the office of augur, and guidance to the military), the avian omens were confirmational, not predictive. The purpose of the omens was to discover whether the gods approved of a human-planned course of action. The Senate, for example, had already determined they wanted Numa to replace Romulus as king.<sup>71</sup> The confirmational augury for Numa occurred in temporal proximity to his reception of power and was a demonstration of the gods' approval of the Senate's plan. This confirmatory

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<sup>70</sup>Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars—Galba* 1; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 15.136.

<sup>71</sup>Plutarch, *Lives*, 7.1-3.

characteristic of augury changed during the Imperial period when there was an increase in serious competition for succession. Avian omens tended to be more predictive, at least from the perspective of the ancient historian writing decades later, with the increase in the stress of succession in the Imperial era.

There are frequent reports of a childhood avian omen of an emperor when concentrated doubt or conflict surrounded the transference of power. Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and Galba had noteworthy resistance or competition in respect to power, and each one had avian omens in connection with their birth or childhood that were predictive of their later succession.<sup>72</sup> Childhood avian omens functioned to give greater assurance of divine selection of the emperor if the circumstances surrounding the rise to power were questionable. If the gods had determined a ruler's imperial destiny long before any conflict over succession, there was less chance for connivance or happenstance in determining divine election. The gap in time between the omen and assent, therefore, allowed augury to provide greater assurance as the avian omen pointed to predestined divine election and not merely divine approval of human decisions.

### *Imperial Augury in the Early Decades of the Empire*

An examination of the frequency of bird omens with their surrounding political circumstances in the reigns of emperors from Augustus to Domitian (31 B.C.E.-96 C.E.) demonstrates a connection between the strength of candidate's claim and the occurrence

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<sup>72</sup>Those rulers whose rise to power had turmoil without early avian omens include Vespasian and Domitian. An avian omen confirmed Vespasian, but it was in his adult years; see Tacitus, *Histories*, 2.50.

of augury. I primarily consider the work of Suetonius in this examination since Lorsch has established him as the chief source for imperial omens.<sup>73</sup>

*Octavian (Augustus).* Among the emperors, Augustus is of special interest to this study. First, Suetonius saw an etymological link between one of the names Octavian received and augury. The Senate bestowed on Octavian the honorific title “Augustus” in 27. It is considerable for this study that Suetonius concatenated “Augustus” with bird omens:

For when some expressed the opinion that [Octavian] ought to be called Romulus as a second founder of the city, Plancus carried the proposal that he should rather be named Augustus, on the ground that this was not merely a new title but a more honorable one . . . in which anything consecrated by augural rites are called, “august” (*augusta*), from the increase (*auctus*) in dignity, or from the movement or feeding of the birds (*aviun getus gustusue*), as Ennius also shows when he writes, “After by augury august illustrious Rome has been founded.”<sup>74</sup>

Every Roman emperor for the next four hundred years took the name Augustus.

Therefore, an etymological connection existed throughout the Imperial period at least for educated Latin speakers that associated each emperor with divine appointment of the emperor that was based on augury.

Second, Augustus’ rise to power included the combination of a difficult ascendancy and avian imperial omens early in his life. Political tension arose after the death of Julius Caesar regarding who would succeed him. Some people had assumed that Caesar would appoint Anthony, his primary assistant, as heir. Caesar had, however,

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<sup>73</sup>Lorsch, *The Omens of Power*, 16-18. Dio and Tacitus are noteworthy, but Suetonius is more valuable because his writings are earlier and contain greater detail.

<sup>74</sup>Suetonius, *Augustus* 7.2; Ennius (239-169B.C.E.), quoted here by Suetonius, wrote *Annales*.



adopted Augustus, his nephew, and appointed him to succeed him. The struggle between Augustus and Anthony is renowned.

In the midst of imperial strife, Suetonius provided four auguries that confirmed Augustus as the divinely chosen ruler, and the first avian omen occurred in his childhood, long before Augustus' ascent. Among various childhood omens proving Augustus' divine election as emperor, Suetonius wrote, "an eagle surprised [Augustus] by snatching up his bread from his hand, and after flying to a great height equally to his surprise dropped gently down again and gave it to him."<sup>75</sup> The second augury, according to Suetonius, convinced Caesar that Augustus should be his successor. Suetonius wrote that Caesar spared a palm tree from being cut down,

From this a shoot at once sprang forth and in a few days grew so great that it not only equaled the parent tree, but even overshadowed it; moreover many doves built their nests there, although that kind of bird especially avoids hard and rough foliage. Indeed it was that omen in particular, they say, that led Caesar to wish that none other than his sister's grandson [Augustus] be his successor.<sup>76</sup>

Next, during the second Triumvirate, the flight of an eagle confirmed Octavian's future victory over his colleagues who were vying with him for power.<sup>77</sup> Three birds and three leaders fought. The eagle, perched on Augustus' tent, represented him, and the two crows, Anthony and Lepidus. The eagle defeated the crows, and Suetonius saw the portent came true when Octavian defeated the two opponents. Finally, at Octavian's first consulship, twelve vultures appeared, which Suetonius compared with the experience that Romulus had at the founding of Rome.<sup>78</sup> Suetonius recognized augury to be divine

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 94.7; Dio, *Roman History*, 45.2.1.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 94.11.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 96; cf. Dio, *Roman History*, 47.1.2-3.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 95.

confirmation of Augustus' great power—he was another Romulus—chosen to bring peace to Rome.

Third, Augustus is important because he set up a form of government that made the future transfer of power difficult at the death of an emperor.<sup>79</sup> He fashioned himself as a princeps, which essentially was a monarch in the guise of first citizen and with the retention of respected aspects of the Republic (the Senate, magistracies, and assemblies). The nominally powerful Senate invested Augustus with a set of powers. This form of government was a great improvement over the final years of the chaotic Republic; the Principate ended more than a hundred years of civil wars and created the *Pax Romana*. The problem arose regarding the potential reversal of these powers to the Senate at the death of the emperor. The situation heightened the potential for a return to civil war. As problems regarding succession increased, so did recorded occurrences of conformational augury.

*Tiberius (r. 14-37 C.E.).* Tiberius' rise to the throne caused a major shift to a blended dynasty, and he succeeded to the throne in the midst of much resistance. He was a Claudian by birth—the son of Tiberius Nero and Livia. Augustus married Tiberius' mother by forcing his father to divorce her. Augustus subsequently adopted Tiberius as his son. Tiberius came to the throne, his heritage created a mixed family rule, which scholars call the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, and his dynasty lasted for forty years.

Although some popular opinions describe Tiberius as succeeding without difficulty on the death of Augustus, ancient Roman historians describe the succession as

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<sup>79</sup>See G. Bowersock, "Augustus and the East: the Problem of Succession," in *Caesar Augustus* (eds. Fergus Millar and Erich Segal; Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1984), 180 ff.

challenged by family rivals, nobles, and the military. Augustus had given early support to Marcellus, his sister's son and husband of Augustus' daughter, Julia, to succeed to the throne. On one occasion, Tiberius rode a chariot on Augustus' left side while Marcellus rode on the right. Marcellus died of food poisoning in 23 B.C.E., making Tiberius next in line for the throne. Augustus, however, gave his daughter in marriage to his friend and comrade, Marcus Agrippa. The marriage produced three sons, two of whom Augustus adopted as heirs, Gaius and Lucius. Tiberius, who had married Julia after Agrippa's death, went into seclusion, and Suetonius said, "Some think that, since the children of Augustus were now of age, [Tiberius] voluntarily gave up the position and the virtual assumption of the second mark which he had long held."<sup>80</sup> Tiberius became the sole heir to the throne when Gaius and Lucius died early deaths within three years of each other, and Augustus banished Agrippa Postumus (the third son of Agrippa and Julia). Tacitus suggests that Livia exiled Agrippa Postumus because he might prevent her son, Tiberius, from obtaining the throne.

Tiberius was tentative in taking the throne at the death of Augustus, at least in part, because of the tension regarding succession. Tiberius did not publicly announce Augustus' death until after Agrippa Postumus had been exiled. Suetonius reported the competition and tension for the throne:

[Agrippa] was slain [in exile] by a tribune of the soldiers appointed to guard him, who received a letter to which he was bidden to do the deed; but it is not known whether Augustus left this letter when he died, to remove a future source of discord, or whether Livia wrote it herself in the name of her husband; and in the latter case, whether it was with or without the connivance of Tiberius.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 11.1.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.1.

The situation at Tiberius' ascension was so tense that he would often say he was "Holding a wolf by the ears."<sup>82</sup>

Several factors contributed to the tumultuous transference of power from Augustus to Tiberius. A slave of Agrippa Postumus amassed a band of rebels to avenge his master's death. A noble, Lucius Scribonius Libo, was plotting a revolution. Two separate mutinies of soldiers broke out, and the army in Germany tried to make Germanicus, Tiberius' brother, the emperor. The exchange of power was so tenuous that Tiberius had to wait two years to bring Libo to trial.

It is not surprising that avian omens preceded Tiberius' succession, and one augury was long before his ascendancy to power. Suetonius commented that Tiberius had "strong and unwavering" confidence in his destiny as emperor because of the omens.<sup>83</sup> The first occurred while he was still in the womb and Livia tried to determine the sex of the fetus by using an egg. It hatched as a cock with a notable crest, which was interpreted that Tiberius would wear a crown. The second omen happened as he returned to Rome years before becoming the emperor: an eagle appeared on the roof of his house.

*Gaius (r. 37-41).* Tiberius' nephew and adopted son, Gaius, was the anticipated successor. He ascended without conflict and without augury.

*Claudius (r. 41-54).* Gaius' uncle, Claudius, is a prime example of a leader whose ascendancy was highly suspect; he ascended to power under traumatic circumstances with military involvement. Politically, Claudius' reign followed the

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 14.2-3.

assassination of Gaius and came amidst competition for the throne from individuals in the Senate. As the Senate was meeting to choose one of its own members as emperor, the Praetorian Guard appointed Claudius as emperor. Claudius' reputation was in no way regal. His mother once used him as an example of a supreme fool, and he was renowned for stammering. The person he was and the circumstances of his enthronement were in need of divine confirmation. Suetonius recorded that just before becoming emperor, when Claudius entered the Forum for the first time, "an eagle that was flying by lit upon his shoulder."<sup>84</sup>

*Nero (r. 54-68).* Claudius' adopted stepson, Nero, ascended as emperor smoothly and without augury. He inherited the throne unopposed because of the ruthless ambition of his mother, Agrippina the Younger.

*Galba (r. 69).* Galba came to the throne without the benefit of a hereditary claim and in the midst of significant political turmoil. Suetonius recorded a pre-birth avian omen that strengthened Galba's claim to the throne as being ordained by the gods: "When Galba's grandfather was busy with a sacrifice for protection from the stroke of lightening, an eagle snatched the intestines from his hand and carried them off to an oak full of acorns, the prediction was made that the highest dignity would come to the family, but late."<sup>85</sup> Two factors demanded such a divine confirmation of Galba: the transference of power was more stressful following the end of a dynasty (the Julio-Claudian); and the

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<sup>84</sup>Suetonius, *Claudius*, 7.

<sup>85</sup>Suetonius, *Galba*, 4.2; cf. Dio, *Roman History*, 64.1.3.

military played a role in the demise of Nero; it abandoned the emperor in favor of Galba, and Nero then committed suicide.<sup>86</sup>

*Otho* (r. 69) and *Vitellius* (69). These two emperors are exceptions to the paradigm of the occurrence of augury since their rise to power included military intervention and neither had hereditary claims to the throne, yet neither had avian confirmation to sustain their claims to power. The lack of any record of augury in the ancient historians was likely because of the brevity their reigns (three months and eight months, respectively) and the short treatment they receive in the primary sources that had the most treatment on augury (Suetonius, Plutarch, Cassius Dio, and Tacitus).

*Vespasian* (r. 69-79). With civil war and the establishment of a new family reign, the Flavian Dynasty (69-96) followed the three short reigns of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Vespasian, therefore, had no hereditary claim to the throne and came to power in a time of great uncertainty. Suetonius recorded that “While Otho and Vitellius were fighting for the throne after the death of Nero and Galba, [Vespasian] began to cherish the hope of imperial dignity, which he had long since conceived because of the following portends.”<sup>87</sup> A full listing of various omens follows and among them augury, which also represented his squelching the civil war: “Two eagles fought in the sight of all, and when one was vanquished, a third came from the direction of the rising sun and drove off the

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<sup>86</sup>Chris Scarre, *Chronicle of the Roman Emperors* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 56-77.

<sup>87</sup>Suetonius, *The Deified Vespasian*, 5.1; cf. Tacitus, *The Histories*, 2.50 and Dio, *Roman History*, 44.10.3.

victor.”<sup>88</sup> Vespasian’s ascension fits the mold of a rise to power surrounded with turmoil and a confirmatory avian omen.

*Titus* (r. 79-81) and *Domitian* (r.81-96). The next two emperors were sons of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. Titus, who had long been prepared to succeed his father, came to power without opposition and without omens. Titus’ reign was brief (79-81 C.E.), and his unexpected death nearly created a civil war when Lucius Antonius attempted to usurp the power from Titus’ younger brother, Domitian. The rebellion was short-lived. There was no prior expectation or preparation for Domitian to be the emperor. Once again, there was the combination of a struggle for power and the presence of augury. Suetonius wrote that “Domitian learned of this victory [over Antonius] through omens before he actually had news of it, for on the very day when the decisive battle was fought a magnificent eagle enfolded [Domitian’s] statue at Rome with its wings, uttering exultant shrieks.”<sup>89</sup>

Domitian represented the end of a dynasty, and Suetonius noted an avian omen contiguous with the death: “A few months before he was killed, a raven perched on the Capitolium and cried ‘All will be well,’ an omen which some interpreted as follows: Recently a crow which was sitting on a Tarpeian rooftop could not say ‘It is well,’ only declared ‘It will be.’”<sup>90</sup> Domitian fits the pattern in the Imperial era of augury accompanying the transference of power without hereditary claims.

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 5.6.

<sup>89</sup>Suetonius, *Domitian*, 6.2.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 23.6.

The rise of rulers and the occurrences of imperial avian omens from 31 B.C.E. to 96 C.E. demonstrate that augury functioned to provide divine confirmation and to sustain an imperial candidate's claim to the throne during turbulent times of a dynastic shift, the lack of hereditary claims, or military intervention. Avian omens occurred at the beginning and ending of dynasties. Augustus at the head of the Imperial era had the flight of birds confirm his rise to power. Tiberius began the blended dynasty of Julio-Claudian, Galba took control at the dynastic shift during the civil war, and Vespasian was the first of the Flavian Dynasty; each of these emperors had augury confirm their ascent. Avian omens occurred when military conflict surrounded the transference of power during the years of 31 B.C.E to 96 C.E. Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Galba, Vespasian, and Domitian, all had some sort of military intervention surrounding their ascents as well as augury. The question remains whether the type of bird was significant in avian omens.

### *Eagles in the Roman Milieu*

The Romans held one bird to be above all others in augural and political significance, the eagle. Eagles were particularly important for two applications: the choice of emperors and military campaigns. An iconographic representation of this bird became a virtual replacement in function to the appearance of a live eagle; the eagle statue became a theological, imperial, political, and military symbol of Rome and its superiority.

### *Roman Perception of the Eagle*

The Roman perception of the eagle as the king of the avian world came from its physical strength, high flying, and dominance in the avian and animal world. Pliny the



Elder said that “Of the birds known to us [Romans] the eagle is the most honorable and also the strongest.”<sup>91</sup> He also identified six kinds of eagles and detailed their superior strength and hunting abilities.<sup>92</sup> Cicero referred to the eagle as god’s satellite.<sup>93</sup> Achilles Tatius, a Roman era Greek author in the late second century C.E., referred to the eagle as the king of all birds.<sup>94</sup>

The dominance of the eagle led to a close connection between it and the king of the gods (Zeus in the Greek milieu and Jupiter in the Roman). The connection between Zeus/Jupiter and the eagle is so familiar in Roman literature and art that two examples will suffice.<sup>95</sup> Pliny’s treatment reveals that the connection was clear in early Imperial Rome. He wrote, “It is stated that [the eagle] is the only bird that is never killed by a thunderbolt; this is why custom has deemed the eagle to be Jupiter’s armour bearer.”<sup>96</sup> Later in the Imperial age, the Roman philosopher, Porphyry (ca. 234-ca. 305), claimed a direct relationship between the kind of bird and a particular god, and he linked the eagle with Zeus: “Birds understand the gods more quickly than men, and when they have understood, declare it as far as they are able and are heralds of the gods to men. One bird of one god, another of another, the eagle of Zeus, the hawk and raven of Apollo, and the

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<sup>91</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 10.6.

<sup>92</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 10.6-15.

<sup>93</sup>Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, 11.10.24; Horapolla, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapolla*, trans. George Boas (New York: Pantheon, 1950), 2.56, a grammarian under Theodosius (408-450 C.E.) provided an explanation of Egyptian hieroglyphs in which he described the eagle as flying higher than all other birds.

<sup>94</sup>Achilles Tatius, *The Adventures of Leucippe and Cleitophon*, 2.12.

<sup>95</sup>See J. M. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, Aspects of Greek and Roman Life (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 240.

<sup>96</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 10.15.

stork of Hera...and so on with each god.”<sup>97</sup> The connection between Zeus and eagles was plain: Zeus was the king of the gods, and the eagle was the king of the birds. The Romans extended the comparison of the eagle to themselves and their emperors as the rulers of the world.

### *The Eagle in the Roman Political Milieu*

The association between the eagle and Jupiter, the ornithological and theological kings, naturally fit well with the bird’s link with the emperor as the political ruler.<sup>98</sup> Even a cursory examination of the emperors from 31 B.C.E. to 96 C.E. confirmed by an avian omen reveals a definite connection between eagles and omens of imperial content. Every successful claimant to the throne who had avian confirmation during this period had at least one omen that involved an eagle. Even the confirmation by vultures, such as those at the founding of Rome with Remus and Romulus and the appearance of twelve at Augustus’ first consulship, confirmed the royal connection of eagles and the Empire since Roman writers considered vultures a species of eagles.<sup>99</sup> Greg Woolf of St. Andrews University states, “The Romans linked the [eagle] to their own supreme sky god, Jupiter—the eagle then became the bird of emperors, Jupiter’s earthly equivalent.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, trans. Gillian Clark (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 3.5.

<sup>98</sup>See A. Peace, ed., *M. Tuli Ciceronus de Divinatione* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1920-1923, 1973), 129; Lorsch, *The Omens of Power*, 146.

<sup>99</sup>Pliny, *Natural History*, 10.3.

<sup>100</sup>Greg Woolf, ed., *Ancient Civilizations: the Illustrated Guide to Belief, Mythology, and Art* (San Diego: Tender Bay, 2005), 38.

The *Gemman Augustea* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) is a key piece of art that brings together the connections among the emperor, eagles, and augury. The work is “unquestionably the best-known and arguably the finest surviving Roman cameo.”<sup>101</sup> The piece was cut during the life of Augustus from onyx stone, and the emperor is depicted as the supreme ruler of the world, sitting beside the goddess Roma as he is being crowned. An eagle perches beneath the throne looking up at the emperor.<sup>102</sup> “The upper register of the *Gemma Augustea* . . . celebrates Augustus’ dominion over the civilized world . . . .”<sup>103</sup> The cameo shows Octavian during the act of his coronation. The link with Jupiter is evident by the presence of the eagle and the scepter of Jupiter in Octavian’s left hand. A similar joining of Jupiter’s staff and an eagle is found in the *Portrait of Claudius with the Attributes of Jupiter* (Vatican Museum, Rome). The object in Octavian’s right hand, the Lituus, is of special interest to this study. The Lituus is also known as the Augur’s Staff. The staff signifies that the emperor is the gods’ choice and the gods’ representative who interprets their desires on earth.<sup>104</sup>

This connection between the emperors and eagles was also apparent in later imperial regalia. Johannes Lydus, a Byzantine author writing around 490 C.E., stated that Romulus had a scepter with an eagle on its top.<sup>105</sup> Two ivory diptyches of Emperor

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<sup>101</sup>Dianna E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 69.

<sup>102</sup>For a photograph of the entire cameo, see Scarre, *Chronicle of the Roman Emperors*, 9.

<sup>103</sup>Kleiner, 69.

<sup>104</sup>Kleiner, 71.

<sup>105</sup>Johannes Lydus, *On Powers of The Magistracies of the Roman State* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983), 17.

Anastasius (r. 491-518) show the ruler holding a scepter with an eagle on top. One diptych displays a scepter with the eagle supporting an image of the ruler. The other scepter supports three heads representing the joint power of the time.<sup>106</sup> The presence of an eagle in imperial regalia represented the supremacy of the emperor and the Empire and was a forerunner to an eagle in the English regalia for coronation and consecration with the Ampulla.

The prognosticative, symbolical, and theological functions of eagles fit well with the needs of Imperial Rome. The era was one filled with greater uncertainty because the political and social welfare of the Empire depended on the fortune of one man. People wanted assurance of the future prosperity of the candidate in hope of their own success. The eagle, as has been demonstrated from Homer's depictions, was fully dependable for an accurate source of prognostication. The symbolic and theological superiority of the eagle provided assurance that a candidate had a divine claim to the throne through election by Jupiter himself, the sender of eagles. The emperor depicted with an eagle signified the supremacy of both the Roman ruler and the Empire.

#### *The Eagle in the Roman Military Milieu*

The eagle, a most dependable omen and the symbol of strength and superiority, came to represent Roman domination. The appearance of the bird functioned as an omen assuring military victory. Tacitus wrote that as Caesar was ordering his troops to advance, "there was a most encouraging augury. Eight eagles . . . caught the general's eye. 'Go,' he exclaimed, 'follow the *Roman* [italics added] birds, the true deities of our

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<sup>106</sup>See Andre Grabar, *Christian Iconography: a Study of Its Origins*, Bollingen Series 35.10 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), nos. 196, 270, 271.

legions.”<sup>107</sup> The reference to “Roman birds” indicates the association between the bird and the Republic; the phrase “true deities” implies eagles were the source of Roman power. Several ancient Roman historians recorded that a whole army was able to infer the sure victory through the flight of an eagle:

[Augustus] even divined beforehand the outcome of all his wars. When the forces of the triumvirs were assembled at Bononia, an eagle that had perched upon his tent made a dash at two ravens, which attacked it on either side, and struck them to the ground. From this the whole army inferred that there would one day be discord among the colleagues, as actually came to pass and divided its results.<sup>108</sup>

Plutarch also told how soldiers from opposing sides in a Roman civil war who knew the outcome of the impending battle by the appearance of two eagles fighting overhead.<sup>109</sup> Because the combatants on both sides were Roman, two eagles appeared representing each Roman military side.

Iconographically, a silver or bronze statute of an eagle, small enough to be concealed under clothing,<sup>110</sup> became a vicarious surrogate for the actual bird. The Roman army placed the statues of eagles on standards, which were tall poles that served a variety of practical military functions. Every century, cohort, and legion had a standard that designated their unit during battle. The eagle was one of five animals placed on standards until 104 B.C.E., when Gaius Marius made the eagle virtually the sole representative of the legion. Pliny the Elder noted the importance of the eagle in the Roman military camp,

The eagle was assigned to the Roman legions as their special badge by Gaius Marius in his second consulship. Even previously it had been their first badge, with

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<sup>107</sup>Tacitus, *The Histories*, 2.17.

<sup>108</sup>Suetonius, *Augustus*, 96; cf. Dio, *Roman History*, 45.2.1.

<sup>109</sup>Plutarch, *Lives*, 47.48.4.

<sup>110</sup>Appian, *Civil War*, 4.101.

four others, wolves, minotaurs, horses and boars going in front of the respective ranks; but a few years before the custom had come in of carrying the eagles alone into action, the rest being left behind in camp. Marius discarded them altogether. Thenceforward it was noticed that there was scarcely even a legion's winter camp without a pair of eagles being in the neighbourhood.<sup>111</sup>

The eagle standard had its own shrine in the legions' camps. Dio (ca. 165-ca. 229), a Roman historian, described the shrine of the standard: "It is a small shrine and in it perches a golden eagle. It is found in all the enrolled legions, and it is never moved from the winter quarters unless the whole army takes the field; one man carries it on a long shaft, which ends in a sharp spike so that it can be set firmly in the ground."<sup>112</sup> Although archeology has not yet uncovered an eagle standard, they are depicted on coins and sculptures such as Trajan's Column.<sup>113</sup>

The eagle standard came to have the same function as the live bird had; it provided omens for divination concerning military actions. Legions became superstitious toward both positive and negative circumstances regarding the eagle standards. Appian (ca. 95-165), the Roman historian from Egypt, connected an eagle avian omen with the standards. He related a positive omen when two live eagles perched on the standards protecting the legion for days before a battle.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 10.16.

<sup>112</sup>Dio, *Roman Histories*, 40.18.1-2; cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.7.

<sup>113</sup>See Lawrence Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army: from Republic to Empire* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984), 224-225.

<sup>114</sup>Appian, *Civil War*, 4.101.

The army also considered many events concerning the standards as warnings. Each legion would plant the eagle in the ground while encamped.<sup>115</sup> The soldiers considered any difficulty pulling the pole out of the soil to be a bad omen. Valerius Maximus relates how the neglect of warnings that included the standards led to what he considered among the worse disasters in Roman history. Before the significant defeat at the battle of Carrhae against the Parthians, Crassus received many “manifest prodigies,” which included the difficulty of extracting the eagles.<sup>116</sup> The chief centurion had difficulty pulling up one eagle. The other standard required maximum effort to remove it, and it then turned on its own in the opposite direction of the forward progress of the legion. Maximus wrote, “These were great prodigies, but the ensuing disasters were considerably greater.” He listed two items he considered greater disasters: “the destruction of so many fine legions” and “the capture of so many standards by enemy hands.” Any negative omen connected with the standards when ignored was considered to result in peril. Maximus claimed such a result: “So do the admonitions of the gods flare up when scorned, so are human counsels punished when they set themselves above those of heaven.”<sup>117</sup>

Alternatively, giving heed to the warning of negative omens concerning the standards brought positive results. For Suetonius, action taken because of observed difficulty in pulling up the standards averted civil war. Claudius was able to put down a

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<sup>115</sup>The standard had a point at one end for planting the standard in camp. Suetonius (*Julius Caesar*, 62) described a battle scene in which Caesar was nearly killed by an eagle-bearer making a pass at him with the point in the midst of panic.

<sup>116</sup>Valerius Maximus, *Memorial Doings and Sayings*, 1.6.11; cf. Dio, *Roman Histories*, 40.18.2.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.6.12.

rebellion in just five days because of soldiers revolting and refusing to march after the bad omen.<sup>118</sup>

The standard functioned in the role of a live eagle in maintaining a connection between the highest god, the superiority of Rome, and the emperor. First, omens concerning the standards frequently mention Jupiter as the source. Maximus, for example, indicates that Jupiter gave warning to Pompeius by sending bees to cover the standards.<sup>119</sup> Second, the link with Jupiter led to the standards having religious significance, which resulted in the standards representing Roman world superiority. In sacred festivals, soldiers anointed the standards with oil and attached to them garland and laurel wreaths. Pliny attributed this handling of the eagle statues to be the basis for Rome's domination of the world: "At all events the eagles and the standards, dusty as they are and bristling with sharp points, are anointed on holidays—and I only wish we were able to say who first introduced this custom! No doubt the fact is our eagles were bribed by this reward to conquer the world!"<sup>120</sup> Third, the relationship between the standard and the emperor is evident in the regular practice of placing the emperor's image on the pole beneath the eagle.<sup>121</sup>

The standards as symbolic of Jupiter, the emperor, and the superiority of Rome, became a prime source of fear for the enemy and of high morale for Roman troops. The Roman historian, Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330-395), observes the effect of the

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<sup>118</sup>Suetonius, *Claudius*, 13.2.

<sup>119</sup>Maximus, *Memorial Doings*, 1.6.12.

<sup>120</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 13.3.23; Suetonius also recorded the practice of anointing the eagles, *Claudius*, 13.

<sup>121</sup>Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 48.2, indicated such a practice when he pointed out that Tiberius "gave presents to legions in Syria because they alone consecrated no image of Sejanus among their standards."



standards on opposing armies: “The Germans stood amazed, terrified by the fearful sight of the gleaming standards.”<sup>122</sup> The standards also motivated Roman soldiers to engage battle by moving it into the enemy forces to inspire the legion to fight regardless of the danger. The troops, for example, held back because of the depth of the water during Caesar’s first raid on Britain as the Roman ships approached the island. The eagle bearer urged his comrades as he jumped into the water with the standard saying, “Jump down soldiers, unless you want to betray our eagle into the hands of the enemy.” As the eagle bearer came against the enemy, the soldiers encouraged one another “not to allow so dire a disgrace, and leapt down from the ship with one accord.”<sup>123</sup> Marcellinus specifically mentioned the motivational function of the standards: “Then, after the troops had been given rest for recovering their strength, and the standard had been raised, which is accustomed to rouse men to battle . . . .”<sup>124</sup> The depiction of the eagle with its wings reaching upward and its head facing forward was so common on tombstones that it has been considered the typical representation of the type of eagle of the legions.<sup>125</sup> The eagle standard represented the presence of Jupiter forging the way before the legions.

The eagle standard was revered as a divine protector, and its loss was the greatest possible catastrophe for a military unit.<sup>126</sup> One military officer on the verge of defeat “sent an entreaty to Corbulo that he should come with speed to save the standards and

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<sup>122</sup>*Ammianus Marcellinus*, 27.2.6.

<sup>123</sup>Caesar, *The Galic War*, 4.25.

<sup>124</sup>*Ammianus Marcellinus*, 27.10.12.

<sup>125</sup>Michael Speidel, *Roman Army Studies*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1984), 22.

<sup>126</sup>See Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life*, 241-242.

eagles.”<sup>127</sup> The capture of a standard provided keen motivation for fighting with greater vigor. Tacitus observes that “the twenty-first [legion] infuriated by this loss [of the eagle], not only repulsed the first and slew the legate . . . but captured many colors and standards from the enemy.”<sup>128</sup> The effort to regain a captured eagle was on occasion the basis for going to war.<sup>129</sup> If the enemy captured the standard, the disgrace was sufficient to cause the legion’s disbandment.<sup>130</sup> The eagle statue came to represent iconographically the power, dominance, and dignity of the Roman Empire.

### *Summary*

The concept of augury permeated Roman culture. The practice played vital roles in the intellectual, political, and military milieus of the Empire. In the thought world of the Empire, Homer’s epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are of special concern when looking at augury in the Imperial era for two reasons: 1) ancient writers considered Homer a leading authority on augury, and 2) his works were widely read and disseminated through the Roman educational system. His literature assisted in maintaining awareness and establishing the function of augury for imperial Romans. Homer used avian omens repeatedly as a source of divine prognostication to develop the plots and characters of his epics and for such salient rhetorical devices as irony and

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<sup>127</sup>Tacitus, *The Annals*, 15.11.

<sup>128</sup>See Tacitus, *The History*, 2.

<sup>129</sup>Sextus Julius Frontinus, *The Stratagems, and the Aqueducts of Rome* (New York: J. P. Putman’s Sons, 1925), 2.8, mentions that a battle fought specifically to avenge Varus’ defeat and to regain the standards. Cited in Graham Webster, *The Roman Army in the First and Second Centuries* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1981), 135.

<sup>130</sup>See George R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 128-130; and Henry M. Parker, *The Roman Legions* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), 10.

prolepsis. The popularity and authority of Homeric literature was a significant factor in cultivating augury in the thought and practice of the Empire.

The use of augury in the political milieu also contributed to saturating the culture with notions of avian omens. Divination by birds was a key element in the well-known and often repeated tradition of the founding of Rome and the selection of its first leaders. Romans considered their Empire to be the supreme political entity because it was founded on avian omens. The profound power and influence of the Augur, an official imperial position, further contributed to the importance of augury in the Roman world. Roman historians portrayed avian omens as a key factor in the military strength and success of the Empire. Augury also played a critical role in the confirmation of emperors especially in the early decades of the Imperial era. The certainty of avian omens became especially important during the Imperial period as the political power and the future success of the people narrowed to one man.

The type of government that Augustus fashioned created a perpetual problem in the transference of power at the death of an emperor. Such struggles for power increased the value of divine confirmation that augury offered. The degree of conflict or doubt concerning a candidate's claim to the throne in the early Imperial decades appears to correlate with the number of recorded avian omens. As the degree of stress about succession increased because of dynasties ending or beginning, candidates without hereditary claims, or excessive competition among candidates, especially if the competition involved military intervention, then the accounts of avian omens increased.

Augury functioned to promote the candidates' right to the throne and to assure the people that the new emperor was the elect of the gods. An etymological link existed in

the early imperial era between the dignity of the title of “Augustus” (taken by every emperor from Augustus to the fall of the Empire) and augury. The connection of the appellation of Augustus also extended to the founding of Rome by augury. Avian omens became more predictive in the Imperial era; they affirmed the choice of an emperor as a matter of divine election rather than merely the gods’ stamp of approval of human choices. The predictive nature of augury was highlighted by creating stories of childhood auguries in the lives of emperors with questionable right to power.

The eagle had a prominent role in the Roman political military world as a bird of omen and symbol of imperial superiority. Roman historians recognized the eagle as the strongest and most honorable bird, and therefore represented the might and world dominance of Rome. They linked the eagle with the king of the gods, Jupiter, and his representative on earth, the Roman ruler. There is a definitive link between eagles and imperial omens; every successful candidate who had an avian omen had at least one involving an eagle. The appearance of an eagle inspired or warned troops and indicated that the gods supported them and favored their commander for victory. The eagle was always associated with success and power, and as such, the eagle was symbolic of Roman might and supremacy.

A notable concern of Imperial Rome was the exercise of power and the symbolic representation of authority through icons. The Romans iconographically depicted the functions and symbolism of a live eagle in their eagle standards. The eagle standard retained the live bird’s connection with avian omens, Zeus, the emperor as Zeus’ earthly representative, and Roman superiority. As such, Romans used the standards in religious services as objects of sacred significance.

The eagle became a repeated symbol throughout the centuries since the Roman Empire not only of political and military superiority but of Roman Imperial might. The political concerns of Imperial Rome that the eagles and standards addressed and their symbolism in Imperial Rome have parallels, as we shall see, with England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This study must next address the question of how divination by the avian omens, a practice considered by most to be pagan, entered the life of the Church. The acceptance of avian significance entered some sectors of the Church early and remained for centuries. This study now turns to the early Church and its reaction to augury in the imperial period.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Flight of Birds in the Early Church

The source of the syncretistic use of Roman imperial augury by the Church for divine confirmation of leaders most likely was the biblical narrative and the practice of the early Church. The Gospels contain what looked like a Roman imperial augury in form and function in the account of the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism, the flight of a bird inaugurating a king. The post-apostolic church occasionally adopted this Christianized function of the flight of a dove for the selection of ecclesiastical leaders, even in the face of bold rejection of Roman augury.

The present chapter addresses in two sections the flight of birds in the early Church. The first part considers augury in Luke's Gospel. Scholarship continues to be dissatisfied with the explanations of a dove at Jesus' baptism.<sup>1</sup> Here an attempt is made to contribute to that discussion. Most scholars have sought for answers from the Jewish milieu with little success. Charles H. Talbert of Baylor University has made noteworthy progress by going against the tide and examining the Greco-Roman sources.<sup>2</sup> His consideration of the baptismal dove as an "anticipation of Jesus' destiny, one that will

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<sup>1</sup>John Nolland, *Luke*, Word Bible Commentary 35A-C (Waco: Word Books, 1989), 1:161, representative of a host of commentators, says, "The origin of this symbolism is yet to be satisfactorily explained." For a brief summary of various available interpretations, see L.E. Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970-71): 41-67.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Talbert, "Prophecies of Future Greatness: The Contribution of Greco-Roman Biographies to an Understanding of Luke 1:5—4:15," in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events, Presented to Lou H. Silberman*, ed. James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel (New York: KTAV, 1980), 129-142.

become more striking when viewed in the context of the pagan practice of divination by means of the flight of birds,” is a most important step in understanding the narrative from the perspective of the authorial audience. However, he based his conclusion on Plutarch’s reference to Numa Pompilius as “the most beloved of the gods,” and states, “In such a thought world, the Lukan baptismal narrative would have been viewed as an omen of Jesus’ status as the beloved Son of God.”<sup>3</sup> Talbert’s conclusion pioneers the way to hearing Luke’s message through the first Greco-Roman ears but still leaves the question of why a dove at Jesus’ baptism instead of some other kind of bird. I will demonstrate in the first section of this chapter that Luke’s audience would have indeed seen the flight of the dove to function in similar ways as Roman augury, but the dove was the antithesis of anticipated imperial avian omens (Romans would have expected an eagle not a dove as a royal symbol), a point crucial to Luke’s consistent depiction of Jesus and the nature of the Kingdom of God as antithetical to the Empire.

The second part of this chapter traces the conflicted stance of the post-apostolic Church from the late first through fourth centuries. The sources used here are representative, not exhaustive. The writers cited reflect the attitudes and practices that generally surrounded divination by avian omens in the Mediterranean milieu of this era. This culture included Roman, Jewish, and Christian reactions to and uses of augury. The Christian community generally rejected the pagan practice of avian divination, yet in some places, the flight of a dove replicated for the Church the functions of Roman augury in the divine confirmation of leadership appointment. Eusebius in the fourth century is a lynchpin for this study since he clearly embodied a syncretistic view of augury in

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 134-135.

recognizing and rejecting it as a pagan practice but still affirming a flight of a dove as a divine sign of miraculous guidance.

### *Augury in Luke's Gospel*

Each of the four canonical Gospels portrayed the dove descending on Jesus at the start of his ministry. The Synoptics tied the scene with Jesus' baptism, but John's Gospel makes no mention of the dove in connection with baptism. All four accounts, however, function to identify Jesus as God's divinely chosen unique son who was to inaugurate the eschatological Kingdom. Luke's narrative is of particular interest to this study over the other New Testament Gospels for two reasons: his sensitivity to the geo-political composition of the receiving communities of his gospel and his distinctive portrayal of the descent of the dove from the other Evangelists. A comparison of Luke's dove with Roman Imperial augury will delineate the similarities and differences of the flight of the dove and Roman Imperial augury.

### *Luke's Authorial Audience*

An examination of Luke's first audiences reveals a predisposition to interpret the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove as an avian omen. If Richard Bauckham of St. Andrews University is correct, Luke was aware of the sacred importance of his writing and wrote with the purpose of wide dissemination of his gospel; his intended audience was plural.<sup>4</sup> It is much more appropriate, in light of Bauckham's findings, to consider Luke's audiences as a geographical region than as an independent solitary community. The evidence of Luke-Acts, both external and internal, indicates an audience that was

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<sup>4</sup>Richard Bauckham, *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 12-56.



Greco-Roman and specifically non-Palestinian. Tradition stated that the author of Luke-Acts was a traveling companion of Paul and addressed the Greco-Roman Pauline churches. Joseph Fitzmyer of Georgetown University cites a second-century prologue to the gospel that credits Luke as the author who was writing from Greece.<sup>5</sup> According to Mark A. Powell of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, the internal evidence also clearly points to a Greco-Roman audience of Luke-Acts, “although scholars disagree on the particulars, there is consensus that the presence of Gentiles in Luke’s community has had a significant effect on his theology.”<sup>6</sup>

Strong internal evidence suggests that the intended readers of Luke-Acts were specifically non-Palestinian who would have been much more sensitive to the presence of Roman Imperial augury. Among the manifold internal features of Luke-Acts that signify such an audience,<sup>7</sup> the most important for this study is Luke’s redaction of Mark’s Palestinian practices.<sup>8</sup> In many instances, Luke modified Marcan references that would have been foreign and not understood by Luke’s non-Palestinian readers and translated Mark’s Palestinian customs to those in line with the eastern Mediterranean world. Mark portrayed, for example, the friends of the paralytic digging through the roof of a house to lower the disabled man in front of Jesus (Mark 2:4). The roof of a common Palestinian home consisted of mud, which a person could open by digging a hole in it. Such earthen

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<sup>5</sup>Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, Anchor Bible Commentary vol. 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 38-39.

<sup>6</sup>Mark Powell, *What Are They Saying About Luke?* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 56.

<sup>7</sup>For a listing of such Greco-Roman features, see Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York, Doubleday, 1997), 269-270, and Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 57-59.

<sup>8</sup>Although there is no consensus regarding the priority of Mark’s Gospel, most NT scholars hold the Two-hypothesis theory that Luke had access to and redacted Marcan material. See Powell, *What Are They Saying about Luke*, 17-21.

construction was not typical for houses in the eastern Mediterranean world, where roofs consisted of tile. Luke, therefore, changed Mark's reference of a mud roof to tile to make the story more intelligible to his non-Palestinian Greco-Roman readers (Luke 5:19).<sup>9</sup> This non-Palestinian audience, located more at the heart of the Roman socio-political world, would have been keenly sensitive to the presence of augury, as demonstrated in Chapter One of this dissertation, because of the practice's prolific presence in the literature and political milieu of the region and time.

Most scholars date the composition of Luke-Acts between 80 and 100 C.E.,<sup>10</sup> a date that makes the work contemporary with the richest literary period for Roman augury. Augury was prevalent in the entertainment and educational fields of the Greco-Roman world through reading, studying, and performing Homeric epics. The Roman historians who produced the most material with the greatest amount of detail about augury published their works during this same period: Suetonius (ca. 69-130), Tacitus (56-117), Pliny the Elder (23-79), and Plutarch (ca. 46-127).<sup>11</sup> These writers consistently depicted augury as integral to the initial formation of the Empire, guidance for military campaigns, and most importantly for this study, the advancing of a candidate's claim to the throne. According to the extant documents, the period of Luke's first audience contains the most repeated and detailed literary treatments of augury.

The appearance of Luke's work also coincides with the period of the most numerous uses of imperial auguries in claims to political power. Stacy Lorsch implies

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<sup>9</sup>See C. C. McCown, "Luke's Translation of Semitic into Hellenistic Custom," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 58 (1939): 213-220.

<sup>10</sup>See Brown, *Introduction*, 273-274, Werner G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 151, and Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 53-57.

<sup>11</sup>Lorsch, "The Omens of Power," 4.

that the reports of the Roman historians probably reflected the actual political circumstances of the various emperors: “The imperial omens could have been a major factor in the various struggles for supremacy that occurred during the first century A.D.”<sup>12</sup> Luke’s audience, because of their geographical location and the era in which they lived, received repeated assurances that their rulers’ right to the throne had the confirmation of the gods through avian omens, assurances that had occurred repeatedly for more than a century. At least six of the emperors from 27 B.C.E. to 96 C.E. claimed divine right to the throne through avian omens: Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Galba, Vespasian, and Domitian. Out of the 127 years from Augustus to Domitian, 107 years had rulers who claimed in part their right to power by avian omens. The occurrences of augury during the Imperial era had increased as the fate of the people and the empire shifted from the responsibility of a group of men during the Republic to the fortune of one man in the Imperial period. There are no known extant records during this time of a claim to the throne by ornithological omens by an unsuccessful candidate. Luke’s readers were familiar with the political use of augury to reassure the people that they could trust their lives and futures to an emperor confirmed by the gods through the flight of a bird. Suetonius recognized the very title of Roman emperors, Augustus, to have etymological ties with avian omens. This association between the claims of candidates to political power and augury predisposed Luke’s audience to understand the descent of the dove as an avian omen for the purpose of inaugurating a king.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., xiv.

*The Context and Portrayal of the Dove in Luke's Gospel*

The possibility that Luke's audiences understood the flight of the dove as augury receives further strength because the dove occurred in the context of Luke's claiming a royal status for Jesus. Talbert establishes that Luke 1:5-4:15 is a literary unit in which "virtually the totality of the material about Jesus . . . would have been regarded as an anticipation of his later public greatness."<sup>13</sup> Luke utilized a variety of portents in this initial section of the Gospel in a way that was familiar to his readers. Talbert says that Luke "was simply following the conventions of Greco-Roman biographical literature."<sup>14</sup> Jesus' later public greatness had ties with claims to royalty. The heaven-sent Gabriel, for example, appeared to Mary while she was pregnant with Jesus and announced to her that God would give the *throne* of David to her son and his *kingdom* [emphases added] would know no end (Luke 1:32-33). This royal perspective provides further evidence that Luke's readers understood the baptismal dove as an avian portent since the two, the descent of the dove and Roman augury, shared similar regal functions.

Royal allusions to Jesus were not an isolated reference in Luke's writing; he consistently associated Jesus with kingship and the Kingdom of God throughout the Gospel. The core purpose of Jesus' ministry was to preach the good news of the kingdom (4:43). He imparted the secrets of the kingdom to his followers (8:10). The kingdom had drawn near in the ministry of Jesus (9:27; 11:20). The essence of the disciples' message was to be the same as Jesus' regarding the nearness of the kingdom (10:9). His disciples supposed that the kingdom was to appear immediately as he approached Jerusalem (19:11). The crowds proclaimed, "Blessed is the king who comes

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<sup>13</sup>Talbert, "Prophecies of Future Greatness," 137.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

in the name of the Lord” (19:30). Jesus, the king, promised his disciples they would eat and drink with him in his kingdom (22:30).

The royal theme is most prominent in the crucifixion scene. The Pharisees accused Jesus of proclaiming himself the king of the Jews (23:2). Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king, and Jesus replied that he was (23:3). A Roman soldier referred to Jesus as the king of the Jews (23:37), and Pilate placed a written notice above Jesus’ head on the cross that read, “This is the king of the Jews” (23:38). One of the criminals crucified next to Jesus requested, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom” (23:40). The kingship theme in Luke’s Gospel and the flight of a bird at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry mirrored the function of imperial avian omens in the Greco-Roman literary world to support the claim of a royal contender and assure the readers that the candidate was indeed the elect of God.

Luke’s unique portrayal of the dove from the other gospel writers also increased the likelihood of his readers seeing the dove in light of Roman augury. Luke makes a significant change in the description of the dove at the baptism of Jesus. The other Evangelists were more ambiguous in their language as to the degree of similarity between the Spirit and a dove. Matthew, Mark, and John each described the Spirit’s descent with the phrase, *w`j peristera.n* (as a dove).<sup>15</sup> This phrase could be either adverbial or adjectival. If understood adverbially, “as a dove” describes the motion of the Spirit’s descent: the movement of the Spirit was similar to that of a dove. Lander Keck at Yale University argues that the original meaning in Mark was adverbial modifying the action

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<sup>15</sup>Matthew used the equivalent comparative conjunction *w`sei..*

of the Spirit, and Luke cleared up the ambiguity and shifted the meaning to adjectival.<sup>16</sup>

Luke states that the Spirit descended on Jesus *swmatikw/ | ei; dei w`j peristera.n* (in *bodily form* [emphasis added] as a dove). Interpreted adjectivally, the phrase modifies the form of the Spirit: the Spirit was similar in outward appearance to a dove. Luke's phrasing does not necessitate an interpretation of an incarnation of the Spirit as a dove, but the Spirit descended in an unmistakable dove-like bodily form. The baptismal scene in Luke 3:22 incorporated what clearly looked like a bird and thus more like an avian omen than in the other Gospels. Luke's audience, being in the heart of the Greco-Roman, non-Palestinian milieu and thoroughly familiar with augury, surely would not have missed the connection: the flight of what looked like a bird in the context of royal claims and their own political practice of inaugurating emperors with avian omens.

#### *A Comparison of Luke's Dove and Roman Augury*

The depiction of the dove in Luke's Gospel was similar to Roman augury in function, but the kind of bird was the antithesis of the imperial practice. The similarity in function would naturally have caused the readers to see parallels between the dove and augury, and an antithetical type of bird would likely have provided enough contrast to allow the readers to continue to reject Roman augury and still affirm and utilize the dove as the functional equivalent of secular avian omens.

*Shared functions between the dove and roman augury.* The literary function of the dove mirrored how Greco-Roman writers had used bird omens. The dove and Roman augury guided the readers through the narrative, bolstered claims to royal power, and confirmed a candidate in the midst of challengers. Luke's rhetorical use of the dove was

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<sup>16</sup>L. E. Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," 63-67.

similar to Homer's employment of augury to announce to the readers the outcome of the story at the beginning of the narrative. The baptismal scene at the beginning of the Gospel clarified for the readers how the story of Luke-Acts would end. The dove foreshadowed, for example, that Jesus was the one who would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16), which happened on the day of Pentecost when tongues, as of fire, appeared among each of the disciples, and a tongue rested on them (Acts 2:1-4). The descent of the dove served to confirm that Jesus' kingdom would know no end (1:33), which occurred in the progression of the plot in Acts as the gospel spread from Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The immediate context of the baptismal scene made it clear that the dove bolstered the claim that Jesus was the Messianic King in three ways. First, directly preceding the baptism, the people questioned the identity of the Messiah, "The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ" (3:15). The descent of the dove functioned in the beginning of the Gospel to clarify for the characters within the narrative and Luke's readers that Jesus was the Messianic King.

Second, readers familiar with the Old Testament were likely to recognize the *Bath qol*, the voice from heaven at the baptism, "You are my Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22), as a combination of quotations from Psalm 2, a royal Psalm, and Isaiah 42:1, part of the Suffering Servant texts. The quotation from Psalm 2:6-7, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my Son,'" clarifies that the heavenly voice at the baptism indicated Jesus as a king and one who would rule with power. Psalm 2:8 and 9 describe the type of rule

of the one called “the Son,” “Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as your possession. You will break them with an iron rod; you will shatter them like potter’s ware.” This imagery calls to mind physical strength and might.

The second part of the heavenly voice at Jesus’ baptism stands in antithetical contrast to quotation from Psalm 2. The source of this second statement of the voice is from Isaiah 42:1, “Behold, my Servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him, and he will bring justice to the nations.” This Servant, in contrast to the Son described in Psalm 2, gains his status through suffering and death. The joining of Psalms and Isaiah passages by the heavenly voice at the baptism creates an oxymoron: kings do not serve, they rule; servants do not rule, they serve. This antithetical nature of the Servant/King is further reflected in the confirmation of Jesus’ kingship by the flight of the dove. It was not the anticipated imperial eagle with its symbolism of power and might that appeared at Jesus’ baptism but a dove, which depicted defenselessness and timidity in the Roman culture. The presence of the dove in the context of the voice bolsters Luke’s repeated theme of the diametrical nature of Jesus’ kingdom to that of the Rome Empire. The Servant/King relied on divine power and not worldly might. The dove, with its juxtaposed perception to that of the imperial eagle, fits Luke’s repeated theme of the antithetical nature of the Kingdom of God.

Third, it was common practice in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature to provide the genealogy early in biographical works of kings. Most commentators rightly address the Jewish background of the genealogy in Luke, but the fact that Luke wrote to Greco-Roman audiences demands attention to the function of genealogies in that milieu.



Suetonius repeatedly provided the families' backgrounds for nearly every emperor whom he chronicled (Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian).<sup>17</sup> As a means of strengthening his claims to the throne, Caesar reminded his audience when he spoke at the funeral of his aunt that she and he were descendants of the fourth king of Rome, Ancus Marcius.<sup>18</sup> Suetonius used Galba's ancestry to prove his right to the power following the end of the Caesars: "[Galba] always added to the inscriptions on his statues that he was the great-grandson of Quintus Catalus Capitolinus, and when he became emperor he even displayed a family tree in his hall in which he carried back his ancestry on his father's side to Jupiter."<sup>19</sup> Whereas Matthew charted Jesus' ancestry only back to Abraham, Luke traced it to God (Luke 3:38). Luke's inclusion of the genealogy with its undertones of royalty in the immediate context of the dove reinforced the notion that the dove had the function of augmenting the claim that Jesus was the Messianic King. Such a use of the flight of a bird and genealogy was in line with the ancient biographers' treatment of the rise of kings and emperors to power.<sup>20</sup>

Luke's Gospel also mirrors Imperial augury in its function to distinguish the divine choice of an emperor among multiple candidates. Chapter Two of this dissertation demonstrated that ancient Roman writers depicted avian omens frequently when there was competition for the right to rule; such was the case with Tarquin, Augustus, Tiberius,

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<sup>17</sup>Plutarch also began many of his biographies of noble men with their ancestry (Agis, Alcibiades, Alexander, Pericles, Pyrrhus, Solon, Themistocles, and Theseus).

<sup>18</sup>Suetonius, *Caesar*, 6.1.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., *Galba*, 2.

<sup>20</sup>Quintilian documented the proper form of creating a biography, "Before [the life of] the man there have to come [descriptions of] his fatherland, parents and ancestors, and there are two ways of treating these, for it may be glorious either to have lived up to [one's] nobility or to have lent honour to [one's] humbler family by mighty deeds" *Inst. Orat.*, 3.7.10.

Claudius, and Vespasian. Luke's account of the dove took place in the context of another potential candidate for messianic king, John the Baptist. Among the Synoptic Gospel writers, Luke alone reports the people questioning whether John the Baptist might be the Messiah (Luke 3:15).

The flight of the dove and the *bath qol* were the apogee of the resolution between a comparison of John the Baptist and Jesus in the introductory chapters of Luke's work. The baptismal scene clearly culminated Luke's message that Jesus, not John the Baptist, was God's Messianic King.<sup>21</sup> John's actions and his physical appearance gave some people the impression that he might be the hoped for messiah: his dramatic preaching, his clothes and diet, his desert dwelling, and his exhortations for repentance in preparation for the Kingdom of God.

The readers of Luke's Gospel had encountered numerous parallels between John and Jesus that demonstrated Jesus' superiority before the baptismal scene. Both were divinely called: the Baptist to be "the prophet of the Most High" (1:76), Jesus to be "the Son of the Most High" (1:32, 34). Both had early ties with the Holy Spirit: John was filled while in the womb (1:15); Jesus was conceived by the Spirit (1:35). Both were heralded: John by neighbors and family (1:58), and Jesus by angels (2:9-14). In the narrative, Luke's readers encountered John the Baptist distinguishing himself from the Messiah three times: 1) Christ was higher, and John was unworthy to untie Jesus' sandals; 2) John baptized in water, and Jesus would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit; and 3) Christ, the mightier one, was coming in eschatological judgment to separate the wheat from the chaff and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire (3:16-17). The dove functioned in the context of this demonstration of the superiority of Jesus over John the

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<sup>21</sup>See Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, "Luke 3:15-17, 21-22," *Interpretation* 48.4 (1994): 397-401.

Baptist in the way that Roman Imperial augury distinguished the divine choice among a plurality of royal candidates.

*The dove as the antithesis in kind to the imperial eagle.* The literature in each of the first-century cultures, Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian, portrayed the dove as the antithesis of the Roman Imperial eagle. Greco-Roman writings, as has been noted, saw the eagle as “the most honorable and also the strongest”<sup>22</sup> of all birds, and this bird was closely related to the highest of the gods, Zeus/Jupiter. Aelian indicates the dominance of the eagle, “Not only when he is alive and active do birds dread the eagle, the king of birds, and cower down when he appears, but if one mixes his feathers with those of other birds, the eagle’s remain entire and untainted.”<sup>23</sup>

The Hebrew Scriptures describe in similes the swiftness of eagles in capturing their prey: eagles were “swift to devour” (Hab 1:8); eagles were quick, “swooping on their prey” (Job 9:26; cf. Deut 28:49; Jer 48:40; 49:22). Christian literature, which was nearly contemporaneous with Luke’s Gospel, also notes the strength and dominance of eagles. The Epistle of Barnabas, written between 80-120 C.E., describes eagles as covetous, not knowing how to get their food by their own labor but plundering other birds’ property. The epistle states that eagles sought how they may “devour the flesh of others.”<sup>24</sup> The eagle was the domineering king of the avian world in the Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literary worlds.

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<sup>22</sup>Pliny, *Natural History*, 10.1.

<sup>23</sup>Aelian, *On Animals*, 9.2.

<sup>24</sup>Irenaeus, *Epistle of Barnabas*, 10.

Alternatively, the Greco-Roman literature considered the dove to be domestic, gentle, and preyed upon. The dove appeared as a weak victimized bird in Homer's *Odyssey* toward the end of the epic.<sup>25</sup> Homer had already described several avian omens depicting the coming demise of the suitors with an increasingly graphic depiction of the demise of various animals by eagles of omen. A hawk, described as a messenger from Apollo, flew by Odysseus' son, Telemachus, as he arrived back at Ithaca. The hawk was flying while holding a dove in its talons, plucking it, and shredding the feathers. Telemachus received an interpretation, "Telemachus, surely not without a god's bidding did this bird fly by upon your right, for I knew, as I looked upon him, that he was a bird of omen. No other descent than yours in Ithaca is more kingly; you are supreme forever." It seems likely that a hawk appeared to Telemachus instead of an eagle because this was a royal avian omen for the prince, not the king. The narrative portrayed the dove as a defenseless bird; it had to endure the on-going pain of being plucked before its merciless death. This picture of helplessness and torture was the opposite of an eagle that had its choice of prey.

Roman and Jewish writers also provide accounts of doves as the antithesis of eagles. Plutarch describes the dove as loving, nurturing, and domestic. He associated the dove with the goddess of love, "In these matters, the Greeks are correct in saying that the dove is the sacred bird of Aphrodite."<sup>26</sup> Plutarch depicts doves as less harmful than eagles. Doves, according to him, did not kill or threaten anything that has life. In regard to other birds, Plutarch states that the doves did not even so much as touch dead birds

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<sup>25</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*, 3.525-534.

<sup>26</sup>Plutarch, *Iris and Osiris*, 379-D.

because they were of the same species. Eagles would strike and kill their own kind.<sup>27</sup> He contrasts doves with partridges—whereas the male partridge stole and destroyed his mate’s eggs, the male dove, “assumed the care of the nest taking turns at keeping the eggs warm and being themselves the first to feed the fledglings.”<sup>28</sup> Pliny the Elder describes the parenting of the eagle in contrary terms to Plutarch’s description of doves. Pliny says that the eagle “compels its still unfledged chicks by beating them to gaze full at the rays of the sun, and if it notices one blinking and with its eyes watering flings it out of the nest as a bastard and not true stock.”<sup>29</sup>

Philo (20 B.C.E.-40 C.E.), on the Hellenistic Jewish side, clearly and emphatically expounds a view of doves that was antithetical to eagles. He states that the dove was “the gentlest of those whose nature is tame and gregarious.”<sup>30</sup> E. R. Goodenough of Yale University reaches a conclusion after examining the Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literature: “Beneath the variety of settings the dove itself shows a unity, and that unity, we may now see, lies essentially in the fact that the dove represents the beneficence of divinity in love, the loving character of divine life itself.”<sup>31</sup> The dove’s characteristics in the Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish literature as loving, nurturing, vulnerable, and weak, were plainly the antithesis of the eagle.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., *Roman*, 9.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., *The Cleverness of Animals*, 962.

<sup>29</sup>Pliny, *Natural History*, 10.10.

<sup>30</sup>Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus*, 1.163. Colson translates *peristera*. “pigeon,” but it is the same Greek word that the Evangelists use for the dove.

<sup>31</sup>E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 8.40-41.

The readers of Luke-Acts would have readily suspected the dove to be a royal avian omen given the prominence of augury in their culture and the clear parallels regarding functions between Luke's account and imperial avian omens. However, eagles appeared almost exclusively as the only bird to bolster the claim of emperors to the throne.<sup>32</sup> Every emperor from Augustus to Domitian who claimed avian omens had an eagle as evidence of divine election to the throne. Greco-Roman readers were accustomed to seeing eagles confirm claims to royalty. The pressing question consequently for Luke-Acts readers was why a dove and not an eagle; surely the king of the birds, the eagle, would be appropriate for Jesus, the king whose "kingdom would know no end" especially in light of the well-established tradition of Roman emperors having confirmation by eagles.

The reason why a dove was cited instead of an eagle at the royal confirmational baptism of Jesus was in Luke's consistent portrayal of the kingdom of God as the antithesis of the Roman Empire. Luke's depiction of the kingdom was shocking to his audiences; he used antithetical parallels of the two kingdoms throughout the narrative. The kingdom of God did not belong to the wealthy and powerful but to the poor (6:20). The kingdom was not for those who focused on taking care of their physical needs, as the nations of the world did, but for those who sold their possessions, gave alms, and stored their treasure in heaven (12:23-34). The initiation of the Kingdom of God was not grand and spectacular but was similar to the mustard seed (13:18). The Kingdom was not for those who were first but last (13:29-30). The Kingdom was not for the dominant and

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<sup>32</sup>Even the rulers confirmed by vultures (i.e., Romulus, Remus, and Augustus) were in the category of eagle omens since vultures were in the same ornithological class, Pliny, *Natural History*, 10.3; cf. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 22.

powerful, but it belonged to children (18:16). Jesus contrasted the leaders in the Kingdom of God with Gentile leaders,

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves (22:25-27).

The strongest antithetical comparison of the Roman Empire and God's kingdom in Luke's Gospel was implied—the King of the Jews suffered miserably and died at the hands of the Roman Empire on a Roman cross. The dove as royal confirmation of Jesus' kingship and as the converse of the imperial eagle conformed to Luke's unswerving portrait of a kingdom of God that contrasted sharply with the Roman notions of power.

*The parallel function of the dove and the donkey in Luke.* Another animal appears in Luke's Gospel with the same function of the dove to depict Jesus' kingship as the opposite of Imperial regal expectations: the donkey or colt (pw/lon),<sup>33</sup> which emerges in account of Jesus' triumphal entry into the royal city of King David, Jerusalem (19:29-38). While many commentators struggle to find royal significance in a donkey,<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>There is debate over the meaning of pw/lon. Walter Bauer, "The 'Colt' on Palm Sunday (Der Palmesel), *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953): 220-229, argues that the word should be translated as 'a young animal, foal' another animal is mentioned in the context; when it appears alone, it means either a 'young horse, colt' or a 'young male ass.'" See also O. Michel, "pw/lon," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 6.959-961. The Masoretic Text of Zech 9.9, which is the source of the reference, reads, "upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass"; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2.1248).

<sup>34</sup>Hermann Patsch, *Abendmahl und historischer Jesus*, Cawler theologische Monographien (Stuttgart: Cawler, 1972), 16, argues that the account of Jesus riding on a donkey and his disciples proclaiming him king occurred on separate occasions but conflated by the Evangelists. John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 925, sees the royal significance in that the animal had never been ridden, and thus Jesus does not share his royal dignity with previous riders. Nolland does admit, "The thought actually fits a little awkwardly with the fact that the donkey is only a temporary borrowed one!" William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1953, 1956), 250, claims, "The ass in Palestine was not the lowly beast that it is in this country. It was a noble beast. Only in war did kings ride upon a horse; when they came in peace they came upon an ass." Unfortunately, Barclay does not provide any documentation to

the symbolism was once again in what the animal was not; it is not a stallion in front of a fine imperial chariot. The donkey fits the same motif as the dove: the animal is the converse of the usual symbolism that portrayed Roman power and might. A *pw/loj* had no royal association in the Greco-Roman Empire. The evidence that the donkey functioned in Luke's Gospel as antithetical to the Roman royal prospective is threefold: Greco-Roman royal use of horses and chariots; the context of Zechariah 9:9, the source of Luke's quotation that mentioned the *pw/loj*; and the use of royal language that surrounds the story of the donkey in Luke's Gospel.

Luke's first readers were familiar with the horse and chariot as representative of military strength and power; such symbolism had been used for centuries. More importantly to this study, horses and chariots were symbols of royalty might and victory and were occasionally associated with an imperial candidate's rise to power. The Greco-Roman literature fell in line with the long tradition of tying the greatness of the king with the quality of his horses and chariots. Homer depicts King Rhesus as a formidable opponent on the basis of the eminence of his horses and chariot: "His are surely the fairest horses that I ever saw, and the greatest, whiter than snow and in speed like the wind. And his chariot is skillfully worked with gold and silver."<sup>35</sup>

The Romans, in contrast to Jesus' humble entrance into Jerusalem on a *pw/loj*, followed the antecedent examples of the use of horses and chariots in triumphal celebrations when victorious military leaders and emperors entered the capital city. Josephus, for example, commented on the Roman celebration of Vespasian, Titus, and

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substantiate his claim. However, he misses the treatment of any Greco-Roman sources, which work directly against his claims regarding the use of horses and the nobility of donkeys.

<sup>35</sup>Homer, *Iliad*, 10.436.



Domitian when they brought back the spoils from the fall of Jerusalem—a highly notable event for both the Jewish and Christian communities. Josephus pointed to the importance of the horse in the festivity, “Vespasian drove behind these [spoils] and Titus followed him; Domitian rode beside them, dressed in a dazzling fashion and riding a horse which was worth seeing.”<sup>36</sup> The Arch of Titus—erected during Domitian’s reign to commemorate Titus and his accomplishments—depicts Titus riding into Rome in his chariot pulled by four horses in a triumphal procession after conquering Jerusalem. The panel shows Titus being crowned by Victory. Dio mentioned that a chariot was part of the recognition given to Caesar when the Senate made him a monarch.<sup>37</sup>

Other artwork connected the eagle as a symbol of power with the horse and chariot. The Arch of Nero—constructed after his suicide in 68—shows Nero in a toga holding a scepter with an eagle in a “four-horse chariot that has the personifications of Peace and Victory beside it.”<sup>38</sup> The “Triumph of Tiberius,” a silver cup (Barcarole, Paris), depicts Tiberius in a triumphant toga holding a scepter and being crowned by an eagle while riding in a triumphal chariot.<sup>39</sup> Such artwork shows the joint use of eagles and horses in the symbolism of crowning and might.

The Romans recognized a hierarchy in depicting the worthiness of a ruler’s or other military leader’s accomplishments that included the horse and chariot as the highest means of entrance into the city. Suetonius reveals such a graded structure of dignity in his description of Octavian, “He twice entered the city in an ovation . . . and he celebrated

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<sup>36</sup>Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 7.5.133.

<sup>37</sup>Dio, *Roman History*, 43.45.

<sup>38</sup>Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 156.

<sup>39</sup>See *ibid.*, 153-154.

three regular triumphs.”<sup>40</sup> The ovation was a lesser honor than a triumph, the basis of which was on such things as whether the victory came from a declared war or the caliber of the opponent.<sup>41</sup> The ovation, recognizing a lesser accomplishment than the triumph, restricted the victor’s entrance into the city to being on foot instead of in a chariot drawn by four horses. Aulus Gellius (ca. 125-ca. 180) indicates levels of honored entrances into the city, “I must not pass over a point relating to ovations, about which I learned that the ancient writers disagree. For some of them have stated that the man who celebrated an ovation was accustomed to enter the city on horseback: but Masurius Sabinus says that he entered on foot . . . .”<sup>42</sup> An entrance on foot or horseback was less honorable than in a chariot with horses. Luke’s description of Jesus’ unusual entrance into Jerusalem on a young donkey was antithetical to the horse and chariot of the Roman triumphal entrance into the city.

The Hebrew Scriptures acknowledge the strength and dignity of horses and chariots but often pitted their earthly supremacy as a point of reference against the ultimate power of Yahweh. The plundering of Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, which is mentioned no less than five times in the celebration of the crossing of the Red Sea, represented the Egyptian might that Yahweh overwhelmingly defeated (Exod 15). The author of Chronicles relates the number of horses and chariots to a nation’s strength (2 Chron 9:25). The psalmist states, “Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but

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<sup>40</sup>Suetonius, *Augustus* 22.1.

<sup>41</sup>Gellius, “The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius,” trans. John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), writes, “the occasion for awarding an ovation and not a triumph, in that wars have not been declared, in due form and so have not been waged with a legitimate enemy, or that the adversaries’ character is low or unworthy, as in the case of slaves or pirates, or that because of a quick surrender” (5.6.21).

<sup>42</sup>Gellius, 5.6.27.

our pride is in the name of the Lord our God. They will collapse and fail, but we shall rise and stand upright.” The psalm ends by mentioning a royal connection, “Give the victory to the king, O Lord, answer when we call” (Ps 20:7-9). The author of Isaiah warns the Israelites not to trust in horse and chariot, “Alas for those who go down to Egypt for help and who rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD” (31:1)! It is in this Hebraic logic of Yahweh’s superiority over earthly empires and their horses and chariots that both the donkey and the dove appeared in Luke’s Gospel.

Luke, in his gospel, clearly places the story of the donkey in the context of royal expectations. He recorded that the crowds shouted as Jesus rode the donkey, “Blessed is the *king* [emphasis added] who comes in the name of the Lord” (19:38). The reader, by this point in the Gospel, had seen the contrast between Jesus’ description of the Kingdom of God and the worldly Roman Empire so many times as to suspect that the donkey was a mark of humility in contrast to imperial equestrian power. Jesus’ having to borrow his means of conveyance, instead of providing his own, further contradicted current first-century regal expectations. The imperial assumption that a king’s horses and chariots reflected his degree of honor and might was juxtaposed to Jesus’ borrowed donkey, a beast with no royal dignity. The fact that the crowds in the narrative recognized the donkey as being in the setting of a royal scene points to their understanding of the great reversal between the Kingdom of God and the Roman Empire, an understanding anticipated by the earlier appearance in the narrative of an animal with a similar function, the baptismal dove.

Both the crowds surrounding Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and Luke's first readers were likely to have recognized the scene as reflecting the description told in Zech 9:9.<sup>43</sup> The verse reads, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Luke and Zechariah both describe the anomalous notion of a royal personality approaching Jerusalem on a donkey. The Septuagint version of Zechariah shared with Luke the same word to depict the donkey, *pw/loj*. The shared striking non-conventional triumphant entrance of a king on a donkey and the same terminology would have likely lead Luke's readers to associate the two passages.

The most important point of commonality between Luke and Zechariah for this study is the motif of humility that contradicts imperial notions of the might of horses and chariots. The next verse in Zechariah, 9:10, says that the king's humble advent would "take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem." The context and the comparison between a donkey and war-horses in the Zechariah passage points to the donkey functioning in Luke's account in the same manner as the dove did earlier in the gospel: the symbols of power, the horse and the eagle were actually inferior to the eschatological symbols of the donkey and dove in light of the new realities of the reign of God as inaugurated by Jesus. The most powerful subdued the weaker in Imperial reasoning; in Zechariah's and Luke's writings, the weaker was the conqueror. The humble king, riding on a donkey subdued chariots and war-horses.

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<sup>43</sup>Both Matthew's and John's Gospels make it explicit that the cries of the crowds fulfilled a prophetic pronouncement.

The expressions of humility in Luke's gospel stood in stark contrast with Greco-Roman cultural expectations of claims to royal power. The *pw/loj* was no challenge to the horse in nature, in military might, or in royal symbolism; in the same way a dove was no challenge to an eagle. The role of the donkey and the dove in Luke's gospel, therefore, parallel each other in function and reinforce the interpretation of each other as expressions of the antithetical natures of the reign of God and the Roman Empire.

Augural syncretism likely entered the Church beginning with Luke's authorial audience. These non-Palestinian readers, in a culture saturated with augury, would not likely have missed the similarities between imperial avian omens and the flight of the dove at Jesus' baptism. The difference between the dove and the Imperial eagle omens was probably great enough to allow a syncretistic reading of the dove by Luke's audience. The possibility of such a reading receives support from the evidence in the post-apostolic church, which flatly rejected Roman augury yet occasionally sanctioned the flight of doves in ecclesiastical matters.

### *Augury in the Early Church*

The flight of Jesus' baptismal dove reflected two roles of Roman Imperial avian omens: 1) confirmation of divine election, and 2) selection from a multiplicity of candidates. Some writers in the early church considered the descent of a dove a repeatable event with the same functions as imperial augury. The recurring use of the descent of a dove in the selection of ecclesiastical leaders reveals that at least some communities and one key church historian, Eusebius, approved a syncretistic use of avian omens. This utilization of a dove as a means of divine guidance and selection occurred in the midst of the Church's consistent rejection of Roman augury in the first five centuries

of church history. In the case of Eusebius, he rejected imperial omens yet provided a positive report about the descent of a dove in the selection of a bishop.

### *The First Century*

The reception of augury by the first-century Jewish communities is important to examine because of the close ties between Jews and Christians. Philo and Josephus (ca. 37-ca. 100 C.E.), who represented some of the various strands of first-century Judaism in regard to divination by the flight of birds, both rejected the practice. Philo indicates that Moses gave specific directives against augury because the practice led people astray from devotion to God: “Thus knowing that the erring life of the multitude is greatly helped on its way into the wilds by the art of divination, [Moses] forbids them to use any of its forms and expels from his own commonwealth all its fawning followers, haruspices, purificators, [and] augurs.”<sup>44</sup> Philo dismisses divination by avian omens as guesswork that lacked empirical means of testing. He considered auguries as an impious practice because “he who pays attention and puts confidence in them is spurning the Cause of all in his belief that they are the sole causes of good and evil and fails to perceive that the anchors on which he moors his life are utterly insecure, such as birds and wings and their flight hither and thither through the air.”<sup>45</sup>

Moses, according to Philo, insisted that to be an Israelite, a person had to renounce such divination as augury and put his trust in the non-ambiguous truth of God. Philo considered augury an uncertain means of prediction in light of God’s promise to the Israelites of full knowledge of the future if they would remain pious. This prophetic

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<sup>44</sup>Philo, *The Special Laws*, 1.60.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.62.

knowledge, according to Philo, was to come through God's divinely appointed prophets, "who are the interpreters of God."<sup>46</sup> Philo considered Balaam an augur and his practice as harmful; Balaam exemplified through his practice of augury that "divine truths are heard by some to their profit, by some to the harm of themselves and others."<sup>47</sup>

Josephus rejected augury as untrustworthy for predicting the future. He told the story of a Jewish man named Mosollam who exemplified a fundamental flaw in the practice of avian omens. Josephus related how Mosollam encountered an augur and a large number of people standing on a road watching a bird in an attempt to learn what direction they should take. The augur showed the bird to Mosollam and described the course of actions to take based on the direction of the bird's flight. Josephus described the scene that, according to him, pointedly showed the bankruptcy of augury:

Mosollam made no reply, but drew his bow, and shot at the bird, and hit him, and killed him; and as the augur and some others were very angry, and wished imprecations upon him, he answered them thus: "Why are you so mad as to take this most unhappy bird into your hands? For how can this bird give us any true information concerning our march, which could not foresee to save himself? For had he been able to foreknow what was future, he would not have come to this place, but would have been afraid lest Mosollam the Jew would shoot at him, and kill him."<sup>48</sup>

Josephus' argument that the human capturing and killing of birds contradicted the notion of their ability to see the future is a defense repeated later by Christian writers.<sup>49</sup>

Josephus also revealed that first-century Jews had a strong aversion to the Roman eagle standard. Herod had erected what appears to be an eagle standard in the Jerusalem temple, which he was rebuilding for the Jews. Many Jews, on the false report of Herod's

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 1.65.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., *Changing Names*, 202; cf. Philo, *Moses*, 264.

<sup>48</sup>Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.22.

<sup>49</sup>For example, see Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.90.

death, entered the temple, pulled down the eagle, and destroyed it with axes. The riotous scene showed the deep Jewish aversion to the Roman presence symbolized in the imperial eagle in their temple. The writings of both Philo and Josephus reveal a general spurning and rejection of augury by Jews of the first century.

First-century Christians also strongly rejected the Roman practice of augury. The earliest extant Christian writing to mention the practice of augury appears to be in the *Didache* (ca. 70-110). It emphatically rebuffs augury: “My child, do not become a diviner (οἰωνοσκο, ποῖ),<sup>50</sup> since [this] is the path leading to idolatry; not an enchanter, nor an astrologer . . . nor [even] wish to see these things, for from all these, idolatry is begotten.”<sup>51</sup> The author(s) gives augury priority by listing it first and made a clear connection between augury and the grievous sin of idolatry. The concern was so grave and dangerous that the readers of the *Didache* were to avoid even seeing the practice of divination by the flight of birds.

### *The Second and Third Centuries*

The frequency of the practice of divination by the flight of birds reached a nadir in the second-century Roman milieu,<sup>52</sup> yet augury remained a topic of serious concern among Christian writers. The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* was a second or third-century document<sup>53</sup> that condemned all avian omens irrespective of the type of bird used:

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<sup>50</sup>This word is often translated “soothsayer” or “augur.” The etymology of the word has significance for this study, οἰωνο, ποῖ “a bird of omen”, σκοπο, ποῖ “watcher”; see Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 701.

<sup>51</sup>*The Didache*, 3:4.

<sup>52</sup>See Rothaus, “Augurs and Augury,” 1-8.

<sup>53</sup>Regarding authorship, John W. Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: the Writings of the Fathers Down to 325* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1978, 1994), 7.389, states, “There has always existed a great



“Be not a diviner, for that leads to idolatry; for says Samuel, ‘Divination is sin;’ and ‘there shall be no divination in Jacob, nor soothsaying in Israel.’ Thou shall not use enchantments or purgations for thy child. Thou shall not be a soothsayer nor diviner by great or little birds.”<sup>54</sup> This distinction of the type of bird—whether it was great or little—could have possibly been a reaction to the use of the dove as an acceptable source of divination because it was the antithesis to the Roman Imperial eagle; in any case, the document rejected all avian omens as idolatry.

Although divination by the flight of birds had waned by the second century, eagle standards, as already argued, in many ways replaced the actual flight of birds. Tertullian (ca. 155-230), the great Christian apologist, considered the veneration of the eagle standards to be idolatry: “Roman religion, every bit of it a religion of camps, venerates the standards, swears by the standards, sets the standards before all the gods.”<sup>55</sup> Tertullian’s consideration of the standards as idols undoubtedly came from the popular treatment the standards received during festivals, such as anointing the eagles with expensive oils and perfumes, and the use of the standards for prognostication.

Marcus Minucius Felix provided fuller and clearer reasoning for the rejection of predicting the future by avian omens. Minucius likely wrote the *Octavius*, a supposed dialogue between Caecilius (a pagan) and Octavius (a Christian), toward the end of the

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diversity of opinion as to the author and date of the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*. Earlier writers were inclined to assign them to the apostolic age, and to Clement; but much discussion ensued, and the questions to which they give rise are still unsettled.”

<sup>54</sup>*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 7.6.

<sup>55</sup>Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 16.8.

second century.<sup>56</sup> Minucius, on the one hand, argued against the validity of augury by showing the practice's lack of accurate results. Within the dialogue, Caecilius argued in favor of augury—those who neglected auguries suffered harm and those who heeded the avian omens had good fortune.<sup>57</sup> Caecilius cited Clodius, Flaminius, and Junius as not waiting for favorable omens from the sacred chickens and consequently losing their armies. Octavius countered Caecilius with three examples that demonstrated the impotency of avian predictions. Regulus did not observe auguries, and yet he avoided capture.<sup>58</sup> Mancinus was careful to heed avian omens but the enemy captured and executed him.<sup>59</sup> Octavius continued his response to Caecilius, “Paulus also had chickens which greedily ate their food, yet at Cannae he was crushed with the greater part of the Republic's forces.”<sup>60</sup>

Minucius depicted augury in the *Augustus* as lacking reliability, yet he did not completely deny the power of augury but attributed any degree of accuracy to demons. Minucius wrote, “There exist deceitful and wondering spirits who have lost their heavenly vigor from having been dragged down by earthly stains and lusts.”<sup>61</sup> These demons, according to Minucius, were attempting to lure humanity astray through human desires to predict the future: “now damned themselves, [the demons] seek to bring others

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<sup>56</sup>There is much debate among scholars concerning the dates of Minucius. For a brief discussion, see A. Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4.256-257.

<sup>57</sup>See Marcus Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 26.1.

<sup>58</sup>Regulus was a Roman general in the first Punic War who initially beat the Carthaginians in a sea battle in 256 B.C.E. The Carthaginians later completely defeated Regulus in 255 B.C.E.

<sup>59</sup>Mancius died in battle ca. 136 B.C.E.

<sup>60</sup>Cannae was a significant battle of the Second Punic War in which Hannibal defeated Lucius Aemilius Paulus in 216 B.C.E.

<sup>61</sup>Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 26.7.

to damnation as a consolation of their own ruin; perverted, they seek to spread their perverting error; cast out by God, they seek, by introducing wicked cults, to win others away from Him.” Minucius specifically referred to augury as one of the ways the demons attempted to pull Christians away: “These unclean spirits or demons . . . direct the flight of birds.”<sup>62</sup>

Cyprian (d. 258), like Minucius, was highly critical of the pagan practice of Roman augury. Cyprian slightly modified Minucius’ examples that countered the validity of augury by adding Caius Caesar to Minucius’ list and turning the argument into a tirade against the empire:

The consulship, moreover, is the highest degree in Roman honours, yet we see that the consulship began even as did the kingdom. Brutus puts his sons to death that the commendation of his dignity may increase by the approval of his wickedness. The Roman kingdom, therefore, did not grow from the sanctities of religion, nor from auspices and auguries, but it keeps its appointed time within a definite limit. Moreover, Regulus observed the auspices, yet was taken prisoner; and Mancinus observed their religious obligation, yet was sent under the yoke. Paulus had chickens that fed, and yet he was slain at Cannae. Caius Caesar despised the auguries and auspices that were opposed to his sending ships before the winter to Africa; yet so much the more easily he both sailed and conquered.<sup>63</sup>

The repetition of the augury by two such well-known ecclesiastical figures as Minucius and Cyprian demonstrates a well-established, consistent rejection of Roman Imperial divination by birds in the early Church.

The most thorough and strongest rejection of Roman augury in the third century came from Origen (ca. 185-ca.254 C.E.) in his *Contra Celsum*. Origen accused Celsus, an antagonist of Christianity, of degrading the human race by comparing it to animals.

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 27.1.

<sup>63</sup>Cyprian, *Quod Idola Dii Non Sint*, in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 36, trans. R.L. Defferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958), 198.

Celsus, according to Origen, even endorsed the animals' superiority because of their powers of sorcery.<sup>64</sup> Origen quoted Celsus, "And if men take any pride in sorcery, yet even in this matter snakes and eagles are wiser. At any rate, they know many antidotes and prophylactics, and furthermore, the powers of certain stones keep their young from harm."<sup>65</sup> Celsus argued that irrational animals have closer contact with God than humans do, as demonstrated by the ability to predict the future. In the hierarchy of the animal world, Celsus held birds to be superior creatures and especially of divine character because of their capacity to forecast upcoming events: "For what would anyone say to be more divine than to foreknow and declare the future? Well then, men learn this from the other animals, and especially from birds; and those who understand the indications which they give are diviners."<sup>66</sup>

Origen, like Minucius, questioned the predictive ability of augury. He defended his view, at least in part, by the lack of agreement in methodology and philosophy among those who endorsed the practice of augury. On the one hand, Origen challenged the methodology of reading avian omens since it had no standardization: some looked to the flights of birds, others to their songs, and still others to the birds' feeding habits. Philosophically, some supporters of augury held that the birds' behaviors were the result of outside influences such as prophetic gods or demons.<sup>67</sup> Other supporters maintained

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<sup>64</sup> See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4:86-93.

<sup>65</sup> Eagles supposedly had a special stone they brought into the nest that kept their chicks safe. See Pliny, *Natural History*, 10.12; 36.149-151; and Aelian, *On the Character of Animals*, 1.35. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.88.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> The argument had a long history in the Roman world. Cicero used such a defense in favor of augury in the first-century B.C.E.: "The divine will accomplishes like results in the case of birds, and causes those known as *alites*, which give omens by their flight, to fly hither and thither. . . . How much

the notion that birds were able to prognosticate because their souls were divine and adapted for this purpose.<sup>68</sup> With biting sarcasm against Celsus, Origen proclaimed,

According to Celsus, therefore, the species of prophetic birds understood God better than Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato! And we ought to resort to birds as our teachers so that, just as they teach us the future by divination according to Celsus' notion, so also they may set men free from doubt about God and pass on the clear conception of Him which they have received.<sup>69</sup>

Origen showed the absurdity in Celsus' case. Since Celsus thought birds to be superior to humanity, humans ought to use birds as teachers and ignore the well-respected Greek philosophers.

Origen then attacked the notion of birds having prophetic abilities. He, like Josephus, argued that human ability to capture and kill birds worked against avian foreknowledge. Origen wrote, "Had they known their own future they would have taken care not to fly into the place where men had set traps and nets for them, and where archers would take aim and shoot arrows at them as they flew."<sup>70</sup> He proceeded to come against the highest form of Roman avian omens, the eagle: "Surely also, if eagles had foreknown the designs against their young, whether those of snakes . . . or some men who capture [their young] for amusement or for some other use and service, they would not have built their nest where they were liable to be exposed to attack." For Origen, the

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more easier [sic] is it for such results to be accomplished by a god, whose divine will all things must obey" (*de Divinatione* 1.53.128. *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 21.1.9, writing about 390 C.E., also represented such a view. He wrote, "Auguries and auspices are not gained from the will of fowls of the air, which have no knowledge of future events (for that not even a fool will maintain), but a god so directs the flight of birds that the sound of their bills or the passing flight of their wings in disturbed or in gentle passage foretell future events. For the goodness of the deity, either because men deserve it, or moved by his affection for them, love by these arts to reveal impending events."

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 4.89.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 4.90.

observation of birds in nature and their vulnerability spoke against their having predictive abilities.

However, Origen did not completely eliminate the possibility of birds providing valid predictions; he, like Christian writers before him, attributed avian prognostic power to demonic activity. He held that certain evil spirits, who had become impious, fell from heaven and inhabited the bodies of those animals that Moses considered unclean.<sup>71</sup> These demons that dwelt in the bodies of animals had some indication of the future because of having formerly resided close to God in heaven. The demons' main objective was to lead humans away from God, so the spirits would influence the behavior of their animal hosts. The demons could thus turn human attention, according to Origen, from seeking and worshipping God to searching for guidance from "the birds and serpents, and even to foxes and wolves."<sup>72</sup> Origen linked the unclean animals that Moses listed in Leviticus to those regarded as having prophetic abilities by the Egyptians.

This connection led Origen to conclude that a relationship existed between specific demons and particular animals:

There seems, therefore, to be some sort of kinship between the form of each deamon and the form of each animal. And just as among men some are stronger than others, though this has nothing to do at all with their moral character, in the same way some deamons probably have more power than others in something morally neutral, and some use these animals to deceive men in accordance with the will of "the Prince of this world" as he is called in our scripture, while others use another form to show the future.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>See Leviticus 11.

<sup>72</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.92.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.93.

Demons, as Origen understood augury, had direct influence on the behavior of some birds. If birds were indeed predicting the future, then the Devil, not God, directed their behavior. Humans could influence bird behavior only to a point; therefore, the likely source of those times of valid avian predictions was demonic, a view in line with Origen's interpretation of the Scriptures. His cosmology permitted an ability to foretell the future but did not see God using animals or ordinary people to do so, God used only "the most sacred and holy of human souls who he inspires and makes prophets."<sup>74</sup> Origen sealed his case against Roman augury by quoting the Mosaic Law, "You shall not employ augury nor study the omens of birds" (Lev. 19:26).

Origen's rejection of augury is consistent with other Christian opinions during the second and third centuries. These conclusions had their basis in two observations. First, divination by avian omens lacked consistent results and was unreliable. This argument mirrored what Cicero had said regarding the differences between augury as practiced in Rome and elsewhere:

Now let us examine augury as practiced among foreign nations, whose methods are not so artificial as they are superstitious. They employ almost all kinds of birds, we only a few; they regard some signs as favorable, we others . . . . Ye gods! How much they differ! So much that in some cases they were directly the reverse of each other.<sup>75</sup>

Such a lack of standardization of irreconcilable methods of practice was likely a part of Origen's rejection of augury. The spiritual origin of valid predictions was the second reason Origen and other early Christians rejected divination by birds. If the predictions proved accurate, then the power and ability came from demonic influence, not from God who would use divinely appointed prophets rather than animals.

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 4.95.

<sup>75</sup>Cicero, *de Divinatione*, 2.36.

Yet even with the clear rejection of Roman augury by both Jewish and Christian writers during the first three centuries of the history of the Church, some Christian authors of this period affirmed a syncretistic flight of a dove in the style of Imperial avian omens. The *Protoevangelium of James* is one of the second-century documents that condone the dove for divine guidance in the selection of a prominent ecclesiastical figure. The document tells the birth narrative of Jesus and portrays the choice of Joseph as the husband of Mary:

When [the priest] had finished the prayer he took the rods, and went out (again) and gave them to them: but there was no sign on them. Joseph received the last rod, and behold, a dove came out of the rod and flew on to Joseph's head. And the priest said to Joseph: "Joseph, to you has fallen the good fortune to receive the virgin of the Lord; take her under your care."<sup>76</sup>

This account shares two common functions with Roman Imperial avian omens. First, it reveals the divine election of Joseph to an honorific role of authority. The appearance of the dove affirmed the claim for Joseph as the husband of Jesus' mother, Mary. Second, the flight of the dove indicated Joseph's divine selection from among competitors for the position of honor. The author of *Protoevangelium of James* utilized the two roles of the pagan practice of Roman Imperial divination by the flight of birds—Joseph was divinely elected and chosen from among other contenders to be Mary's husband.

Irenaeus, the author of *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (ca. 155),<sup>77</sup> wrote in one version about an ascending dove when Polycarp was put to death. This dove functioned in ways similar to Roman augury as divine election and selection. Irenaeus wrote that the executioners were having problems putting Polycarp to death because his body would not

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<sup>76</sup>*Protoevangelium of James*, 9.1.

<sup>77</sup>For further discussion of the date of the document, see Bart Ehrman, Introduction to *The Apostolic Fathers*, Loeb Classical Library, 361-362.



ignite and burn: “At length the lawless men . . . commanded an executioner to go up and stab him with a dagger, and when he did this, there came out a dove,<sup>78</sup> and much blood, so that the fire was quenched and all the crowd marveled that there was such a difference between unbelievers and the elect.”<sup>79</sup> The ascent of the dove at Polycarp’s death shared common themes with Imperial augury: like imperial omens, the dove showed Polycarp as divinely favored; the appearance of the dove also served to distinguish Polycarp as an exemplar from unbelieving martyrs.

However, the dove at Polycarp’s martyrdom was more similar to a necrotic avian omen that appeared at the deaths of some emperors. In this type of augury, the bird did not appear as a sign at the beginning of a notable person’s rise to prominence but at the end of life to demonstrate their dignity. Avian omens at the deaths of emperors were common. For example, several predictive omens occurred with Galba that warned of his impending death; one was avian: “as he took the auspices, the sacred chickens flew away.”<sup>80</sup> A similar event surrounded the death of Domitian, “A few months before he was killed, a raven perched on the Capitolium and cried ‘All will be well,’ an omen which some interpreted as follows: ‘Recently a crow which was sitting on a Tarpeian rooftop could not say it is well.’”<sup>81</sup> The presence of a dove at Polycarp’s death mirrors the familiar Roman scene of a bird omen at an emperor’s death as a sign of his dignity.

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<sup>78</sup>The textual evidence is divided regarding the dove; some manuscripts omit the reference to the bird. The omission is of little concern in this study; the original reading is not imperative to discern, only that some communities had exposure to the appearance of a dove at Polycarp’s death.

<sup>79</sup>Irenaeus, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 16.

<sup>80</sup>Suetonius, *Galba*, 18.3.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, *Domitian*, 23.2.

An important parallel with Polycarp's necrotic bird omen is Suetonius' account of Augustus' death:

His death, too . . . and his deification after death were known in advance by unmistakable signs. As he was bringing the lustrum [a sacrifice of purification] to an end . . . before a great throng of people, an eagle flew several times about him and then across to the temple hard by, perched above the first letter of Agrippa's name.<sup>82</sup>

The birds of Augustus' and Polycarp's deaths share common functions: both confirm the divine will in the death of the men, and both avian appearances pointed out the necessity to remember the greatness of the men. The appearance of a bird close to the time of Augustus' death functioned to confirm his noble status. So too, Irenaeus clarified the importance of remembering Polycarp's death; the martyr's bones became "more valuable than gems and gold," and "whenever we can gather together in joy and happiness, the Lord will allow us to commemorate the birthday of his martyrdom."<sup>83</sup>

Some Roman artwork of the period reveals some of the imperial burial practices and suggests that Irenaeus adapted his account of a dove at Polycarp's death from these sources. The *Arch of Titus* (likely constructed by Trajan) has a square panel at the apex of the vault that portrays Titus in a tunic and triumphant toga ascending to heaven on the back of an eagle. The panel "depicts the emperor's soul carried heavenwardly by the eagle that was let go by an imperial slave at the very moment of the emperor's cremation."<sup>84</sup> Such an imperial practice was not an isolated event; a similar portrait of Nero on the back of an eagle also has survived. If the account of the dove at Polycarp's death is an adaptation to Roman culture, then the story is probably best explained as a

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., *Augustus*, 48.1.

<sup>83</sup>Irenaeus, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 18.2-3.

<sup>84</sup>Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 189.

compilation of the baptismal dove and the imperial eagle at emperors' death. Here again the antithetical nature of the dove to the eagle served to distinguish the characteristics of the Kingdom of God from those of the earthly Empire.

Christians in the third century both opposed and adopted the flight of birds as keys to discerning the divine will in the selection of leaders. The opposition was consistent with early accusations of demonic influence and the inability of birds to predict accurately the future. The flight of a dove was likely acceptable for two reasons. First, the concept of the dove, being opposite of the eagle was likely a mark of Christian distinctiveness as a radical departure from the symbolism of Roman and worldly might. The reversal in the kind of bird of prognostication fit familiar biblical themes such as "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." Second, the flight of the dove fit the biblical pattern at the baptism of Jesus. For third-century readers, the descent of a dove was a divine revelation of Jesus' true identity at the Jordan River as divinely elected, a function occasionally mirrored in the selection of ecclesiastical leaders.

#### *The Fourth Century*

The practice of augury underwent several significant political changes during the fourth century and also remained an issue for the Church. The political change began with the Edict of Milan's granting universal toleration in 313 and the Empire's move toward Christianity and away from paganism. One of Constantine's (272-337) first decrees was that no haruspex could be practiced in public or in private homes under the penalty of death by burning. Constantine lessened the inclusiveness of the law within a year by applying it only to those who used the practice as an attempt to injure others or to corrupt innocent people by magic arts. The change was likely the result of the

conservative pagans in the Empire resisting change.<sup>85</sup> Constantine's son, Emperor Constantius II (r. 357-360), moved the Empire further away from the practice of augury than his father. Constantius was intent on eradicating divination permanently. He focused on the teachings of the Church and was intent in promoting the growth of Christianity. Such a preoccupation reflected the same outlook of a growing percentage of his empire.<sup>86</sup> He cited augury specifically among the pagan practices for removal from his realm: "The wicked doctrines of augurs and seers shall become silent. . . . The inquisitiveness of all men for divination shall cease forever."<sup>87</sup> The degree of penalty indicated the seriousness of Constantius II. He declared, "For if any person should deny obedience to these orders, he shall suffer capital punishment, felled by the avenging sword." Constantius, with this decree, drastically reversed 300 years of Church history: now paganism was being threatened with persecution, and this discrimination was partly based on augury.

Emperor Julian (r. 361-363) "the Apostate," who nearly entered into civil war with Constantius II, reinvigorated pagan divination, and augury in particular. Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus indicated that Julian was anxious about the potential of hostilities with Constantius, and Julian wanted to be the first to strike "since he inferred

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<sup>85</sup>A. A. Barb, "The Survival of Magic Arts" in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 105-6 ; 193-218.

<sup>86</sup>For a fuller discussion, see W. H. C. Frend, "From Paganism to Christian Society 330-360" in *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 554-571.

<sup>87</sup>Constantius (January 5, 357), in *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, trans. Clyde Pharr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 9.16.4. Constantius' reforms targeted divination in general as seen in Ammianus Marcellinus' report: "If anyone consulted a soothsayer about the squeaking of a field mouse, or about the meeting with a weasel on the way, or any like portent, or used some old wife's charm to relieve pain (a thing which even medical authority allows), he was indicted (from what source he could only guess), was haled into court, and suffered death as the penalty" (16.8.1).

from many prophetic signs (in which he was adept) . . . that Constantius would shortly depart from this life.”<sup>88</sup> The first explanation of prophetic signs used by Julian that Marcellinus provided was augury.<sup>89</sup>

Julian also used divination in attempts to safeguard himself in war. Marcellinus typically provided introductory summary statements for each section of historical narratives. His comments of Julian’s preparation for conflict with the Persians are telling: “Julian prepares for a campaign against the Persians, and in order to learn the outcome of the war, he consults the oracles and slays countless victims, abandoning himself wholly in soothsaying and prophecies.”<sup>90</sup> Marcellinus continued and provided some of the details:

But Julian, being a man of uncommonly high spirit, no less carefully considered the importance of his campaign [against the Persians], and used every effort to make corresponding preparations. Nevertheless, he drenched the altars with the blood of an excessive number of victims, sometimes offering up a hundred oxen at once, and with white birds hunted out the land and sea.<sup>91</sup>

Marcellinus indicated that Julian’s search for foreknowledge about the outcome of the war was not limited to haruspicy but included divination by augury:

Moreover, the ceremonial rites were excessively increased, with an expenditure of money hitherto unusual and burdensome. And, as it was now allowed without hindrance, everyone who professed a knowledge of divination, alike the learned and the ignorant, without limit or prescribed rules, were permitted to question the oracles and the entrails, which sometimes disclosed the future; and *from the notes of birds, from their flight* [emphasis added], and from omens, the truth was sought with studied variety.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 21.1.6.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 21.1.9.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 22.12.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 22.12.6.

<sup>92</sup>*Ammianus Marcellinus*, 22.12.5-6.

Politically, the practice of augury generally declined during the first part of the fourth century until its revitalization under Julian. Following Julian's rule, Valentinian moved the Empire in 364 to a more balanced state by proclaiming freedom for both pagan and Christian practices. Theodosius came to the throne in 378, and in 392, probably under the influence of Ambrose (ca. 340-397), made all pagan rites illegal.<sup>93</sup>

In regard to the approval the practice of augury, the Church remained conflicted during the fourth century. Christians clearly rejected Roman augury, and yet some people in the Church accepted a Christianized version of imperial avian omens in the flight of a dove. Christian writers in the fourth century continued to use strong, inflammatory language in rejecting augury. Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386), writing in regard to preparation of baptism, said augury was the work of the devil: "The watching of birds (οἰωνοσκοποι), divination, omens or amulets, or charms written on leaves, sorceries, or other evil arts, and all such things, are services to the devil; therefore shun them."<sup>94</sup> Augury's first position in the list emphasized its importance and priority. Cyril gave a stern warning and directed his admonition to those in the church who practiced divination by birds, "For if after renouncing Satan and ranging thyself with Christ, thou fall under his temptations; perchance because he treated thee of old as his own, and has let thee off from severe slavery, and has been greatly exasperated against thee; so thou wilt be bereaved of Christ, and be tempted by him." Cyril's warning threatened the loss of salvation to those who even looked on the practice of augury.

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<sup>93</sup>P.R. Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church*, 448-449, cites this action in 392 as the first limitation of pagan practices on the basis of Christianity.

<sup>94</sup>Cyril of Jerusalem, "On the Rites before Baptism," in *St. Cyril's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. and trans. F.L. Cross (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 57.

Gregory of Nyssa (ca.335-ca. 395) interpreted the biblical account of Balaam to reflect the demonic influence of birds. He wrote, “[Balaam] calls in magic as his ally against those whom he assaults. The history against this magic is a diviner and augur who derived his presumably harmful power against his adversaries.”<sup>95</sup> He went on to qualify his understanding of Balaam as an augur: “The history gives witness of divination by observing birds when it says of the one mentioned [Balaam] that he possessed the powers of divination and received counsel from birds” (see LXX, Num. 24:7).<sup>96</sup> Gregory especially attributed Balaam’s power to demons<sup>97</sup> as well as the demonic influence on animals.<sup>98</sup> Cyril and Gregory of Nyssa proclaimed the falsity of augury without denying its power. They joined augury with the influence of the devil and thereby demonized the cultural and political tradition of avian omens in the Empire.

Eusebius (ca.275-339) was the bishop of Caesarea in Palestine. Part of his significance to this study is his lasting influence as a Church historian. One of his most important works, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Church History), has merited him the title of the Father of Church history by many scholars. Eusebius has particular import for this study because he manifested in himself a syncretistic understanding of divination by the flight of birds. He rejected Roman augury as a pagan practice, yet he affirmed the flight of a dove in the selection of a bishop.

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<sup>95</sup>Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist, 1978), 292.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 293.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 292.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 293.

Eusebius clearly rejected Roman augury when he affirmed Clement of Alexandria's depiction of augury.<sup>99</sup> Yet, he also favorably conveyed a report about the miraculous choice of Pope Fabian in 236. Fabian came to Rome with others after the death of Anteros, who was a bishop for only a month. Eusebius stated that while Fabian was in Rome, "he came to office in a most miraculous manner, thanks to the divine and heavenly grace." Eusebius then described in detail the circumstances surrounding Fabian's divine election and selection:

For when the brethren were all assembled for the purpose of appointing him who should succeed to the episcopate, and very many notable and distinguished persons were in the thoughts of many, Fabian, who was there, came into nobody's mind. But all of a sudden, they relate, a dove flew down from above and settled on his head, in clear imitation of the descent of the Holy Ghost in the form of the dove upon the Savior; whereupon the whole people, as if moved by one divine inspiration, with all eagerness and with one soul cried out "worthy" and without more ado took him and placed him on the episcopal throne.<sup>100</sup>

Three key points of similarity emerge between the dove with Fabian and imperial avian omens. First, both avian appearances occurred in leadership contexts. An episcopal "see" was a more typical expression; Eusebius' reference to the episcopal "throne" had leadership overtones and placed the dove in the same royal context as Imperial avian omens. Second, the Fabian dove and imperial augury functioned to reveal divine election to a position of authority. Eusebius highlighted that this avian omen functioned as divine election since no one thought of Fabian as a viable candidate for the position prior to the flight of the dove.

Third, the Fabian dove and imperial augury both functioned to indicate divine selection from among several candidates. Eusebius explicitly indicated a multitude of

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<sup>99</sup>See Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, 2.3.4.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.29.



candidates for the episcopal position: “Very many notable and distinguished persons were in the thoughts of many.” Eusebius’ comparison of the dove at Fabian’s appointment with the dove at Jesus’ baptism could imply the function of selection from among a field of multiple contenders. The dove at Jesus’ baptism, as noted earlier in this chapter, distinguished Jesus as the divine choice as opposed to John the Baptist as the possible messiah.

A generation after Eusebius, John Chrysostom (347-407) expressed that the baptismal dove both identified Jesus as the Son of God and distinguished him from John. As a source of identification, Chrysostom said, “Since the dove itself at that time [of the baptism] appeared, that as in place of a finger (so to say) it might point out to them that were present, and so to John, the Son of God.”<sup>101</sup> Chrysostom pointed out that the crowds likely held John in higher esteem than Jesus. John outwardly had a more messianic pedigree than Jesus did. John spent his time in the wilderness, was the son of the priest, wore the clothes of an ascetic prophet, and his mother had been barren. The crowds perceived no such background for Jesus because, according to Chrysostom, the miracles of Jesus’ birth and childhood were secrets at the time of the baptism. John baptizing Jesus likely confirmed to the crowds John’s superiority over Jesus.

Chrysostom wrote regarding the perceived greatness of John over Jesus at the baptism,

In order therefore that this opinion might not prevail with the multitude, the very heavens are opened, when He is baptized, and the Spirit comes down, and a voice with the Spirit proclaiming the dignity of the Only Begotten. For since the voice that said, “This is my Beloved Son,” would seem to the multitude rather to belong to John, for it added not, “This that is baptized,” but simply *This*, and every hearer would conceive it to be said concerning the baptizer, rather than the baptized, partly

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<sup>101</sup>Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. George Baronet, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 10, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1886-1890, 1999), 77.

on account of the Baptist's own dignity, partly for all that has been mentioned, the Spirit came in the form of a dove, drawing the voice towards Jesus, and making it evident to all, that *This* was not spoken of John that baptized, but of Jesus who was baptized.<sup>102</sup>

Chrysostom provided evidence that the notion of the baptismal dove as an agent of divine identification and selection between John and Jesus was present during Eusebius' era. It is also noteworthy that in the same homily and in the context of comparison Chrysostom spoke of the superiority of the eagle to the dove as an example of antithesis.<sup>103</sup>

Chrysostom recognized the agent that identified Jesus as Christ and superior to John was not itself a symbol of superiority but of weakness. Chrysostom connected the dove and the eagle.

Eusebius' description of the Fabian dove appeared to reflect the core roles of Roman Imperial avian omens: the dove was in the context of royal language; the bird demonstrated divine election to office and indicated divine selection among candidates just as the baptismal dove of Jesus had done. So even though Eusebius rejected Roman augury, he endorsed the flight of the dove that functioned in much the same way of the pagan imperial practice of divination by the flight of birds.

### *Summary*

A syncretistic view of the flight of a dove as a sign of divine election entered the Christian Church early in its history. The possibility that first auditors of Luke's Gospel heard the description of the descent a dove in the likeness of Roman Imperial augury must receive consideration. These audiences were mostly non-Palestinian Gentiles living in the Mediterranean milieu, a culture saturated with the presence and practice of

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 77.

divination by the flight of birds. Luke's audiences lived in an era that produced the notable amount of literature about augury with the greatest amount of detail (the most in the extant sources). This literature also portrayed the most emperors who came to the throne with the evidence of an avian omen to enhance their claim to power.

The similarities of the roles of Roman augury and the descent of Luke's baptismal dove increased the likelihood of Luke's audiences seeing parallels between the two. Both avian traditions occurred in a context of divine confirmation of a king or an authority figure. The flight of birds was a rhetorical guide for first-century Roman readers of both Homer and Luke. Imperial omens and Luke's baptismal dove also shared the functions of identifying the divinely chosen ruler and the selection of the king from a field of candidates. John the Baptist was, in the mind of many in the narrative crowd of Luke's Gospel, a competing contender with Jesus for the office of messiah. The first several chapters of the Gospel contrast Jesus and John and clearly reveal the superiority of the former. The descent of the dove was the climax of this Lucan comparison between John and Jesus. Roman augury and the baptismal dove shared this role of providing divine guidance for distinguishing between competing hopefuls to a position of leadership. Luke's audience would have seen the dove as a divine device indicating God's choice of a king.

The strong similarities of the augural function with antithetical avian forms between the Roman Imperial eagle and Luke's baptismal dove likely left the Gospel readers questioning why a dove and not an eagle to inaugurate a king whose "kingdom would know no end." The eagle was clearly the bird of choice for all successful Imperial candidates who claimed avian confirmation. The eagle was the strongest and mightiest,

dominating the avian world, a noble and desirable symbol for a ruler. All three first-century cultures, Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian, depicted the dove as the antithesis of the eagle: doves were domestic, weak, and birds to be preyed upon. A dove instead of an eagle is consistent with Luke's depiction of Jesus' messiahship and the Kingdom of God as antithetical to the Roman emperor and Empire. Luke used the same theme for the other animal associated with Jesus and his kingship, the donkey. The donkey was the antithesis of the imperial symbols of might and power—the horse and chariot. Just as an imperial king entering the royal city on a young donkey instead of the finest chariot pulled by the strongest of horses would contradict Roman understanding, so too Luke's first readers would have been baffled by the flight of a dove instead of an eagle to confirm divine royal election. The parallel literary role of the dove and donkey reinforced the notion that the author of the Gospel used the prevailing conventions of Imperial avian omens to contrast the nature of Jesus' kingship with that of the emperor.

The evidence is clear in the first four centuries of the Church that both the Jewish and Christian communities strongly rejected Roman augury as pagan. Christian writers of the era consistently argued against the validity of prognosticating by avian flights yet left room for the possibility of augural accuracy under the influence of the demons. Even in the midst of this strong denial and rejection of avian omens, there were repeated reports of descents of doves, similar to that of Jesus' baptism, in confirming the divine election of key ecclesiastical figures. Eusebius was clearly syncretistic in his understanding: he rejected the Roman practice of divination by avian omens yet affirmed the report of a dove as a miraculous display of divine selection of Fabian as bishop.

The acceptance of the syncretistic use of a dove in the same functions of the eagle in pagan practices likely came from the model of Luke's portrayal of Jesus' baptism and the antithetical form of eagles and doves. The baptismal dove accomplished the same results as imperial avian omens: it bolstered the claim that Jesus was the divinely elected messianic king, and the dove selected Jesus from among another candidate for that position, John the Baptist. The design of the Gospel dove was to point to the converse nature of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, the Roman Empire. Such a contrasting function of the dove created sufficient distance with the Imperial pagan practice to allow the early church to duplicate the descent of the dove in the selection of some ecclesiastical leaders.

However, the English Ampulla is an eagle, not a dove, and therefore failed to maintain a distinction between pagan and Christian in the kind of bird used for determining the divine will. The early church was syncretistic in the use of a dove in the selection of ecclesiastical leaders. The church adopted the symbolism of the eagle and transferred ecclesiastical syncretism of avian omens to the political milieu in the coming years of the medieval era. The next chapter will address this avian and political transformation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Flight of Birds and Anointing in Medieval France

France and England have shared many of the same coronation traditions and practices through the Middle Ages and into the early Modern era. The two countries also fiercely competed with each other for centuries culturally and militarily. France and England had royal propaganda battles in the fourteenth and fifteen centuries over the title of “Most Christian King.” Both kingdoms armed themselves with legends about special heaven-sent oil connected with a bird for the consecration of their sovereigns. The French myth and practice of anointing kings with holy oil sent from heaven predated any similar observance in England. The coronation chronology, commonalities of myths, and the extensive competition between the two countries naturally points to the likelihood that the English borrowed and adapted their claim to a divinely given ampulla in reaction to French assertions of having the most supreme monarch in the world as a result of being consecrated by the avian-delivered holy oil. This chapter will trace the development of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule* from its antecedents in the anointing practices of the early Christian Church to the relic’s use in the late Middle Ages in France as the background and occasion for the emergence of the Ampulla in England.

The growth in the importance of anointing in the early Church and the connection of oil and baptism were crucial components in the initial developments toward the French legend of *Sainte Ampoule*. I will first examine the observance of anointing in the early Church and demonstrate how the Church came to distinguish between types of oils for

specific ecclesiastical functions and how the anointing oil came to be associated with a dove. Then I will trace the practice of anointing in the Middle Ages and its evolution into being an indispensable political practice in the consecration of kings in many European kingdoms, first with the Visigothic kings and then later with the French monarchs. The legend of *Sainte Ampoule*, which combined anointing and the flight of a dove, emerged out of these ecclesiastical and political environments. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the connections between the legend that surrounded Clovis' baptism and Roman traditions of imperial augury in France from the sixth to seventeenth century. Roman themes in royal inaugural celebrations and the presence of Latin literature at the time of the legend's appearance will also receive brief treatment. This backdrop is important in moving from the significance of the dove in French consecrations to the eagle in English coronations.

From the outset, it is necessary to acknowledge the history of augury in the region north of Rome that eventually became France. Gaul, the first-century geographical area that incorporated what is present-day France, had its own augural history apart from Rome. The Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus (ca. 90-ca. 30 B.C.E.), mentioned divination by birds in that geographical area: "The Gauls likewise make use of diviners (οἰωνοσκοῦντες) accounting them worthy of high approbation, and these men foretell the future by means of the flight or cries of birds and the slaughter of sacred animals, and they have all the multitude subservient to them."<sup>1</sup> Diodorus' statement shows that augury had a notable role in both predicting the future and in perception of political power and authority in Gaul.

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<sup>1</sup>Diodorus Sicily, *Bibliotheca Historia*, 5.31.3.3.

Cicero also recognized the practice of augury in Gaul: “Not even among the barbarians is the practice of divination neglected, since there are Druids in Gaul, one of whom I knew myself. . . . He claimed to have knowledge of nature . . . and used to tell the future partly by means of augury and partly by conjecture.”<sup>2</sup> When the Romans, with their emphasis on augury, conquered that part of the world in the first century B.C.E., they found a people steeped in similar avian traditions. Christianity, with its account of the inauguration of Jesus by the descent of a dove, entered the region to the north that had a history of the importance of the flight of birds in revealing the will of the gods. Augural practices and their influence in the political sphere were already present in the geographical area of what is now modern France before the arrival of both the Romans and the Christians.

### *The Evolution of the Legend of Sainte Ampoule*

The legend of *Sainte Ampoule* is a story of heaven-sent oil that was reportedly delivered at the baptism of Clovis in 500 C.E. by a bird. The legend, when it first appeared in the ninth century, claimed that as Archbishop Remi was about to anoint the ruler after he converted to Christianity, Remi was unable to reach the oil because of the great crowds that were pressing in upon him to see the ceremony, and consequently, the archbishop prayed, “And behold a dove, fairer than snow, suddenly brought down an ampulla in his mouth full of Chrism! All that were present were delighted with the fragrance of it, and when the archbishop [Remi] had received it the dove vanished.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Cicero, *de Divinatione*, 1.90.

<sup>3</sup>“Et ecce subito columba nive candidior attulit in rostro ampullulam, chrismate sancto plenam, cujus odore mirifico super omnes odores, quos ante in baptisterio senserant, omnes qui aderant, inaestimabili suavitate repleti sunt. Accipiente autem sancto pontifice illam ampullulam, species columbae



Remi took the small avian-delivered ampulla of unction and anointed Clovis with it. The legend stated that the oil never ran out because it was supernaturally replenished over the years.

The creation and evolution of the myth of the *Sainte Ampoule* occurred in distinct stages over centuries. The first step toward the myth was connecting the long-established practice of anointing and the baptism of Christians in the early Church. With the union of anointing and baptism, the Church in the Middle Ages then linked an ampulla of oil and a dove in the artistic depictions of Jesus' baptism; this association of an ampulla and a dove was a linchpin for the future development of *Sainte Ampoule*.

The European political history of royal anointing must be considered in the development of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule*. The foundations of what formed the legend were present in the earliest extant documentation of royal anointing. The traditions of Clovis' conversion and baptismal anointing in the sixth century were foundational in the evolution. The first connection between anointing and royal consecration appeared among the Visigoths in the seventh century in the telling of the story of King Wamba. This account poses interesting comparisons with the later Frankish tradition of the *Sainte Ampoule*. The political use of anointing by Pepin I in the eighth century to justify his ascent to the throne was another significant political event in the evolution toward the *Sainte Ampoule*.

Once anointing acquired a political role in royal consecration at coronations, first of Visigoth rulers and then of French kings, the next step was Archbishop Hincmar's

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disparuit." Hincmar *Life of Remi*, 38. See J. P. Migne, "Vita Sancti REmigii Rhemorum Achiespiscopi," *Patrologia Latina Database* [full text data base on line]; available from <http://bearcat.baylor.edu/search/tPatrologia+Latina+Database+/tpatrologia+latina+datase/1/2,24,B/1856~2460492&FF+&1,2,0>; Internet; accessed 27 June 2006.

formation of the legend in 869 of St. Remi's oil, a tale of a descent of a dove with an ampulla of oil at Clovis' coronation. The legend continued to develop from this point over the next four centuries in name and importance in the Franks kingdom and Western Europe as a result of political and ecclesiastical exigencies that arose both domestically in France and abroad. I will begin tracing the major developments of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule* by considering the history of anointing.

*Combining Oil, Baptism, and a Dove*

Oil, baptism, and a dove—the foundational elements of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule*—had merged through the relationship between anointing and baptism long before the emergence of any hint of a myth regarding heaven-sent oil at Clovis' baptism. Anointing as a royal consecrating act had a long history, which was an established practice as early as the fourteenth century B.C.E. in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Archaeologists have found a tablet from that era at Tel-el-Amarna that describes royal anointing.<sup>5</sup> Consecrating kings with oil became a general custom in the ancient Middle East and included such Old Testament figures as Saul, David, and Solomon. The Jews had their own legend surrounding the oil that Moses used to anoint Aaron. That holy oil was supposedly preserved miraculously in the Jerusalem temple until its destruction in 70 C.E.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>For an overview to this topic, see Stephanie Dalley, "Anointing in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1993), 19-25.

<sup>5</sup>Brian O. Barker, *The Symbols of Sovereignty* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 163; and Ernest Short, *The Coronation: Its History and Meaning* (London: Schoolmaster Publication Company, 1930), 10.

<sup>6</sup>Arthur Taylor, *The Glory of Regality: A Historical Treatise of the Anointing and Crowning of the Kings and Queens of England* (London: R & A Taylor, 1820), 351.

The New Testament writers limited the function of oil to healing, fasting, preparation for burial, fuel of lamps, and Jesus' royal anointing;. The New Testament made no explicit connection between oil and baptism. There was an implied link, however, in the Gospels between the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism and anointing, which writers in the post-apostolic Church asserted. Luke recorded that Jesus used a passage from the book of Isaiah in his first public appearance following his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, "The *Spirit* of the Lord is on me, because he has *anointed* [emphases added] me to preach the good news to the poor" (4:18). This connection between baptism, the reception of the Spirit, and anointing became a well-used theme for the post-apostolic writers.

The earliest extant Christian literature that linked the practice of baptism and anointing with oil was Tertullian's *de Baptismo* at the beginning of the second century:

Then having come up from the font we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction in accordance with the ancient discipline whereby, since the time when Aaron was anointed by Moses, men were anointed unto the priesthood with oil from a horn: from which ye are called "christs" from the chrism, that is the anointing, which also lent its name to the Lord. This was done spiritually since he was anointed with the Spirit by God the father . . . . In the next place the hand is laid on in blessing, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Tertullian's comment points to two factors regarding the importance of oil. First, the association between the practice of baptism and anointing with oil was standard for him.<sup>8</sup> He saw the use of oil as a fundamental element in the Christian life and pointed out an etymological connection between oil and Christian titles. The appellation "Christ" came from a Greek translation of the Hebrew word for messiah, which meant the anointed one.

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<sup>7</sup>Tertullian, *de Baptismo*, 7-8.

<sup>8</sup>Leonel L. Mitchell, *Baptismal Anointing* (London: SPCK, 1966), 2.

Tertullian saw an essential semantic correlation between chrism, a particular type of oil used in anointing at baptism, and the terms “Christ” and “Christian.”

Second, Tertullian linked the anointing with oil at the baptismal ceremony and the reception of the Spirit. The relationship was between the oil and the Spirit, not the water of baptism and the Spirit. He explicitly denied a connection between the reception of the Spirit and water: “Not that we obtain the Spirit in water, but that cleansed in water under the angel we are prepared for the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> This link between the anointing and the Holy Spirit was foundational for the later legend of *Sainte Ampoule*.

The post-apostolic writer, Hippolytus (ca. 170-ca. 235), also associated anointing with oil and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Hippolytus recorded the prayer of the bishop that occurred between the acts of baptism and anointing: “O Lord God, who didst count these [who were baptized] worthy of deserving the forgiveness by the laver of regeneration, make them worthy to be filled with thy Holy Spirit and send upon them thy grace.”<sup>10</sup> The reception of the Spirit for Hippolytus, like it was for Tertullian, was the result of anointing with oil and not the water of baptism.

The early Church associated oil with the believer’s reception of the Spirit, and this connection would lead to a relationship between the descent of the dove at Jesus’ baptism and oil, a crucial link in the development of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule*. Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386) combined the elements of anointing, the descent of the dove on Christ at his baptism, and the Christian’s reception of the Spirit when anointed with oil at baptism:

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>10</sup>See the translation by Dix, *Hippolytus*, 38.

[Jesus] bathed in the river Jordan and after imparting the fragrance of His Godhead to the waters, came up from them. Him the Holy Spirit visited in the essential presence, like resting upon like. Similarly for you, after you had ascended from the sacred streams, there was an anointing with chrism, the antitype of that with which Christ was anointed, that is of the Holy Spirit. . . . Christ was anointed with the mystical oil of gladness; that is with the Holy Spirit, called “oil of gladness” because He is the cause of spiritual gladness. So you, being anointed with ointment, have become partakers and fellows of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), perhaps the person of greatest influence on Western Christianity, further nuanced the connection between the descent of the dove at Jesus’ baptism and the reception of the Spirit:

Christ was certainly not anointed with the Holy Spirit, when he as a dove descended upon him at his baptism. . . . But Christ is to be understood to have been anointed with that mystical and invisible unction when the word of God was made flesh. . . . For it is most absurd to believe him to have received the Holy Spirit, when he was near thirty years old, for at that age he was baptized by John, but that he came to baptism as without any sin at all, so not without the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Augustine continued and linked the anointing at Jesus baptism with the believer’s reception of oil in the baptismal rite:

The Lord Jesus Christ himself not only gave the Holy Spirit as God but also received it as man, and therefore he is said to be full of the grace and of the Holy Spirit. And in Acts [10:38] of the Apostles it is more plainly written of him, “Because God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit.” Certainly not with visible oil, but with the gift of grace, which is signified by the visible ointment wherewith the Church anoints the baptized.<sup>13</sup>

The early Church had united the three essential elements of the later legend of *Sainte Ampoule*—oil, baptism, and a dove—early in ecclesiastical history.

### *Distinguishing the Types of Ointments*

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<sup>11</sup>Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses*, 3.3, quoted in John Halliburton, “Anointing in the Early Church,” in *The Oil of Gladness* (London: SPCK, 1993), 81.

<sup>12</sup>Augustine, *de Trinitate*, 26.46.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

The distinction of oils was another key factor in the development of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule*. This distinguishing of types of oils later provided an exclusive right to the throne through the application of a particular type of oil. Anointing was a means of eliminating challengers to the right to rule within the kingdom and later to the elite title of “Most Christian King” among Western European monarchs.

The practice of distinguishing oils occurred in the early Church’s ceremony of baptism. Hippolytus, writing after Tertullian, indicated that in baptism there were two applications that involved distinct types of oils, one immediately before the water and one directly afterward. The bishop first would give thanks over the water at the beginning of the ceremony and then would “give thanks over the oil” followed by the consecration of the “oil of exorcism.”<sup>14</sup> Candidates for baptism presented themselves to the elder, who exorcised any demons with the use of exorcism oil, and then the elder or bishop applied a second oil after baptism. John Chrysostom (347-407) mentioned this distinction of the oil of exorcism:

Renouncing [the devil], [the baptismal candidates] have changed their allegiance and publicly enlisted with Christ. It is for this reason that the bishop anoints you on your forehead and marks you with the seal to make the devil turn away his eyes. He does not dare to look at you directly because he sees the light blazing from your head and blinding his eyes. From that day onwards, you will confront him in battle and this is why the bishop anoints you as athletes of Christ before leading you into the spiritual arena.<sup>15</sup>

Hippolytus also spoke of a second anointing: “when [the candidate] has come up [out of the water], he is anointed by the presbyter with the oil of thanksgiving, the presbyter saying, ‘I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ.’ And so each one after

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<sup>14</sup>Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, 17.21.

<sup>15</sup>John of Chrysostom, *Baptismal Homilies*, 2.24.

drying himself is immediately clothed, and then is brought into the church.”<sup>16</sup> The presbyter applied this oil of thanksgiving after the oil of exorcism, which points to the presence of a distinction of two types of oils, each having its own function.

The *Apostolic Confessions* also confirm two anointings as well as two different types of oils: “But thou shalt first anoint the person with holy oil and afterward baptize him with water, and finally thou shalt seal him with the chrism; that the anointing with oil may be participation of the Holy Spirit and the water a symbol of death, and the chrism a seal of covenants.”<sup>17</sup> The two oils were distinct having separate names and purposes.

Chrism was a blend of olive oil, balm, and perfume, or sometimes called “the cream,” and was distinguished from the plain olive oil often used in many anointings. The later Latin rites provided for three types of oils, all of which the bishop consecrated on Maundy Thursday before Easter.<sup>18</sup> Two of the oils were simple olive oil used for anointing the sick and for catechism. The Church considered the chrism a special vehicle for the Holy Spirit and used this exceptional ointment only for confirmation, ordination of priests, and consecration of bishops.<sup>19</sup> Later, chrism was an element of the coronation of several European kings, but most of Europe discontinued this use of chrism by the tenth century, except in France and England.<sup>20</sup> Efforts to distinguish types of oils for

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 21.19-20.

<sup>17</sup>*Apostolic Constitutions*, 7.22.

<sup>18</sup>F. C. Eeles, *The Coronation Service, Its Meaning and History* (London: Mowbray, 1952), 31.

<sup>19</sup>J. Wickham Legg, “The Sacring of the English Kings,” *The Archaeological Journal* 51 (1894): 30.

<sup>20</sup>Edward R. Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1960), 214.

sanctifying people for specific purposes reached an apex in the claims of heaven-sent oil in the French and English legends of the ampullae.

One final association of oil among the post-apostolic writers must receive mention: the royal function of oil in anointing kings in the Old Testament was a frequent theme in the early Church era.<sup>21</sup> Hippolytus wrote,

If anyone offers oil, he shall give thanks as at the offering of the bread and wine, though not with the same words but in the same general manner saying, “that sanctifying this oil, O God, wherewith thou didst anoint kings, priests, and prophets, thou wouldst grant health to them who use it and partake of it, so that it may bestow comfort on all who taste it and health on all who use it.”<sup>22</sup>

This connection of consecrated oil and royal purposes was a fundamental aspect of the myth of *Sainte Ampoule*. The early Church had already distinguished different types of oils for specific purposes. The first distinction was separating normal oil through the consecration of a bishop into holy oil. Then this holy oil was further differentiated into exorcism/holy oil and chrism, each having distinct functions. However, as anointing moved into royal and political spheres of the seventh-century Visigoths and ninth-century Franks, the demand for a specific kind of oil of the highest distinction developed for setting the monarch apart from the nobles, would-be contenders for the throne, and eventually from kings of rival territories and kingdoms.

Anointing with ecclesiastical oil quickly lost some of its ability to limit claims to the throne as would-be royal contenders were also anointed. Julian of Toledo’s story of Wamba and the later legend of the *Sainte Ampoule* limited rival claims to power through the creation of an exclusive oil—oil that had been sanctioned with a miracle. The

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<sup>21</sup>Leonel L. Mitchell, *Baptismal Anointing*, Alcuin Clato Series 48 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>22</sup>Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions* 5.



legendary oil of the *Sainte Ampoule*, associated with the miraculous descent of a dove was the most sacred and used for inaugurating the divinely elected French kings as the supreme and exclusive political ruler within France. Eventually with the rise of a sense of nationalism, the avian-sent oil was used to prove the French king's superiority over all other kings in the world.

### *Connecting Oil and a Dove*

The connection between oil, anointing, and a dove became evident in artwork during the Middle Ages. Depictions of the baptismal scenes produced during this time were greatly diverse, which reflects the lack of harmony in the Gospel accounts. Some of the artwork portraying Jesus' baptism emphasized the importance of baptismal anointing and clearly linked oil with the descent of the dove. Some medieval artists gave a picture of an ampoule of oil in the mouth of the baptismal dove in their portrayals of Jesus' baptism as early as the seventh century.<sup>23</sup>

The medieval depiction of an ampulla in the beak of the dove at Jesus' baptism undoubtedly resulted in part from the Church's interpretation of the biblical text, connecting the Spirit in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism and his being anointed by the Spirit. Some works of art, beginning in the late tenth century, placed two ampullae in the mouth of the descending dove at the Jordan River.<sup>24</sup> The delineation of two ampullae

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<sup>23</sup>Francis Oppenheimer, *The Legend of the Ste. Ampoule* (London: Farber and Farber, 1953), 17, 37, 126-145, argues that the appearance of the dove with an ampulla in its mouth in the artwork of the ninth century was a revival of a theme from the seventh century.

<sup>24</sup>*The Ivory Casket at Brunswick*, a tenth-century ivory carving, is the earliest extant depiction of the dove descending with two ampullae. The manuscript *The Benedictional of St. Aethelwold* in the Duke of Devonshire's library (illustrated between 971 and 980) also shows two ampullae in the dove's beak. See Oppenheimer, *The Legend of Ste. Ampoule*, 275-286, for further descriptions and photographs of these and other examples. He convincingly argues, 139-141, that the two ampullae depicted at Christ's baptism were

at Jesus' baptism in medieval artwork likely reflected current practices of multiple oils in baptismal anointing in the Christian community. The two ampullae in the dove's beak clearly reflected the two-stage anointing with two distinct types of oils that emerged in the Christian community's baptismal rites after Tertullian.

The rendering of an ampulla in the mouth of the baptismal dove was a repeated picture. The twentieth-century historian, Francis Oppenheimer, listed fourteen examples of medieval artwork depicting the dove at Jesus' baptism carrying a flask of oil.<sup>25</sup> Several of these delineations of the baptismal dove predated the appearance of the legend of the dove at Clovis' baptism and were therefore forerunners of the myth that appeared in the ninth century.

#### *The Political Evolution of Anointing*

Clovis (ca. 466-511) is a key figure in the history of western civilization. His anointing as the Franks' first Christian king would later become a major component of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule*. Clovis was of the Merovingian House and became the ruler of inconsequential Frankish tribes in 481. By the time of his death in 511, he had provided greater political unity among the tribes so that they were the most powerful kingdom in Gaul.<sup>26</sup> Clovis converted from paganism to Christianity in 496 and was the

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understood to represent two distinct oils having separate functions: one ampulla was for anointing Christ as priest and the other for consecrating him as king.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 275-285. In addition to the artwork, Oppenheimer presented literary evidence from the ninth century that mentioned the baptismal dove holding an ampulla. Oppenheimer, 67, cites the early ninth-century poem, *Nativity of Christ*, which states,

*Jordanem Christus ingreditur  
Servus baptizat dominum  
De coelo vox intonuit  
Columba infert crismata*

<sup>26</sup>Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-470* (London: Longman, 1994), 49.

only Orthodox (non-Arian) ruler in the West, which led to an alliance between the Franks and the pope. This relationship with Catholicism, publicly demonstrated at his anointing by Archbishop Remi, gave Clovis an advantage over other Frankish and Western European leaders, and he was able to expand the Frankish kingdom in the name of Orthodoxy. Clovis created what was to become France, and his baptism contained the kernel of what was to become the legend of *Sainte Ampoule*.

Clovis' rise to power and his subsequent conversion played a pivotal role in the development of European politics and in the later evolution of the legend of heaven-sent oil. He defeated the other Merovingian leaders in the Frankish states and went to war with Burgundy. In 493, he married Clotilda, the niece of the king of Burgundy and an Orthodox Christian. With the encouragement of his wife and the threat of defeat from the Alamans, Clovis vowed he would convert to Christianity if he escaped defeat.<sup>27</sup> He returned to the capital city upon victory to be baptized and anointed by Archbishop (and later Saint) Remi.<sup>28</sup> These events, although there was no mention of a dove until Hincmar's myth in the ninth century, constituted the core of what evolved into the legend of the *Sainte Ampoule*, and the myth became a means of legitimizing later, non-Merovingian, kings.

The oldest extant documentation and likely one of the first royal anointings is Julian of Toledo's account<sup>29</sup> of the consecration of the Visigoth king, Wamba, which

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<sup>27</sup>See Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, 2.30-31, trans. O. M. Dalton (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), 68-69.

<sup>28</sup>For fuller treatment of the history and historiography of Clovis, see William M. Daly, "Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan," *Speculum* 69.3 (1994): 619-664; Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1988), 164-179.

<sup>29</sup>For dating of records of royal anointings see Joaquin M. Pizarro, *The Story of Wamba: Julian of Toledo's Historia Wambae Regis* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 41.

occurred in 672.<sup>30</sup> Julian's *Historia Wambae Regis* covers events of 672 and 673 and opens with the death of the Visigoth king Reccesvind and the election of Wamba as his successor. The nobles and clergy elected Wamba the same day as Reccesvind's death. The new king, Wamba, lacked legitimate claim to the throne beyond the nobles' election, since he was not related to Reccesvind nor did the previous king designate Wamba as his successor.

Julian's history of Wamba was likely a propaganda piece written early in Wamba's reign to validate and safeguard the new king's rule. Joaquin Pizarro of Stony Brook University of New York argues that Julian wrote *Historia* "in support of the king and almost certainly within the first three years of his rule."<sup>31</sup> The account most likely appeared early in Wamba's rule in order to give legitimacy to his reign in the midst of repeated competing claims to the throne. After Julian described the royal anointing in Toledo in 672, he then told of the rebellion of Hildericus in Galli the next year. Wamba responded to this first rebellion by sending his general, Paul, who consequently joined forces with the rebels and led additional territories into the revolt.<sup>32</sup> The *Historia* describes Wamba's victory over the two contenders and Paul's trail. The story ends with

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<sup>30</sup>Scholars debate as to the first occurrence of royal anointing. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early German Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1971), 55, argues Wamba was the first anointed European monarch. Sanches Albornoz, "La *ordination principis* en la Espana goda y postvisigoda," *Caudernos de Historia de Espana* 35-36 (1962), 14-15, contends the first royal anointing was in the reign of Raccarred. P. D. King, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 45 n. 5, sees the Visigothic king Sisenand (r. 631-639) as the first anointed European king. Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain, 409-711* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 45, concludes, "there is absolutely *no* indication anywhere as to when [royal anointing] may have been introduced."

<sup>31</sup>Pizarro, *The Story Wamba*, 39. Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, 41, dates the document between 673 and 690.

<sup>32</sup>See Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 273.

Wamba's triumphal entry into Toledo. Therefore, the oldest account of royal anointing is told in the context of defending the ruler's right to the throne and eliminating the claims of aspiring contenders to power.

Julian's account of Wamba's anointing is of additional importance to this study because the document reveals that the appeals to the continuation of the Roman Empire played a role in claims to the throne, a common theme with the later legend of *Sainte Ampoule*. Lingering hopes of reviving the Empire play a role in the overall thesis of this dissertation as these designs and their connection with royal consecration passed from the Visigoths to the French and then to the English in the fourteenth century.

The Roman connection with royal superiority is evident in the story of Wamba's usurper. Paul wrote a letter to Wamba after attempting to seize power in which the rebel styled his name as *Favius Paulas unctus rex orientalis Wamba regi austro* (Flavius Paul, anointed king of the East, to the southern king Wamba).<sup>33</sup> The early Medieval kings adopted the title Flavius to show continuity with the Roman Empire and Constantine, who utilized the name from the Flavian dynasty.<sup>34</sup> Paul was declaring the existence of two kingdoms, but his was the superior to Wamba's since, according to Paul, there was only one Flavian and truly anointed king—Paul.

The Visigoth kings had a history of claiming to be successors to imperial Rome. The Third Council of Toledo had proclaimed Reccared as a new Constantine.<sup>35</sup> Roger

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<sup>33</sup>A letter of Flavius Paulas to King Wamba. The letter is found in its entirety in Pizarro's *The Story of Wamba*, 175-177.

<sup>34</sup>Pizarro, *The Story of Wamba*, 174.

<sup>35</sup>See Pablo Diaz and R Valerde, "The Theoretical Strength and Practical Weaknesses of the Visigothic Monarchy of Toledo," in *Ritual of Power: from late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Frans Theuws and Janet L. Nelson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 76.

Collins of the University of Edinburgh argues that the ceremony for Wamba was in the tradition of the Empire, “Julian’s account of the elevation of Wamba could just as well serve for a description of the creation of a fourth-century Roman emperor.”<sup>36</sup> A new feature to this Roman-like account was the addition of anointing.

Julian’s account of Wamba’s anointing, moreover, is important to this present study because it shares salient features with the later use of royal anointing in the Frankish states. Anointing functioned in both cases, the Visigoths and Franks, to give exclusive rights of a candidate to the throne and exclude other contenders. Julian’s main concern in his *Historia* was clearly to establish the legitimacy of the new king Wamba in the face of the usurper Paul.<sup>37</sup> Unction was a critical part of Wamba’s claim to the throne. Julian wrote, “In our days, indeed, arose the most noble prince Wamba, whom the Lord chose to rule worthily, *who was proclaimed king by priestly unction* [emphasis added], whom the consensus of people and fatherland elected, who was sought out by the love of the people.”<sup>38</sup> Anointing was an essential factor in establishing Wamba’s legitimacy, but unction alone was not enough.

The act of anointing in and of itself was already insufficient for legitimizing royal claims by the time Julian defended Wamba’s right to the throne in the face of another contender, Paul. Julian asserted that both Wamba and Paul were anointed as kings. Paul made claim to be the *rex unctus* (anointed king). Anointing in Julian’s account was only part of the process of king-making. Julian added two distinct features to Wamba’s

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<sup>36</sup>Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, 45.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>38</sup>Julian, *The Story of Wamba*, 179.

unction that raised him above the usurper. The first quality noted to bolster Wamba's legitimacy was the connection between anointing and a specific location, Toledo.

Anointing for Julian had to take place in a royal city to be valid. Julian stressed that Wamba waited nineteen days after he was declared king before receiving royal anointing. The purpose of the delay was so that Wamba could return to Toledo for anointing in that royal city. Julian wrote, "Defeated by . . . threats [of the nobles and clergy] rather than by their prayers, he yielded, accepting kingship, and took them all into his favor, but postponed the rite of anointment until the nineteenth day from that date [of his election], so that he would not be consecrated king outside the ancient seat." Wamba was 120 miles from Toledo when elected, and his delay centered on desire to perform anointing in the royal city of Toledo.<sup>39</sup> He had allowed other parts of the coronation to occur during the nineteen-day delay but postponed anointing until he was in Toledo.

Julian pointed out the connection,

Although chosen by divine inspiration and later by anxious acclaim and the veneration of the people, this man [Wamba] had already been surrounded by the great pomp of royal ceremony, he would not suffer himself to be anointed by a priest's hand before he had come to the seat of government and had sought the chair of ancestral tradition, at which time on it would be fitting for him to receive the sign of holy unction . . . so that it would not be thought that moved by a frenzied desire to reign, he had usurped or stolen rather than obtained from God a sign of such great glory.<sup>40</sup>

The anointing taking place in Toledo was a foundational element for Julian in promoting the authenticity of Wamba's right to power.<sup>41</sup> Anointing alone was insufficient to validate a candidate's claim; he had to be anointed in a designated city that was

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<sup>39</sup>See Jeremy Adams, "Toledo's Visigothic Metamorphosis," in *People and Communities in the Western World*, ed. Gene Brucher (Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1979), 122-136.

<sup>40</sup>Julian, *The Story of Wamba*, 182.

<sup>41</sup>Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, 45-46.

recognized as a royal city. A false candidate to the throne could receive unction anywhere, but the true king received anointing in only Toledo. Rheims would function in the same way in the coming years for the Franks, as would the city of Rome for the Holy Roman Empire.

The second element in Julian's account that legitimized Wamba's claim to power in connection to anointing was the addition of a description of divine intervention connected with the unction. Julian described the supernatural act,

And when [Wamba] came to where he would receive the sign of holy unction in the palatine church, that is to say the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, he stood already adorned with the royal insignia, before God's altar and, according to custom, pledged his faith to the people. After this, he kneels and by the hand of the holy bishop Quiricus the oil of benediction is poured on his head displaying its wealth of blessings when a sign of favor was immediately revealed. For soon from this very head, where the oil had been poured, certain fumes arose like smoke and stood there in the shape of a column, and a bee was seen to fly out from that same place on his head, which was certainly the omen of some future prosperity.<sup>42</sup>

Wamba was not merely anointed as Paul was; divine affirmation by means of a miracle distinguished Wamba's consecration with oil. Julian interprets the miracle as a "sign" and "omen" of divine approval of Wamba's reign.

Julian's account shares noteworthy similarities with the later Frankish legend of divinely provided oil. No direct evidence exists that Hincmar, in creating the legend of the *Sainte Ampoule* in the ninth century, borrowed from Julian—nor should the historian expect to find such evidence given the previous political rivalry between the two kingdoms that had transpired in the two countries history—but the comparisons are of note. Julian's story of Wamba as a means of legitimizing assertions to power was in need of improvements on several fronts, most notably in its failure to reach lasting results.

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<sup>42</sup>Julian, *The Story of Wamba*, 183.



Julian's account was ineffective in sustaining Wamba's reign—the king was deposed in 680. The story of a column of smoke and the flight of a bee was unworthy of emulation. No other Visigothic king claimed a similar, non-repeatable story. If the combination of divine intervention and unction was to be borrowed, it would need adjustment.

Hincmar's legend was an improvement over Julian's story in the symbols utilized in regard to the unction. The bee in Julian's account should not be understood as conferring a special status on Wamba but as conformational of previous divine election of the king and selection of the correct man. The symbolism of the bee, however, is obtuse and does not have any immediate connection with Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Hincmar's inclusion of the flight of a dove improved on the notion of the flight of a living creature by implying clear associations with the consecration of Jesus Christ at his baptism by the Holy Spirit.

Julian's story was an isolated, one-time, non-repeatable event. The bee conferred no special status on the oil so that it might be used again in the consecration of future Visigothic kings. Hincmar's account eliminated this limitation by having the dove descend with an ampulla of oil, and the oil itself was consecrated, since it was sent from heaven. Hincmar's incorporation of the notion of divine perpetuation of the oil provided the opportunity for future use of the legend for royal claims of superiority and for greater security of the throne from usurpers.

Anointing developed among the Franks from the earlier seven-century Visigothic story into a critical factor in the Frankish political life in the eighth century as a source of divine confirmation of rulers. An important factor in the initial growth of the

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<sup>43</sup>Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, 46-47, concludes that the bee symbolized military success of the king.

significance of anointing among the Franks was its use in the transference of power from the Merovingian to the Carolingian Dynasty. The decline of the Merovingian Dynasty was the result of the ongoing Frankish practice of dividing the kingdom among the king's sons, which ended in civil war and a three-part split of the kingdom.<sup>44</sup> Charles Martel (686-741), a Carolingian, ushered in a new period. He became the mayor of the palace and a powerful political figure in Austrisia, Neustria, and Burgandy, after a successful military campaign in 714. Charles, however, did not assume the throne but kept Merovingian kings as figureheads at court.<sup>45</sup>

Charles' son, Pepin III (r. 741-768), officially inaugurated the new Carolingian dynasty and introduced anointing as a royal religious practice that had a broad and enduring political impact in the history of France.<sup>46</sup> Pepin first legitimized the existing power that the mayors of the palace were already exercising. He had the pope declare that those who actually had authority were the legal rulers of the Franks.<sup>47</sup> He was successful in petitioning Pope Zacharias to send the last Merovingian king, Childeric III, and his son to a monastery, thus ending the Merovingian blood line and dynasty.<sup>48</sup> Pepin,

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<sup>44</sup>For the history of this period, see I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 255-292.

<sup>45</sup>See Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber historiae Francorum* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1987), 57-151, addresses in detail the era of the mayors of the palace and the rise of the Pepiimid dynasty. See also Roger Collins, *Charlemagne* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1998), 23-37.

<sup>46</sup>For a more detailed discussion on whether Pepin I was the first to introduce royal anointing in France, see Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, trans. J. E. Anderson (New York: Dorset, 1989), 263-264.

<sup>47</sup>See *Annales Regni Francorum* s.a. 749, Carolingian Chronicles, ed. Bernhard W. Scholz (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1970), 39, Burghard, bishop of Worms, and the Chaplain Fulrad were sent of Pope Zachary to ask him about the kings in France at that time had not royal power. Was this right or not? Pope Zachary called king rather than one who remained without royal power, and to avoid a disturbance of the right order of things, he commanded by apostolic authority that Pepin should become king."

<sup>48</sup>Ibid. For a slightly different version, see Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, ed. Louis Halphen (Paris: Societe d' edition Les Belles lettres, 1938), 8-12.

not being an heir to the throne, took the title of king at the risk of resistance and rebellion of the nobles who supported the Merovingian throne, but he was able to check conflict and justify his rise to power by gaining support from the Church.

A critical factor in Pepin's ability to establish his right to the throne was his anointment by Saint Boniface in 751,<sup>49</sup> and then again by the pope himself, Stephen III, who crossed the Alps and repeated the anointing in 754.<sup>50</sup> The ceremony, in the same fashion of the anointing of bishops, set Pepin apart from the rest of the nobles (including the privilege of receiving communion in both kinds, which was restricted to clergy at the time) and at least on par with the bishops.<sup>51</sup> Anointing served to bolster Pepin's claim to power by conferring on him the notion and title of the "Chosen of the Lord" and the "Protector of the Church."<sup>52</sup> Pepin, proclaimed king after the anointing ceremony, had officially established a new practice in France that would spread to England and the rest of Western Europe and have political consequences for centuries to come.<sup>53</sup>

The synergistic relationship between Pepin and the pope expanded the importance of the practice of anointing to the king's sons regarding rights to the throne. Pope

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<sup>49</sup>See *Annales Regni Francorum* s.a. 750, 4,, "Pepin was elected king according to the Frankish custom and anointed by the hand of Archbishop Boniface of holy memory and raised to the kingship by the Franks in the city of Soissons. Childeric who had been falsely called king was tonsured and sent to a monastery.."

<sup>50</sup>Some sources refer to this pope as Stephen II.

<sup>51</sup>Richard A. Jackson, *Ordines Coronationis Franciae: Texts and Ordines for the Coronation of Frankish and French Kings and Queens in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 42.

<sup>52</sup>Enright, *Iona, Tara, and the Origin of the Royal Anointing Ritual*, (Abeiten: Fruhmittelalterforschung, 1985), 165, argues for a Celtic influence on the French practice of anointing that assisted Pepin's attempt to justify to the Frankish aristocracy the disposition of the Merovingian line. Enright argues that Pepin used royal anointing to transform the image of the Frankish monarch to "a new born sinless king who could guarantee victory and prosperity in the minds of the folk."

<sup>53</sup>Richard A. Jackson, *Vive Le Roi! A History of the French Coronation from Charles V to Charles X* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 4.

Stephen came to the Frankish territory in order to gain Pepin's protection from the Lombards, who were threatening to overrun Rome.<sup>54</sup> The pope, in exchange for Pepin's pledge of military support, anointed Pepin and his sons, Charles—later known as Charlemagne—and Carloman, as heirs to the throne, thus heightening the potential for future orderly transference of power.<sup>55</sup> This action further strengthened the ties between the pope and the Franks, but more importantly for this study, it brought the political importance of anointing into further focus in two ways. First, anointing reinforced the Frankish king's claim as well as the future claim of his sons to the throne. The act of anointing consecrated the king and his sons above the nobles so that they mainly recognized the power God invested in the king and his heirs. Second, anointing was the foundation for Charlemagne's rule, who was later crowned as the *Imperator Augustus*,<sup>56</sup> later known as the first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>57</sup>

This development of the political importance of anointing along with an association with ancient Rome and its symbolism early in the Carolingian Dynasty was a critical step in the evolution of the myth of *Sainte Ampoule*. A connection between Charlemagne and ancient Rome was a consistent theme of his reign. Charlemagne was

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<sup>54</sup>Fredegair, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegair with Its Continuations*, trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Medieval Classics (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1960), 104.

<sup>55</sup>Oppenheimer, *The Legend of the Ste. Ampoule*, 287.

<sup>56</sup>Einhard, *Early Lives of Charlemagne* 16, trans. A. J. Grant (New York: Cooper Square, 1966), 89.

<sup>57</sup>The records of Charlemagne's coronation (the *Liber Pontificalis*, Royal Frankish Annales, and *Annales Laureshamenses*) proclaim him Emperor of the Romans. See *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis)*, trans. Raymond Davis (Liverpool: 1992), 191; P. D. King, *Charlemagne: Translated Sources* (Lambrigg, Kendal, Cumbria : P.D. King, 1987), 144.

considered the new Constantine.<sup>58</sup> The title “Emperor” was considered to have passed from ancient Rome to the Frankish states when the pope crowned Charlemagne in 800. Contemporary sources indicated the Roman tradition and anointing, “[Charlemagne] was instituted by all as emperor of the Romans. Thereupon, on that same day of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the most holy bishop and pontiff anointed his most excellent son Charles as king with holy oil.”<sup>59</sup> The Roman link was also evident in the contemporary sources in the use of the title “Augustus,” “And after the laudation he was adored by the pope in the manner of the ancient princes and, the title of Patrician being set aside, he was called emperor and Augustus.”<sup>60</sup>

Charlemagne (r. 768-814), after he increased the political unity and expanded the territory, then attempted to minimize the pope’s intervention in Frankish affairs by crowning his own son, Louis I, the Pious (r. 814-840), without papal royal anointing. However, Louis submitted himself to being crowned by Pope Stephen IV two years after the death of his father in 816. Louis was the first sovereign anointed as Emperor by the pope in one ceremony that combined consecration by holy oil (ecclesiastically consecrated with no claim to being avian-sent) and crowning. The inclusion of anointing in the Frankish royal consecration/coronation ceremony was a fixed feature after Louis I. The renowned modern ecclesiastical historian, Williston Walker (1860-1922) of Yale University, indicated the importance of anointing to Louis, “Louis saw his royal and imperial office as a calling from God to defend, expand, and rule the Christian people, a

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<sup>58</sup>Henry Mayr-Harting, “Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation of 800,” *The English Historical Review* 111 (Nov. 1996), 1121.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 1122.

<sup>60</sup>*Annales Lourienses* (801), ed. G. H. Pertz, *G. Scriptores*, (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii aulici Hahniani, 1826), 188.

calling given him by God in his anointing . . . .”<sup>61</sup> Anointing was to play a more definitive role and was to incorporate remnants of Roman avian omens with the Christian dove under Louis’ son, Charles the Bald (r. 840-877).

Hincmar (d. 882), the Archbishop of Rheims who anointed Charles the Bald in 869, is responsible for taking an existing legend about Remi’s ampullae and transforming it into an account that looked like a syncretistic blend of Jesus’ baptism and a Roman Imperial avian omen. Bishop Hincmar, perhaps better known for being a politician and an administrator rather than a theologian,<sup>62</sup> fostered significant changes in the understanding of coronation anointing, and he formed the avian essence of the legend of the *Sainte Ampoule* by adding the notion of the heaven-sent oil by a dove. These changes in the understanding of royal anointing occurred in the midst of dramatic political struggles and overt ecclesiastical vying for power between the pope and the king of the Franks. Hincmar reshaped the preexisting myth for two primary reasons: 1) he was attempting to claim autonomy from Rome for himself, his diocese, and the kingdom, and 2) he wanted to strengthen the tenuous reign of Charles the Bald among the Western Franks, Charles’ newly acquired royal subjects.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Williston Walker *et al.*, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), 243.

<sup>62</sup>See Janet L. Nelson, “Hincmar of Reims on King-making: The Evidence of the Annals of St. Bertin, 861-882,” in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. Janos M. Bak (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), 16-26.

<sup>63</sup>Hincmar also had designs to elevate the role of the bishop above that of the king. At a synod in 881, he said,

So much greater is the responsibility of the priesthood in that they must render account in God’s judgement even for the very kings of men, and by so much greater are the rank and prestige of bishops than of kings because kings are consecrated to their kingship by bishops, but bishops cannot be consecrated by kings (*quia reges in culmen regum sacrantur a pontificibus, pontifices autem a regibus consecrari non possunt*).

J. P. Migne, “Acta of the Synod of St. Macre-de-Fismes,” *Patrologia Latina Database* [full text data base on line]; available from <http://bearcat.baylor.edu/search/tpatrologia+latina/tpatrologia+latina/1,3,5,B/1856>

The ecclesiastical struggle between the pope and the Franks had been gaining momentum since the death of Charlemagne. Charlemagne's progeny quickly lost much of the authority over the Church that Charlemagne had gained. Papal assertion of power in France reached an apogee in the pope's dealings with Hincmar. The Bishop was in danger of losing much of his ecclesiastical authority because of the intervention of the pope in at least two incidents. First, the pope had elevated the bishop of Sens above Hincmar when he was striving to make the See of Rheims the focal point of French ecclesiastical power.<sup>65</sup> Second, Pope Nicholas I (858-867) required Hincmar to reinstate an ousted bishop in Hincmar's jurisdiction. These actions indicated the increased influence of Rome in France, and they directly impacted Hincmar's autonomy.

One of the ways that Hincmar responded to the papal interference in his diocese was by writing the *Life of Saint Remi* in 878, in which he took the notion of oil consecrated by the Church for royal anointing and elevated it to a heaven-sent chrism.<sup>66</sup> Hincmar had opened the tomb of St. Remi in 852 and found two ampullae. The pre-existing legend stated that these flasks were the result of a dying pagan man coming to St. Remi and pleading for Remi to remain with him because he wanted to die a Christian. When Remi asked the priest for oil to anoint the man but none was available, Remi had

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~2460492&FF=&1,0,,1,0; Internet; accessed 28 April 2006. Cited also in J. L. Nelson, "National Synods, Kingship as Office, and Royal Anointing," in *Councils and Assemblies*, ed. G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 55.

<sup>65</sup>Oppenheimer, *The Legend of the Ste. Ampoule*, 32-33.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 3 5.

two empty ampullae placed on the altar, and overnight, God supposedly miraculously filled the flasks with oil sent from heaven.<sup>67</sup>

Hincmar expanded in the *Life of St. Remi* the original story of Remi's heaven-sent oil and tied the account to a dove. Hincmar described the centuries' old description of Remi at Clovis' baptism in a new way. Hincmar said that Remi was unable to reach the oil to anoint Clovis because the crowds were so great and pressed in upon the archbishop. So Remi prayed, "And behold a dove, fairer than snow, suddenly brought down a vial in his mouth full of holy oil! All that were present were delighted with the fragrancy of it, and when the archbishop [Remi] had received it the dove vanished."<sup>68</sup> According to Hincmar, Remi took the small avian-delivered ampulla of chrism and anointed Clovis with it.

Hincmar's description of the flight of a bird for the consecration of a king looked and functioned in ways that were similar to Roman Imperial avian omens as well as the biblical account of the dove at Jesus' baptism. Similar legends of a dove for the election of bishops existed in the early church, as demonstrated in Chapter Three of this dissertation, but Hincmar added oil to the account and applied it to the political realm. The legend removed the point of authentication of the king from the papacy to the oil itself, which would increase Hincmar's authority in regard to the pope. With the heaven-sent oil of the *Sainte Ampoule*, Hincmar could anoint the king apart from ecclesiastical-supplied oil. The independence would strengthen the relationship between Hincmar and

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<sup>67</sup>J. P. Migne, "Vita Sancti Remigi Rhemorum Achiespiscopi, Scripta ab Hincmaro," *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 125, col. 1154.

<sup>68</sup>J. P. Migne, "Vita Sancti Remigi Rhemorum Achiespiscopi, Scripta ab Hincmaro," *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 125, col. 1160, quoted in Arthur Taylor, *The Glory of Regality*, 59 n. 14.



the king and also help establish Rheims, Hincmar's See, as the place for royal consecration since the cathedral there housed the tomb of Saint Remi and his vial of oil.<sup>69</sup>

Hincmar strengthened his defense against papal intervention in the affairs of his diocese by adapting Remi's legend. Hincmar drew a parallel between the baptisms performed by John the Baptist for Jesus and by Remi for Clovis. Hincmar's rationale was that as Jesus had declared John as the greatest person ever born, so too, Remi had similar greatness because he anointed Clovis with oil sent by a dove in the likeness of Jesus' baptism. The comparison raised Remi's importance over that of the bishop of Rome. Since the Bishop of Rome, according to Hincmar's reasoning, was inferior to Remi, the pope could not interfere in Remi's church, the church of Hincmar's See, which still stored the oil that Remi supposedly used to anoint Clovis centuries earlier.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Hincmar clearly defied Roman priority when he anointed Charles the Bald with the "heaven-sent oil" independently of the pope in 869.

In addition to wanting to assert his own independence from Rome, Hincmar aimed to establish Rheims as the ecclesiastical center of France by making the city the exclusive site of all royal inaugural consecrations. Rheims would therefore function in the same way Toledo had for the Visigoths. Hincmar hoped to achieve this preeminence by elevating the importance of St. Remi and the heaven-sent oil. This prominence for Rheims strengthened Hincmar's claims to power and functioned to validate and limit assertions to royal power.

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<sup>69</sup>See Anne Prache, *Saint Remi de Reims: l'oeuvre de Pierre de celle et sa place dans l'architecture gothique* (Geneva: Droz, 1978), 11-18, for a concise early history of the abbey.

<sup>70</sup>J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "History in the Mind of Archbishop Hincmar," in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R. H. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981), 43-70.

Hincmar's flight of the dove with an ampulla of oil bolstered Charles the Bald's claim to power, a purpose analogous to the role of avian omens in the ancient Roman political milieu and to Julian of Toledo's use of supernatural intervention in the consecration of Wamba. In a general sense, the intent of royal anointing was seen to be a way to secure the divinely given attributes needed to fulfill the demands of the royal office. The act of consecration transformed a candidate into a king. The act of anointing was seen to provide the royal claimant with the needed qualities that only God could give for the demands of the state. Royal anointing, like the oil of baptism and the last unction, was transformational, moving a person from death to life.<sup>71</sup>

Charles' specific political situation needed the benefits that the legend of divinely sent oil could provide. Intense conflicts regarding Charles' rise to the throne began during his father's reign, Louis I. The degree of unity in the kingdom that Charlemagne had achieved began to deteriorate quickly under his son Louis. Before the birth of Charles in 823, Louis had three other sons—Lothair I, Pepin II, and Louis the German—with his first wife, Irmengard of Hesbaye. The king allocated various parts of the empire to his first three sons and his nephew, Bernard, in 817 and made them sovereigns of independent kingdoms (he made Lothair the heir of the empire).<sup>72</sup> This distribution of power occurred early in the lives of his first three sons; Lothair, the eldest brother, was just twenty-two years old when Louis made him co-emperor. Louis' actions regarding the distribution of power proved to be disastrous.

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<sup>71</sup>J. L. Nelson, "Symbols in Context: Rulers' Inauguration rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976), 108-110.

<sup>72</sup>See Matt Innes, "Charlemagne's Will: Piety, Politics and Imperial Succession," *The English Historical Review* 12 (Sept. 1997), 833-845, for further discussion on Louis' distribution of power to his sons and Bernard.

Complications set in when Louis' first wife died in 818, and he then married Judith of Bavaria, who in 823 bore Charles II, later called the Bald. The combination of power in the hands of the three youthful kings and Louis setting his affections on the young Charles paved the way for intense sibling rivalry and several civil wars. Trouble escalated in 823 when Pope Paschal crowned Lothair emperor. Louis revised the distribution of the empire to provide land for Charles in 829, at which point Lothair broke with the empire. The three older brothers revolted and went to war with their father in 833. The death of Louis I in 840 sparked another civil war between Lothair and his two brothers, Charles II and Louis the German. The two defeated Lothair and forced him to agree to the Treaty of Verdun in August 843. The terms of the treaty provided Charles II with the territory of the western portion of the empire, roughly the area of present-day France.

Competition with his brothers for land and power was not the only obstacle that Charles II faced in his later ascent to power among the Franks. Charles struggled with continued political decentralization. His vassals were not loyal to him. His rule was weakened from continual raids from the Vikings, and he suffered defeat at the hands of the Bretons. It was in the midst of this royal instability that Hincmar adapted Remi's legend to justify and boost the rule of Charles. Charles' consecration as king by such elevated avian-sent chrism would certainly bolster his claim as king and at the same time affirm the ecclesiastical independence of the Church in France and Hincmar's See based on St. Remi's reputation.

The influence of Hincmar's adapted legend, however, had limited impact for several decades. Hincmar anointed the subsequent king, Louis II, in 877, but Pope John

VIII consecrated the king a second time and refused to anoint his queen. But with an increase in competition for power in the 890s, the legend became prominent again. Charles III, the Simple (r. 898-922), struggled to gain support of the nobles, so Falco, Hincmar's successor, used the legend of heaven-sent oil to strengthen Charles the Third's royal claim and to increase Rheims' assertion as the place for the coronations of French kings. Falco supported his claim for the supremacy of Rheims and the right of Charles III to rule over the upstart royal competitors by using Hincmar's statement about the avian-received oil of Clovis' baptism, the oil stored at the church in Rheims and used to anoint Charles II.<sup>73</sup>

The reign of Robert I (r. 922-923) illustrated the continued growth of the perceived value of the legend of the miraculous oil in the tenth-century political sphere. Robert became a powerful Frankish lord inheriting all the family land after the death of his brother, Eudes, King of the West Franks (888-898). Robert and the Neustrian lords swore allegiance to the new king, Charles III, but nobles later elected Robert, a non-Carolingian, as a rival king because of conflict with Charles. Robert insisted that his anointing take place at the Church of St. Remi with the avian-sent oil because he wanted equal legitimacy with Charles. Richer, the chronicler of Rheims, considered the ceremony outrageous and the new king and archbishop to be neophytes.<sup>74</sup>

Rheims gained its preeminence as the sacred place for the consecration of kings, and Remi's oil acquired a healing status over the next decades. The archbishop of Sens anointed and crowned Raoul (r. 923-936), a non-Carolingian, in the church in Soissons at

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 206.

<sup>74</sup>Richer of Remy, *Histoire de France: 888-995* (Paris: H. Champion, 1937), 247.

the death of Robert. When Raoul became seriously ill in 924, he attributed his sickness to his failure of receiving his consecration by the oil from St. Remi. He went to Rheims, was anointed, and was healthy again within four weeks. When Charles III died in 929, his wife fled to England with their young son, Louis IV (the Foreigner), who was the only remaining Carolingian heir. The nobles chose Louis IV as king in 936, when Raoul died. Louis was anointed and crowned king, thus restoring the Carolingian line, but not in Rheims and not with St. Remi's Oil because of the presence of the plague in the city. Saint Remi's prominence was an influential factor. Louis, who took his role as "God's anointed" seriously, chose Laon as the place of anointing and crowning because of the city's connection with Remi.<sup>75</sup>

The rise of the Capetian Dynasty (987-1328) began a gradual move toward the monarchy becoming politically supreme in France, and St. Remi's oil contributed to the growth of that power.<sup>76</sup> If the nobles who elected Hugh had seen the coming strength of the dynasty, they probably would not have elected him.<sup>77</sup> The Capetian rulers were able gradually to move to supreme power in France, in part, by two factors related to this dissertation. First, they fostered a close relationship with the Church that assisted in creating a sacred image of kingship. Second, the Capetian kings arranged for a smooth

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<sup>75</sup>Elizabeth M. Hallam and Judith Everard, *Capetian France 987-1328*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1980, 2001), 305.

<sup>76</sup>Hugh Capet generally receives credit for founding the dynasty, but he was part of a family that had previously reigned in France known as the Robertines, see Elizabeth M Hallam and Judith Everard, *Capetian France*, 25-26; Robert Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France: Monarch and Nation (987-1328)*, trans. Lionel Butler and R. J. Adam (London: MacMillan, 1960; New York: St. Martin's, 1965), 48. He was the great nephew of Eudes, the great grandson of Robert I, and the nephew of Raoul.

<sup>77</sup>Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France*, 48.

transfer of power to their children through unction that by-passed the intervention of the nobles.<sup>78</sup>

The heaven-sent oil was a main ingredient in elevating the status of the king in both the political and ecclesiastical realms during the Capetian Dynasty. The importance of anointing to Hugh is seen in the expedient anointing of his son Robert, whom he had consecrated shortly after coming to the throne.<sup>79</sup> The oil was perceived to set the kings apart as God's chosen sovereign and allowed them to install their sons as kings. The oil also functioned to decrease the kings' independence from Rome because they were not in need of oil consecrated by a bishop.<sup>80</sup> The legend of St. Remi presented the oil as divinely self-perpetuating, so the French king was able to reduce his need of the pope and the ecclesiastically consecrated oil for coronation.

The Capetians increased their power by being diligent in anointing the princes before the death of the king. Louis VI (r. 1108-1137) signaled the first stage of dynastic growth; his reign indicated the end of Capetian weakness.<sup>81</sup> The heirs preceding him received avian-sent oil at their royal consecrations before the deaths of their fathers. Robert II (r. 996-1031) had his son Henry I (r. 1031-1060) anointed in 1027. Philip I (r. 1060-1108) was crowned in Rheims in 1059, a year before his father's death. Philip designated his son, Louis VI (r. 1108-1137), king in 1098, and Louis was effectively

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<sup>78</sup>See Andrew W. Lewis, "Anticipatory Association of the Heir in Early Capetian France," *The American Historical Review* 82 (1978), 906.

<sup>79</sup>Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France*, 48.

<sup>80</sup>The pope still crowned some kings and the emperors in the Holy Roman Empire.

<sup>81</sup>See Elizabeth M. Hallam, *Capetian France 987-1328*, 145-245; Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France*, 19.

ruling well before the death of his father.<sup>82</sup> The act of anointing aided in establishing a sacred nature for the king.

A second stage of Frankish dynastic growth is discernable with the ability to expand the kingdom's territory and power under Philip II. The practice of anointing princes with avian-sent oil before the death of the king again contributed to the growth of the monarchy's power during this stage of dynastic growth. Pope Innocent II (d. 1143) anointed Louis VII (r. 1137-1180) at Rheims in 1131 with Saint Remi's oil.<sup>83</sup> The pope advised Louis VII in 1171 to have his son, Phillip II, anointed, which Louis did in 1179 at Rheims, a year before the king's death. The reign of Phillip II marked the growth of the Capetian Dynasty from Hugh Capet's kingship, which was only over a small district near Paris, to the geo-politically expanding power of Philip II in all but one king's reign (Louis VI, who was not anointed with Remi's oil).

Hincmar's legend was among the many factors that contributed to the movement toward centralized government in the territories of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Other key issues that fostered centralization included the creation of a standardized form of monetary currency and the provision of armies to protect from invading forces. The advancement in many territories included centralizing power in a monarchy. The process of concentrating power in one person involved in part creating a royal, sacred image of the sovereign and limiting the available places for coronation. The legend of the avian-delivered oil contributed to the demise of the Frankish decentralized feudal system by providing a stronger image of kings as God's divinely consecrated rulers. Limiting coronations to Rheims on the basis of it housing the sacred oil eliminated potential rival

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<sup>82</sup>See Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France*, 48.

<sup>83</sup>Lewis, "Anticipatory Association of the Heir," 925.

cities from producing viable royal candidates (only four royal inaugurations occurred outside Rheims before the nineteenth century: Louis VI in Orleans, 1108; Henry VI in Paris, 1431; Henri IV in Chartres, 1553; and Napoleon in Paris, 1804. The archbishop of Rheims attempted to stop the coronation of Louis VI in Chartres on the basis that the Church at Rheims had the responsibility of consecrating kings because they had St. Remi's oil sent by a dove).<sup>84</sup>

The legend of *Sainte Ampoule* was the most important factor in changing the French coronation service to a consecration ceremony known as a *sacre*, and at the heart of this ceremony was Remi's oil that set the king apart.<sup>85</sup> The consecration of Henry I (r. 1031-1060) was pivotal in highlighting the sacerdotal character in the coronation of French kings. The nobles elected Henry in 1026 while his father, Robert II (r. 996-1031), still reigned. Robert organized the consecration ceremony for his son Henry in 1027. Robert's eldest son had died, and Robert was searching for some kind of divine protection for his younger son, Henry. Robert was familiar with Hincmar's writings including the description of Charles the Bald's anointing and consecration with holy oil delivered by a dove.<sup>86</sup> Robert found spiritual comfort in the use of the oil for Henry's anointing and identified it as St. Remi's oil for anointing previous Carolingian kings—the oil sent from heaven at Clovis' baptism. Robert gave consent for St. Remi's oil to be

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<sup>84</sup>Oppenheimer, *The Legend of the Ste. Ampoule*, 257 lists only three kings (Louis VI, Henri IV, and Napoleon) and fails to list Henry VI..

<sup>85</sup>For fuller treatment on the changes in the coronation services, see C. A. Bouman, *Sacring and Crowning: the Development of the Latin Ritual for the Anointing of Kings and the Coronation of an Emperor before the Eleventh Century* (Groningen, Djakarta: J. B. Wolters, 1957), 1-27, 80-147.

<sup>86</sup>Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels*, 210.



called St. Remi's Ampoule.<sup>87</sup> This change increased the emphasis on the container as also being divinely received from heaven, no doubt a reflection of the importance of relics at the time.

The notion of consecrating the French king and not merely crowning him began to have implications in the thirteenth century beyond the French geographical boundaries.

Colette Beaune of the University of Paris points out the long tradition the French monarchs had of holding the title "Most Christian" from the time of Charlemagne and Pepin. The title evolved to include the king and kingdom exclusively and regularly:

Then, in the last of the decades of the Middle Ages, the idea [of most Christian] was given a new twist. From an occasional reference, it became a regular title: "most Christian" became the sole property of the king of France and his dynasty, an empowering justification for his independence, raising him and his kingdom above the claims of both Church and Imperium.<sup>88</sup>

One writer in the thirteenth century said, "There are many Christian nations, but the first among them is France, and the French are pure Catholic."<sup>89</sup> Most significantly for this dissertation, the French king Philip IV used this notion of superiority in 1312, six years before the appearance of the myth of heaven-sent oil in England:

The Most-High Lord Jesus, having discovered in this kingdom more than in any other part of the world a stable foundation for the holy faith and the Christian religion and having decided that the greatest devotion to him, his vicars, and his ministers was to be found there, decided to honor it above all kingdoms and principalities with a number of prerogatives and singular favors.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Oppenheimer, *The Legend of the Sainte Ampoule*, 244.

<sup>88</sup>Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of the Nation in the Late-Medieval France*, ed. Fredrick L. Cheyett, trans. Susan Ross Haston (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 172-173.

<sup>89</sup>Jacques De Vitry, quoted in Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 17-18.

<sup>90</sup>Cited in Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 176.

The special status of France given by Christ, according to Philip included “singular favors.” The *Ampoule* most likely would have had to be included in Philip’s list. The relic was truly singular; no other country had the privilege of a divinely given heaven-sent oil. The *Sainte Ampoule* contributed to the notion of both the king and the kingdom as the recipients of divine consecration and favored status. The king traced his sacred nature back to his anointment.

The beginning of the thirteenth century witnessed ecclesiastical challenges to the rising influence of the French monarchy, which was in part due to the practice of anointing. Peter Lombard, a twelfth-century theologian and bishop, limited the number of sacraments to seven. Although anointing of priests was included in the seven sacraments, the *sacring* of the king failed to be included. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), who represented the height of medieval papal power, attempted in 1204 to reduce the non-clerical influence in the Church and increase the power of the Church in secular matters by differentiating between priestly and royal anointment. The priest was to receive chrism on the head; the king, however, was to have only holy oil, but not on his head.<sup>91</sup> The hope was to reduce the king’s ecclesiastical influence by consecrating him with a less dignified unguent and thereby reducing his status below that of a bishop. Both England and France continued to use chrism and applied it to the king’s head in defiance of Innocent’s pronouncement.<sup>92</sup> The plan failed in France partly because of the status of Remi’s oil. The majority of the Church affirmed the limitation of the

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<sup>91</sup>Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: a Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 319-321; P. E. Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1937), 119.

<sup>92</sup>Anne R. Sutton and P. W. Hammond, eds., *The Coronation of Richard III: The Extant Documents* (New York: St. Martins, 1983), 6. The *ordo* of 1308 in England also called for anointing the head of the king with chrism.

sacraments to seven except in France where they held to an eighth, the consecration of the king with the oil sent from heaven.<sup>93</sup>

The first mention of the *Sainte Ampoule* by that specific name was in connection with the consecration of Louis VIII in 1223.<sup>94</sup> The second reference to the *Sainte Ampoule* from that era was the *Ordo of Rheims*, composed during the period of 1260 to 1273.<sup>95</sup> The *Ordo* became the standard guide for subsequent French consecration ceremonies, and the document gave detailed information regarding the handling of the relic, practices that were later copied in England with the handling of the Ampulla.<sup>96</sup> The Grand Prior of St. Remi's Cathedral woke early on the day of coronation and went on a specifically chosen white horse to the abbey where the oil was stored. He received the *Sainte Ampoule* and wore it around his neck. A massive procession, which included singing monks and two to three hundred knights, accompanied him as he took the relic from the abbey, through the streets of Rheims, to the Cathedral. Four barons carried poles that held a canopy over the *Ampoule*. Similar traditions would later be manifested in England's handling of the Ampulla.

When the Grand Prior reached the church, he rode his horse inside the church up to deliver the *Ampoule*. The bishop ascended to the altar with the ampulla and displayed it for all to see, while the king and congregation stood in reverence for the relic. The archbishop mixed a small amount of oil from the *Sainte Ampoule* with Chrism and

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<sup>93</sup>See Jackson, *Vive Le Roi!*, 31. Jackson is confused regarding the Councils; he mistakenly cited the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 as the council that limited the sacraments to seven. Peter Lombard limited the number to seven in *Sentences*. The Council of Florence in 1439 officially limited the number of sacraments.

<sup>94</sup>See Jackson, *Vive Le Roi!*, 31-32; Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels*, 208.

<sup>95</sup> For the texts and commentary of French *ordos*, see Jackson, *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*.

<sup>96</sup>See Chapter Five for similar practices.

anointed the king in five places: the head, breast, between the shoulders, and on each shoulder. The hands were added to the list in the fourteenth century.<sup>97</sup> The anointing was the focal point of the coronation ceremony.

The *Ordo* underwent another important change in the fourteenth century at the consecration of Charles V (r. 1364-1380). Charles had produced a new *Ordo* and deposited an official copy of it at the abbey of Saint Denis with the coronation regalia. The most notable change for this study was the adoption of a hymn for the reception of the *Ampoule*. This hymn demonstrated that the significance of *Sainte Ampoule* had expanded from only domestic to include nationalist concerns. The importance of the ampulla moved to incorporate a new growing spirit of nationalism and the use of the relic to foster patriotism. The newly added hymn read, “St. Remigius, having received the chrism from heaven, consecrated with a holy flood the illustrious nation of the French together with their noble king and enriched them with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>98</sup> The hymn stated that the benefits of the chrism from heaven, which were formerly only for the king, were now extended to “the illustrious nation of the French,” the French kingdom was now considered consecrated along with the king as a benefit of the *Ampoule*. These benefits of the king’s anointing now included the kingdom being able to make such claims as the “most Christian” country. This nationalistic notion in the *Ordo* occurred in the midst of two pivotal developments: 1) more nations were receiving the rite of royal anointing, and 2) France was entangled with England in the Hundred Years’ War (1337-1443).

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<sup>97</sup>Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels*, 214; Jackson, *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, 17.

<sup>98</sup>See Jackson, *Vive Le Roi!*, 33-34.

Earlier in the history of the *Sainte Ampoule*, the relic served primarily to distinguish the king from other candidates within the kingdom. However, with the growth of nationalism came the need to differentiate the French king from other European kings, and the legend evolved to include the kingdom of France. Kingdoms in the twelfth century competitively sought the right of papal anointing of the sovereign. Only five monarchs had the right of papal anointing at the beginning of the century: the kings of France, England, Jerusalem, Sicily, and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Twenty-two other states had applied to Rome for royal anointing, but Rome had denied them.<sup>99</sup> The number of states that could anoint began to burgeon later in the century: Norway got the right in 1163, Denmark in 1170, and Sweden in 1210. Consequently, France was losing its distinctiveness. Anointing had become a competitive issue in Western Europe in the thirteenth century. For example, Rome had denied Scotland's request for the right to royal anointing in 1221 because Henry III of England objected. He argued that the Scottish request was a design to avoid devotion to their rightful king, the king of England.<sup>100</sup> Scotland finally received the rite in 1329, which in part was the result of the victory of Robert the Bruce of Bannockburn over the English.

The legend of the *Sainte Ampoule* provided a superior status to the French ruler over all European kings, including those who had papal consent of royal consecration by anointing. The French king had chrism that was completely unique from all other nations. This holy and miraculously given ointment set the French monarchs apart in the

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<sup>99</sup>Barker, *The Symbols of Sovereignty*, 164.

<sup>100</sup>Schramm, *A History of English Coronations*, 130.

midst of more European kings enjoying the political benefits of consecration by the anointing from Rome, especially the English monarch.

Consecration as the Holy Roman Emperor was also unique but paled in political efficacy to the French legend in the decades leading up to the appearance of the English legend of the Ampulla. The notion of the continuance of the imperial Roman Empire had been prolonged and nurtured in the East at Constantinople. The crowning of Charlemagne by the pope in 800 revived the Roman Empire in the West as an ideological force of a universal source of authority. A seal of Charlemagne from that era reads, “*Renovatio Romani Imperii*. ”<sup>101</sup> Hope of a Western Roman Empire gained strength and clarity at the coronation of Otto I. His consecration marks the beginning of the Holy Roman Empire. Otto was elected, anointed, and seated on Charlemagne’s throne in 936, but those actions did not make him the emperor. To be emperor, Otto had to be anointed and crowned by the pope in Rome, and that did not happen for another twenty-six years.<sup>102</sup> The standard into the fourteenth century was that only the pope could crown an emperor and the consecration had to occur in Rome, a situation that gave the advantage to the pope in the growing intensity of the struggle for power between the Church and state, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the time of the first appearance of the English Ampulla.

The idea of a universal monarch, the consecrated emperor, had so much appeal as a political ideology that it did not die in this period even if recognized as impractical. The longing for universal unity in the midst of war-torn kingdoms and strife that resulted

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<sup>101</sup>See James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (London: MacMillan, 1919), 102-103.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 182.

from the growth of national awareness remained a hope in these centuries.<sup>103</sup> Writers of the era, both jurists and poets, placed hope in the centralized government of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>104</sup> Yet, consecration as the Holy Roman Emperor failed to achieve the same effectiveness and dignity that the *Sainte Ampoule* brought. Anointing as emperor did not have the miraculous aspect of the French legend and failed to bring the status that French monarchs enjoyed. By the time of Rudolf I of Hapsburg (1273-1291), the Empire had become conspicuously weak. All the kingdoms in Europe were moving toward a stronger centralized government except in Germany whose unity had fragmented with various princes becoming more independent.<sup>105</sup>

These centuries, the thirteenth through fifteenth, were a tumultuous time of transition and vying for power between ecclesiastical and royal authority as well as among competing kingdoms. The nations that did not have papal anointing were pursuing the rite for their kings in order to be on par with other monarchies. Other nations were losing their distinctiveness and perceived superiority as more nations gained the right to papal anointing. France could maintain an advantage through the uniqueness of the *Sainte Ampoule*, international advantages even over the Holy Roman Emperor. The power and influence of the emperor suffered at the end of the thirteen century and the beginning of the fourteenth. These issues surrounding anointing and the Holy Roman Empire and Church/state tensions, however, rightly belong to the next chapter and the

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<sup>103</sup>J. H. Burns, *Lordship, Kingship, and Empire: the Idea of Monarchy, 1400-1525*, The Carlyle Lectures 1988 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992), 97.

<sup>104</sup>See Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 256-259.

<sup>105</sup>Bryce points out, that Pope Gregory X “compelled the recognition of Rudolf, who subsequently (1279) admitted in a letter to Pope Nicholas III that the Germans owed the imperial crown to the Papacy. His son Albert I, anxious for the support of Boniface III against the German archbishops made a similarly humiliating acknowledgement of the alleged right of transfer.” Ibid., 220-231.

discussion of the factors immediately surrounding the creation of the English myth of heavenly sent oil.

The second circumstance that surrounded the new French emphasis of the *Sainte Ampoule* was the Hundred Years' War between France and England, a conflict that fueled feelings of national identity. The war had a number of causes. The situation in Flanders generated tension, the area was the source of wool for the English, but its local ruler was French. The English were eager to regain French land they had acquired under Henry II, and the French desired to eliminate all the English from French territory.

A significant event for starting the war, which is important for this study, was the attempt of the English king, Edward III (r. 1327-1377), to claim the French throne. The direct male line of the Capetians died with Charles IV (r. 1322-1328), and Philip VI (r. 1328-1350) of the House of Valois ascended to the French throne. In the midst of the change of dynasties, Edward made a hereditary claim to the French throne; his mother, Isabella, was the daughter of Philip IV of France (r. 1285-1314). The French denial of Edward's hereditary argument sparked the war and undoubtedly ignited competitive feelings between France and England regarding the monarchy. The new French *Ordo* of Charles V indicated that God favored both Philip and the French people in the midst of royal competition and war with England.

One other aspect of the war regarding the importance of Remi's avian-delivered oil deserves mention: the influence of Joan of Arc on the consecration of Charles VII (r. 1422-1461). Joan purposed to lead the un-crowned Charles to Rheims for his consecration with the holy oil so that he could fully claim his kingdom. She reflected the popular belief of the necessity for a royal candidate to be consecrated and crowned to be



a fully constituted king. Joan's successful journey from Tours de Troyes to Rheims resulted in a favorable turn in the war for the French and in Joan's becoming a national heroine. Joan's connection with the supernatural world through her visions and her royal mission complemented the legend of the holy oil at Rheims and helped to promote the popularity of the sacred ointment.<sup>106</sup>

The French people also maintained a towering regard for Remi's oil. They referred to the monarch, in light of his anointing with St. Remi's holy oil, as "the *only* [emphasis added] priest-king upon the earth."<sup>107</sup> *Sainte Ampoule* had gained profound domestic and foreign importance for the French people; the French used the legend to promote the superiority of their king in the midst of growing competitive nationalistic spirit.

The legend of *Sainte Ampoule* involved a dove, which had clear biblical connections with the anointing at Jesus' baptism. But does the legend have any Roman Imperial connections with the flight of a bird? Were the French aware of Roman tradition in the centuries following the fall of Rome? This concern is the topic of the final section of this chapter.

### *Roman Traditions and the Sainte Ampoule*

The legend of *Sainte Ampoule* had the markings of syncretism from its initial formation by Hincmar at the consecration of Charles the Bald in 869: it was the flight of a bird designating a ruler as divinely chosen. Given the profound influence avian omens

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<sup>106</sup>See Frances Gies, *Joan of Arc* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 1-5, 101-112; Regine Pernoud and Marie V. Clin, *Joan of Arc: Her Story*, trans. Jeremy Adams (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 53-68.

<sup>107</sup>Cited in Herbert Thurston, *The Coronation Ceremonial: Its True History and Meaning* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1911), 37.

had on the political and civic life of Imperial Rome, especially in confirming the divine selection of Roman emperors, the Franks, who were familiar with Roman culture and literature, would likely associate a bird at an inauguration of a king with augury. The pressing question in this chapter is whether Rome, with its emphasis on imperial divination by the flight of birds, had any lasting affect on France during the time of the legend's creation and use. Three pieces of evidence point to an affirmative answer: the French linked their origins to Rome, inaugural celebrations in Rheims had Roman themes, and the French were responsible for preserving and were thus familiar with much of the Latin literature from the Roman Imperial period, especially the literature rich in the use of avian omens regarding the election and confirmation of Roman emperors.

### *Trojan/Roman Origins of the French*

Medieval French historiography sought to enhance the pedigree of its people by tracing their national origins through the Romans.<sup>108</sup> Both political and popular literature repeatedly utilized the myth that the French were of the Trojan bloodline, which made them at least on par with the Romans who shared that same heritage. The French considered themselves equal to the once world superpower of the Roman Empire on the basis that both the Romans and the Franks were of common ancestry. The hereditary claims began as early as the seventh-century when a writer claimed Priam, the Trojan king and Hector's father according to Homer, as the first Frankish king.<sup>109</sup> Francus, from whom the French gained their name, was the supposed son of Hector and the son-in-law

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<sup>108</sup>For a brief treatment, see George Huppert, "The Trojan Franks and Their Critics," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 227-241; Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 226-244.

<sup>109</sup>Huppert, "The Trojan Franks," 227.

of Remus, one of the founding brothers of Rome.<sup>110</sup> The French kings used such comparisons to claim that their kingdoms and reigns were destined to be as widespread as that of Rome and Roman emperors.

French claims for Roman ancestry were made for both the king and the Frankish kingdom, and the association with ancient Rome saturated literature throughout the Middle Ages. Kings traced their lineage to Troy through Rome, and by 1080, noble families did the same.<sup>111</sup> Abbot Ado of Montierender wrote in the tenth century, “The kingdom of the Romans is in great part destroyed, but as long as the kings of France survive, who ought to rule the Roman Empire, then its dignity will not perish entirely, but will live in them.”<sup>112</sup> Between 1370 and 1435, the same period of the advent of the eagle Ampulla in England, allusions to the Imperial Romans circulated as part of French evidence of special alliance between God and France and the resulting superiority of France over other kingdoms. The point of origination of these comparisons was Hincmar: “. . . the kingdom would belong to the line of Clovis, which would reign most nobly, assist the Holy Church, and be clothed in the dignity of the Romans, and would be victorious over other nations as long as it remained in the path of the truth and faith.”<sup>113</sup> French authors from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries claimed that France was the last Empire, which the Romans transferred directly to the Franks. After 1435, the French generally held that God had renewed a covenant promise with them that would endure to the end of time: “France has succeeded Rome, and the Empire will nevermore be

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<sup>110</sup>Jackson, *Vive Le Roi!*, 179.

<sup>111</sup>For further evidence and examples, see Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 226.

<sup>112</sup>Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 101, col. 1295.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 181.

transferred . . . the monarch of France has already lasted longer than that of the Babylonia, of Macedonia, and of the Romans.”<sup>114</sup> The myth of Trojan/Roman origin provided a source of unity for the French, especially during the Hundred Years’ War, the same period of the birth of the English Ampulla myth.

### *Roman Themes in Inauguration Celebrations*

Roman culture was also a point of comparison in the consecration ceremonies and inaugural celebrations of French kings. Rheims, the city of inaugurations, claimed a Roman origin, asserting that Remus founded it after he was evicted from Rome. Rheims celebrated the king’s coronation entrance into the city by displaying various kinds of artwork and banners that often had Roman themes. When Charles VIII entered the city in 1482, a tableau connected the French/Roman relationship with the baptism of Clovis. The inscription of the middle panel read, “The French, descended from the Trojans, pagans called Sicambrians, made Pharamond their first king; he created Salic law for them and freed them from the Romans who ruled over all men at that time. This happened in the year of grace four hundred twenty.”<sup>115</sup> This panel indicated that part of the French claim to greatness was being freed from Rome earlier than other nations. The first panel of this tableau depicted the Trojan origin of France; the third panel showed the baptism of Clovis and the revered Holy Ampulla. The entire tableau connected the Imperial Roman and French superiority with the legend of *Sainte Ampoule*.

The *Sainte Ampoule* received noteworthy recognition again in Rheims at the coronation of Louis XIII in 1610. An arch in the city, erected for the celebration,

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Cited in Jackson, *Viva Le Roi!*, 178.

depicted Clovis and a dove with a description indicating that he had acquired the kingdom by valor and chrism. Another inscription read, “Rome still sighs for our kings” and that the anointing with the *Ampoule* “provided for them the Empire of the world.”<sup>116</sup> Such a claim put the French kings at least on par with the Roman emperors and made them superior, especially over England, because of French anointment with the *Sainte Ampoule*. Another inscription at Louis’ coronation provided direct reference to the Roman Imperial eagle:

Of the noble blood of Troy mixed with Latin blood was born the great Caesar who marshaled under the eagle the empire of almost all the earth and the sea. And you [Louis], being born of the blood of Troy and Remus, true Caesar of the French, you are predestined to submit the Empire of this world to the rule of the three lilies [of France].<sup>117</sup>

This inscription used the avian symbolism of Roman world dominance as represented by Imperial eagles. The themes at the coronation of Louis XIII brought together a blend of Christian and Roman symbolism to proclaim the greatness of France in the likeness of Rome. Both the dove in the narrative of the *Sainte Ampoule* and the Roman Eagle pointed to the destined greatness of France.

### *Imperial Roman Literature in Medieval France*

The enduring influence of Rome in medieval France was evident in the literary world. Charlemagne had instigated a renaissance of learning in the early 800s, just before Hincmar’s creation of the avian-sent oil. This educational renewal included the preservation of a significant number of the ancient Roman and Christian literary pieces available today. Many of the oldest extant Latin classics are the direct results of

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 175-181.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 181-182.

Charlemagne's reforms. This wealth of Imperial Roman materials was accessible and utilized at the time Hincmar produced his legend about the avian-sent oil at Charles' consecration as king. Hincmar likely had access to these documents because other writers of that period demonstrated influence from classic literature. However, did this Latin literature portray accounts of augury?

The availability of Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* is of particular interest for this study. Suetonius, as noted in Chapter One, provided the greatest number of descriptions and the most detailed accounts of Roman Imperial avian omens of any other writer in the Roman period and all of history. Suetonius provides multiple examples of emperors who advanced their claims to power by augury. The oldest and best copy of Suetonius' work available today is a ninth century codex (Parisinus 6115), which is now in the National Library of Paris; this manuscript originally came from the monastery of St. Martin of Tours in Marmoutiers, France.<sup>118</sup>

However, not only was *Lives of the Caesars* copied and stored at the French monastery, but Suetonius' work also had influence on other works contemporary with Hincmar. For example, Einhard (ca. 770-840), who produced *Vita Karoli Magni (Life of Charles the Great)* around 833, wrote, according to the late Professor John C. Rolfe of the University of Pennsylvania, "on the model of Suetonius, perhaps using the manuscript which is the archetype of those that have come down to us."<sup>119</sup> Thirty-six years before Hincmar's use of the descent of a dove in the defense of Charles the Bald,

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<sup>118</sup>J. C. Rolfe, "The Life and Works of Suetonius," in *Suetonius with an English Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), xxii.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, xiv. It is generally agreed that Einhard used Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* in his writing.

another author had used Suetonius as a model to herald the greatness of Charles the Great.<sup>120</sup> An awareness of the importance of Imperial avian omens to the Romans existed at the time of Hincmar's creation of the account of Clovis' heaven sent dove among a people who strove to be superior to the ancient empire.

### *Summary*

At the heart of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule* was a descent of a dove with special heavenly oil for Clovis' baptism, which St. Remi used in the baptism of the king. The founding three elements of the myth—anointing, baptism, and a dove—had long been a trilogy in Christianity before there was any hint of a myth involving a miraculous dove with an ampulla of oil at Clovis' baptism. The early Church had combined the three elements in its interpretation of the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove to anoint Jesus at his baptism. The early Church crystallized the connection of anointing, baptism, and the Spirit in its practice and theology of the rite of baptism.

The use of oil for the purpose of consecration evolved quickly in the Church to include distinctions in various types of oil for particular applications. The church recognized chrism, a blend of plain olive oil and balsam, as a precious type of unguent and a special vehicle of the Spirit that was for such high events as confirmation and ordination of priests and bishops. The distinction in types and applications of oils along with the notion of the Spirit anointing Jesus at his baptism led to artistic depictions of the

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<sup>120</sup>It must be pointed out that Einhard, in the likeness of Suetonius, used a variety of portents to affirm the greatness of Charles but an avian omen was not one of them. However, even if Einhard had appealed to augury, such a citation would not prove that Hincmar incorporated a Roman augural notion in his account of Clovis' baptism. The point here is simply that Suetonius' writings were present and influential in the era in which Hincmar wrote and that the use of avian omens for bolstering the claims to the divinely given right to rule was salient in Suetonius' work. The likelihood that Hincmar utilized a Roman method of avian confirmation in his attempts to strengthen Charles' the Bald's claim to the Frankish throne is enhanced by the presence and use of Suetonius in Hincmar's time.

baptismal dove with one or two ampullae in its beak. This artistic representation was a forerunner in the evolution of the legend of Clovis' baptism.

Many of the dynamics between Church and State in the early Middle Ages centered on this distinction of oils. From royal anointing with oil, the Church gained the benefit and power of consecrating kings as heads of State, who then became defenders of the Church. Kings also benefited from anointing with special oil, which set them and their sons above the nobles and often provided the kings greater influence in ecclesiastical affairs.

The conversion and baptism of Clovis as the first Christian king of the Franks and the only Orthodox (non-Arian) northern king was a watershed for centuries of Church/State relations and the future development of the legend of heaven-sent oil. His anointing was for baptism, not for royal consecration, but the act instigated a close and enduring bond between the Franks and the pope. Scholars generally agree that St. Remi actually did baptize Clovis in the sixth century, but there is no extant evidence of avian-sent oil until Hincmar's creation of St. Remi's myth in the ninth century.

Pepin I established the Carolingian Dynasty and introduced royal anointing as a political and religious means to bolster claims to the Frankish throne. His anointment by the pope assisted him in usurping the Merovingian Dynasty. The anointment of his sons set a precedent that helped in the peaceful transference of power to the king's heirs. Pepin's son, Charlemagne, attempted to avoid papal involvement and crowned his own son, Louis I. Louis, however, was anointed by the pope after his father's death, and anointing then became a fixed part of imperial consecration services. The importance of anointing hit a high point under Louis' son, Charles the Bald, when Hincmar created the



legend of St. Remi's avian-delivered oil. The legend failed to maintain consistent significance in the remaining Carolingian royal consecrations.

The importance of Remi's oil grew in conjunction with the Capetian Dynasty beginning in the eleventh century through the thirteenth when both became preeminent. The synergistic relationship between the growth of monarchical power and anointing with the avian-sent oil impacted and included three trends: the centralizing of power in the monarch, the anointing of princes while the king was still alive, and the growth in the importance of Rheims as the place of French coronation services. St. Remi's oil set France apart ecclesiastically during this period. The legend played a central role in thwarting papal attempts to assert power, especially with Pope Innocent III. The Church had limited the sacraments to seven (*sacring* the king was not included). Innocent further attempted to limit kings' ecclesiastical influence by restricting their access to consecration by oil. The French considered Remi's oil to be divinely self-perpetuating, and they maintained consecrating the king as the eighth sacrament.

The legend of *Sainte Ampoule* was at its historical apogee in the fourteenth century both domestically and abroad. The two main factors that catapulted the myth's significance were the competition among nations to gain the right of royal consecration approved by Rome and the Hundreds Years' War between France and England. During this time, the benefits of the oil were extending beyond the French king, as the greatest earthly king, to the French people.

The legend appeared syncretistic, joining Christian and pagan Roman notions, from its inception with Hincmar in the ninth century. Roman influence remained strong in medieval France. The French considered themselves to be on par with Rome because

they saw their origins coming from Troy passing through Rome. The coronation celebrations of later medieval consecration ceremonies at Rheims provided clear connections with Rome, the imperial eagle, and Clovis' baptism. France was a premier location in the Middle Ages for the preservation of Latin classics. Among the numerous works preserved was Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, the foremost ancient authority on Roman augury. Not only did the French preserve Suetonius' works, writers contemporary with Hincmar used Suetonius as a model. The French use of the avian-sent ampulla was syncretistic from the start.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Descent of an Eagle in England

After centuries of having a royal inaugural anointing that lacked the mystic and miraculous nature of France's divinely given *Sainte Ampoule*, England finally discovered its own legend in 1318, the heaven-sent oil that Thomas Becket had supposedly received in the twelfth century. It is surprising that while scholars have done some work on the Holy Oil of Becket,<sup>1</sup> which ceased to exist sometime in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, they have largely neglected treatment of the historical significance of the miraculous dispenser of that oil, the Ampulla, which is still used in coronation ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> This absence of work is especially noteworthy given the value of coronation symbolism for understanding European political and ecclesiastical development. Furthermore, the symbolism of consecration was a paramount concern in the development of the concept of kingship, for it was at this moment that the person was transformed into a sovereign on whom the future of the kingdom depended. The monarch also represented the dignity and fortune of the people to the world. The fourteenth century was a dramatic period of evolution and transformation in the concepts

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<sup>1</sup>For more recent treatment, see Walter Ullmann, "Thomas Becket's Miraculous Oil," *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (April 1957): 129-133, and T. A. Sandquist, "The Holy Oil of St. Thomas of Canterbury," in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 330-344.

<sup>2</sup>Harvey D. Sitwell, *The Crown Jewels and Other Regalia in the Tower of London* (London: Dropmore, 1953), 5, is one of the few who comment on the possible background of an eagle in the consecration of the English monarch: "The eagle shape of the Ampulla is no doubt a survival from the Imperial Eagle of Western Europe." He makes no further explanation or comment.

of kingship and the separation of Church and state in Western Europe,<sup>3</sup> the very time of the burgeoning of the English legend of royal anointing with oil that was divinely provided.

The Church generally retained the upper hand in Church/state power struggles in the Middle Ages until approximately the beginning of the fourteenth century. The papacy had established itself as the legitimate source of royal authority up to this time. Kings in the Frankish states received their anointing from bishops even before Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne in 800, and Pope John XII (955-964) crowned Otto as emperor in 962, which began a tradition of papal crowning of the emperor that lasted to the 1500s.<sup>4</sup> Many Western European kings during this era looked to the Church as a crucial source to confirm their right to power. Gradually over this period, kings began to seek ways to achieve control apart from the Church, and they could choose two means toward this autonomy: sacred or secular. The sacred or secular symbolism that kings and territories chose to utilize in coronation services both promoted and reflected changes in the establishment of royal power apart from the Church.

The French represented the sacred model of founding kingship independently from Rome. They had the *Sainte Ampoule*, a revered source of royal consecration that could be free of the papacy. French kings were not dependent on a bishop or pope to sanctify the oil that consecrated them for kingship; their unique oil was heaven-sent and divinely self-perpetuating, which helped to limit papal influence in the process of king-making. The symbolism of the *Sainte Ampoule* generally reflected a submissive people

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<sup>3</sup>See Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: an Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 135-181.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 140.

and clergy who promoted the dignity of the French king, and the relic symbolized a descending view of power.<sup>5</sup> The French coronation depicted the king's power as coming from above; he received it from God, not from the people or the clergy. The *Sainte Ampoule* promoted a royal image and identity that was sacred and divinely appointed; the French king was primarily an agent of Christ, not of the pope or the people.

Coronations in Spain were significantly different from what was occurring in France and England. Castile utilized a more secular means in its attempts to break free of the influence of Rome in the process of king-making. Castilian kings, in their desire to eclipse the perception that the Church established their power, eliminated much of the clerical participation in the symbolism of royal consecration. The king of Castile knelt before a statue of Saint James that had a mechanical arm with a sword in its hand. In the inauguration ceremony, the mechanical arm lowered the sword to dub the king and thus established his right to the throne apart from the clergy. The Castilian symbolism generally reflected an ascending view of authority; power came from below, from the people.<sup>6</sup> The various symbolic rites in these two countries were crucial in representing the endowment of power and the transformation of an individual from a private person to

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<sup>5</sup>Walter Ullmann is a key historian for promoting the theory of conflicting notions of power in the Middle Ages. See *A History of Political Thought: the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 12-13, 20-23). Although critics such as Francis Oakley, "Celestial Hierarchies Revisited: Walter Ullmann's Version of Medieval Politics," *Past and Present* 60 (1973): 3-48, have rightly pointed out that Ullmann's views were too simplistic, he has according to Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, "magnified what are uncontestedly competing tendencies in late medieval life and society" (136-137).

<sup>6</sup>For a general yet fuller treatment, see Denys Hay, *Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 45-163; George Holmes, *Europe: Hierarchy and Revolt, 1320-1450* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), chapters 2 and 4.

a corporate, public persona of the monarch who had the right to rule apart from papal influence.<sup>7</sup>

English kings relied heavily upon anointing to establish their right to authority and thus followed a descending model of power. The great Elizabethan poet and playwright William Shakespeare provided a clue to the importance of royal anointing when his King Richard II stated in his defense against Henry Bolingbroke's attempts to depose him,

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the land;  
For everyman that Bolingbroke hath press'd  
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown  
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay  
A glorious angel; then, if angels fight,  
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.<sup>8</sup>

Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV) was successful in usurping the crown from an anointed king, and Henry's coronation in 1399 was the first time an English king enjoyed the same consecration symbolism as was present in the French monarch's heaven-sent oil.

Late-medieval English kings emphasized their religious and mystical quality in a variety of ways to strengthen the domestic and Continental perception of their power. Association with King Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-1066) was one of the ways that English kings fortified their spiritual image. Henry II (r. 1154-1189) attempted to validate his royal authenticity by initiating and promoting the cult of Edward. Pope

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<sup>7</sup>Other elements that were part of the divine transformation included such things as investiture with the insignia, the coronation, enthronement, banquets, and other lesser events. The rites reflected outward and inward as well as political and sacred transformation of the person into the sovereign. For a fuller treatment, see Schramm, *A History of English Coronation*, 1-10.

<sup>8</sup>William Shakespeare, *King Richard*, Act III, .Scene 2, lines 54-62.

Alexander III canonized Edward in 1161, and in 1163, Henry II exhumed Edward's remains for a new shrine in Westminster monastery, the place of Edward's coronation and of all subsequent English monarchs. The English now had a king who was a saint; such a claim was unique propaganda for Western Europe for promoting the image of kingship. Edward's name and his regalia appeared in all the English coronation oaths after this date.

Many historians correctly treat Thomas' Holy Oil as a source of English royal image-making domestically but often fail to address the European circumstances that influenced the development of the legend. Scholars tend to interpret the Holy Oil solely as the result of English kings' (especially Henry II) attempts to bolster their royal image on the island. T. A. Sandquist of the University of Toronto, for example, seems to imply that foreign influence regarding the Holy Oil was insignificant:

The prophecy [of the legend of the Ampulla] may be nothing more than the English counterpart of the French legend of the Sainte Ampoule. Thus its origin may not be found in any specific event or series of events but rather in the desire of the English to have an oil for the unction of their kings with as miraculous an origin as the oil of Clovis.<sup>9</sup>

Sandquist's statement fails to consider that "specific events or series of events" on the Continent could be the pressing factors that occasioned the legend. Furthermore, Sandquist, like many historians, neglects two other important questions in relation to the English myth. Why was an eagle in the legend, and could the English have been attempting to surpass the legend of the French *Sainte Ampoule* and not merely match it? This chapter aims to demonstrate the political and ecclesiastical urgencies, both domestic and foreign, that led to the syncretistic solution (combining both the sacred and secular models of king-making) in the creation of the English eagle Ampulla.

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<sup>9</sup>Sandquist, "The Holy Oil of St. Thomas," 335-336.

The chapter will begin by examining the origin of the legend of Thomas Becket's oil. Because this oil made its debut in 1318, I will consider the content and historical context of the legend at that time. The political and ecclesiastical contexts, both domestic and foreign, are provided to reveal the occasion of the myth's initial appearance. I will next consider the history of the symbolism of the eagle as a way to disclose the possible range of meanings for this bird in the English coronation service. Then I will examine the context and content, domestic and foreign, of the legend as it appeared again in 1399. The final section of this chapter will examine the myth of the Ampulla into the seventeenth century and why the notion of an English heaven-sent oil failed to achieve lasting significance in England and on the Continent.

### *The Date the Legend First Appeared*

There is no consensus among scholars regarding the date that St. Thomas' Oil first appeared in England and the content of the original legend. A modicum of scholars places the origin of the legend with Henry IV in 1399,<sup>10</sup> but the majority fixes the debut at an earlier date with Edward II in 1318.<sup>11</sup> Some of the historians who defend the earlier date assume that the eagle was part of the first telling of the story. The question of the first appearance of the myth needs attention before a consideration of the content and historical context of Thomas' oil.

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<sup>10</sup>Sitwell, *The Crown Jewels*, 28 and 71, states that Henry IV invented the legend and that the eagle Ampulla was produced in his reign. William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1883; reprint, Buffalo, NY: W. S. Hein, 1987), 3.11, intimates that Henry created both the legend and the account of the eagle's history in 1399 to bolster his claim to the throne through the heredity of Edmund Crouchback. See also Gaillard Lapsley, "The Parliamentary Title of Henry IV," *English Historical Review* 49 (1934): 598-599.

<sup>11</sup>One historian, Herbert Thurston, *The Coronation Ceremonial*, 99, n.1, considers the oil to predate the coronation of Edward II, but unfortunately, Thurston provides no supporting evidence for such a unique claim.



Many historians who maintain Henry IV as the originator of the legend have either been unaware of documents that date the Holy Oil before Henry or have seen these materials as forgeries of Henrician propaganda. These historians espouse that the legend was a creation of Henry IV to strengthen his doubtful ascent to the throne after deposing Richard II. Two documents that date the legend before Henry and the limited use of the legend by him and his successors work against a Henrician origin.<sup>12</sup>

If the English chronicler Thomas Walsingham (d. ca. 1422) is to be believed, his information dates the legend before Henry IV. Before Richard II lost the throne in 1399, he, according to Walsingham, petitioned Archbishop Thomas Arundel for a second anointing using the eagle and the vial of oil that had been recently found in the Tower. Walsingham claimed that Arundel denied the king's request. Walsingham asserts that the archbishop told Richard his first anointing was sufficient.<sup>13</sup> The account, unless fabricated by Walsingham, dates the Holy Oil and the eagle before Henry IV. Walsingham's claim seems credible in light of Henry's and his dynasty's failure to utilize the myth more fully in their attempts in creating a royal image.<sup>14</sup>

The strongest documented evidence supporting the earlier date of the myth's first appearance is a letter from Pope John XXII to Edward II in 1318. The English historian, Wickham Legg, who first published the fourteenth-century letter, stated in 1901 that a limited number of scholars knew about the pope's correspondence to Edward in the

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<sup>12</sup>For a fuller discussion, see Sandquist, "The Holy Oil of St. Thomas," 330-344.

<sup>13</sup>See Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana* (Nendeh Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1864, 1965), 2.239.

<sup>14</sup>For a fuller treatment against Henry IV creating the legend, see Sandquist, "The Holy Oil of Saint Thomas," 330-344. Sandquist argues that there is an "extraordinary lack of contemporary comment" on the continued use of the Ampulla after Henry IV. Sandquist states, "It would appear certain that neither Henry IV nor his successors made any effort to utilize the oil of St. Thomas as a support of their dynasty" (344).

middle of his reign regarding divinely provided oil.<sup>15</sup> The letter presented itself as a response to a delegation Edward had sent to the pope requesting use of Thomas' oil, recently discovered in England, for a subsequent royal consecration. This letter, being from 1318, clearly dates the legend to a time before Henry, and no scholar has yet made a case that the pope's letter was a forgery.

The documents, which assume an earlier date of the myth, in combination with Henry's limited use of the legend to bolster his own claim to the throne, point to a date in Edward's reign for the first telling of the myth. If demands on Henry for political confirmation were the basis for the creation of the legend (as some historians argue), then Edward II had as much motivation to create an account of the miraculous oil as Henry. The best date for the appearance of Saint Thomas' Holy Oil is in the reign of Edward II.

### *The Content of the Myth in 1318*

The pope's response to Edward's request to be anointed with the newly found oil provided many details of the legend surrounding Becket and his special unction. Edward's letter to the pope is lost, but the pontiff's response outlines many specifics of the story Edward had told him. John XXII's letter in 1318 was nearly 150 years after Thomas had supposedly miraculously received royal anointing oil from the Virgin Mary. The details of the reception of the heaven-sent oil constitute about one-twelfth of the pope's letter:

To begin: when the glorious martyr Thomas was in exile in France praying for the good estate of the kingdom of England, there appeared to him the most blessed Virgin, the mother of Christ, telling him that he should die for the Church, and that the fifth King of England from the one then reigning [Henry II was reigning at the

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<sup>15</sup>L. Wickham Legg, ed. *English Coronation Records* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1901), 69.

time of the Virgin's prophecy, and Edward II was the fifth from him] would be a good man, and a champion of the Church of God: wherefore for him and his successors she gave to the said saint a phial with the most holy oil, adding that this king would by virtue of this oil, recover the Holy Land from the hands of the heathen. Further, [your delegate] said that the said St. Thomas, at the command of the blessed Virgin, gave this oil to a monk of the monastery of St. Cyprian to hide secretly, telling him that it should be revealed at a convenient time, and that the head of the heathen would be the cause for its discovery.<sup>16</sup>

The papal letter provides other details of the historical context that might have impact upon this study. The pope acknowledged that Edward, even though he had previously been anointed at his coronation ceremony ten years earlier, wanted a second consecration with this recently found oil. Edward considered his problems and those of the kingdom to be a result of his failure to receive this special Holy Oil. Both the king and the pope desired to keep the matter a secret. Edward had exercised great stealth in getting the news of the newly found oil to the pope most likely in an effort to reduce any further appearance of weakness if the pope denied his request. The pope insisted that if Edward elected a second anointing against the desires of the pontiff, then the event should occur privately and secretly.

Scholars do not agree as to whether the eagle was part of the original legend of the Holy Oil associated with Edward II. Several historians assume that the eagle was part of the legend as it first appeared during Edward's reign. The English historian J. W. McKenna, for example, states, "Edward II, as far back as 1318, had produced documentation for his claim that the stone ampulla of oil *and the golden eagle which contained it* [emphasis added] had been delivered to Becket for the consecration of

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<sup>16</sup>Pope John XXII, "Letter to Edward II," in Legg, *English Coronation Records*, 73. Legg, 69-76, has provided a complete copy and translation of the pope's letter.

English kings . . . .”<sup>17</sup> The case for the eagle in the development of the legend in 1318 is not clear, and the first appearance of a bird in the legend favors a later date. Pope John’s letter in 1318 made no mention of an eagle, only a vial. The first mention of an eagle ampulla occurred in 1399. Sandquist, in arguing against Henry IV being the originator of the legend, postulates that the eagle predated Richard II; she defends this date with a document that listed the regalia of Edward I (r. 1272-1307): “*Et pro una aquila auri cum rubettis et aliis lapidibus preciosis, XLVIII £*” (“And for an eagle of gold with rubies and other precious stones, forty-eight pounds”).<sup>18</sup> However, if this account of the regalia referred to the eagle Ampulla, it described a statue markedly different from the existing one; the current eagle is devoid of any precious stones.<sup>19</sup>

Additional documentation that counters the claims that the eagle was a part of the original account in 1318 included the inventories of the English regalia that failed to list an eagle as an ampulla yet described other ampullae. For example, one of the lists made during the reign of Edward III (r. 1327-1377) of the royal relics stored in the Tower Treasury included two ampullae: one stone and the other crystal, but the account failed to mention an eagle.<sup>20</sup> This description occurred just decades before Richard found the eagle in the Tower of London, and it would be odd to list the material descriptions of two

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<sup>17</sup>J. W. McKenna, "The Coronation Oil of the Yorkist Kings," *English Historical Review* 82 (1967): 102. Ullmann, "Thomas Becket's Miraculous Oil," 129, seems to make the same assumption.

<sup>18</sup>"For one eagle of gold with rubies and other precious stones, £ 48." Cited in Sandquist, "The Holy Oil of Thomas Becket," 340.

<sup>19</sup>This difference could be explained by the destruction and reappearance of the regalia during the interregnum period, when Parliament attempted to destroy all vestiges of royalty. However, the Ampulla shows signs of fourteenth or fifteenth-century workmanship. For further treatment on the history of the eagle statue, see Brian O. Barker, *The Symbols of Sovereignty*, 49-59; Martin R. Holmes, *The Crown Jewels at the Tower of London* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972), 3-4.

<sup>20</sup>For a photo static image of the inventory, see Sitwell, *The Crown Jewels and Other Regalia*, 71.

other ampullae without mentioning a gold eagle. Furthermore, there is no documentation of an eagle ampulla or heavenly sent oil in any coronation service before Henry IV in 1399. The documentary evidence favors the conclusion that the first appearance of the eagle Ampulla in English history occurred during the reign of Richard II.

Physical evidence also strongly suggests the eagle ampulla first appeared under Richard and was absent when the legend of Thomas' Oil first occurred under Edward II. Metallurgists date the body of the eagle and the screw in its neck to be from the late fourteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it is safe to assume the legend of Thomas Becket's Holy Oil first appeared in 1318 under the reign of Edward II, and a stone and/or crystal ampulla, not a gold eagle, contained the oil; the eagle was a later addition by Richard II to the myth.

### *The Church/State Contest and Thomas' Oil*

During the two centuries leading up to the appearance of Thomas' Oil in 1318, a sequence of clashes between kings and popes followed each other so closely that it looked like one continuous conflict.<sup>22</sup> These years were a time when the two separate entities, royal and ecclesiastical, strove for supreme power, and each had the structure and organization to function in that role. The decades prior to the advent of Thomas' legend were especially turbulent between kings, popes, and theorists regarding rights to political and ecclesiastical supremacy.

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<sup>21</sup>See William Jones, *Crowns and Coronations: A History of Regalia* (Detroit: Spring Tree, 1902), 283; Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe*, 150-151.

<sup>22</sup>Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300: with Selected Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 1. I am indebted to Tierney for leading me to many of the pertinent primary sources used in this chapter.

Medieval popes such as Gregory VII, Innocent III, and Boniface VIII sought to elevate the papacy above the temporal powers, and anointing was a central tenet in the argument. Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085), in an effort to elevate the authority of bishops over that of kings, had directed that chrism was only for clergy and was not to be used in royal coronation services (except in France because of the *Sainte Ampoule*). Innocent III reinforced the order in the early thirteenth century when he declared that only bishops were to be anointed on the head with chrism, whereas kings received catechumen oil only, and the application was to be limited to the arms and shoulders.<sup>23</sup>

Innocent III was aggressive in promoting the pre-eminence of the papacy over royal authority and his influence was enduring. Later writers often quoted his use of the analogy of the sun and moon in arguments regarding papal supremacy: “Compare the two lights of the sun and the moon and conclude. Now just as the moon derives its light from the sun and is indeed lower than it in quantity and quality, in position and in power, so too the royal power derives the splendor of its dignity from the pontifical authority.”<sup>24</sup> Innocent III used anointing as a key element in his case of ecclesiastical dominance over kings:

To me is said in the person of the prophet, “I set thee over nations and over kingdoms, to root up and to pull down, and to waste and to destroy, and to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). To me also is said in the person of the apostle, “I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth it shall be bound in heaven, etc.” (Matthew 16:19) . . . . You see then who is the servant set over the household, truly the vicar of Jesus Christ, successor of Peter, *anointed* [emphasis added] of the lord, a God of Pharaoh, set between God

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<sup>23</sup>James Richardson, “The Coronation in Medieval England,” *Traditio* 16 (New York: Fordham, 1960), 116-117.

<sup>24</sup>Innocent III, “Letter to the prefect Acerbus and the nobles of Tuscany (1198),” *Patrologia Latina* 214, col. 377.

and man, lower than God but higher than man, who judges all and is judged by no one.<sup>25</sup>

Innocent traced the emperor's authority through the Roman Empire, the German princes, and ultimately to the church on the basis of anointing, which in the end subjugated the emperor to the pope in Innocent's estimation:

We do indeed acknowledge, as we should, that the princes, to whom [election] belongs by right and ancient custom, have the right and power to elect a king who is afterwards to be promoted to emperor; and especially so since this right and power came to them from the apostolic see which transferred the Roman empire from the Greeks to the Germans in the person of the great Charles. But the princes should acknowledge, and indeed they do acknowledge, that the right and authority to examine the person elect as king, who is to be promoted to the imperial dignity, belong to us who *anoint* [emphasis added], consecrate and crown him.<sup>26</sup>

Innocent deposed the Holy Roman Emperor, Otto IV (r. 1198-1215), and Gervase of Tilbury described the event and its basis in consecration, which was done by anointing:

While the [Eastern] Empire of the Greeks depends on God alone, the pope asserts that the Empire in the West depends solely on the Roman see. This explains a new and universal change—the Pope alone bears the imperial insignia, whereas the Emperor has at his disposal only the usual insignia borne by other kings . . . . The princes of Germany have the right to elect the Emperor but it is the Pope who confirms the election and performs the *consecration* . . . . What more, [the Emperor] is *consecrated* [emphases added] by the Pope alone, at a modest altar, on the right side of the basilica of St. Peter, whereas on the other hand the Pope is given the imperial insignia and receives his anointing before the Altar, reserved for this purpose alone.<sup>27</sup>

Anointing was the foundation that provided the way for Innocent to implement his theory of papal superiority according to Gervase of Tilbury. He considered the pope superior on

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<sup>25</sup>Innocent III, "Sermon on the Consecration of a Pope," *Patrologia Latina*, 217, cols. 657-658.

<sup>26</sup>Innocent III, "Venerabilem (1202)" (*Decretales* 1.6.34), in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, II, ed. E. Friedberg, (Leipzig, Bernhardi Tauchnitz 1881), col. 79-82; cited and translated in Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, 133.

<sup>27</sup>Gervase of Tilbury, "Otia Imperialia," Book II. 28-29, *Monumenta Germaniae, Scriptores* 27, 378-382.

two bases: 1) the emperor's power originated in the anointing that was provided by the pope, and 2) the pope's anointing was superior to that of the emperor.

In turning attention to England, Innocent was able to gain the upper hand when King John (r. 1199-1216) submitted to the pontiff. Innocent wrote concerning the event:

The Kings of the world so honor this vicar for the sake of God that they do not regard themselves as ruling correctly unless they take concern to serve him with devotion. . . . you [King John] have declared yourself and your kingdom temporally subordinate to the one to whom you knew them to be spiritually subject, so that kingship and priesthood, like body and soul, should be united in one person of the vicar of Christ to the great gain and benefit of both. . . . [Christ] has lower himself to bring this about . . . so that those provinces which formerly had the Holy Roman Church as their appropriate teacher in spiritual matters now have her as their special lord in temporal dealings also.<sup>28</sup>

Anointing had been an issue for John in connection with the pope regarding the degree of royal authority and Innocent's intervention in his rule. Innocent had earlier prohibited an English court from putting John on trial on the basis of John's anointing, which raised him above the court. However, Innocent later allowed the papal court to try John because the pope viewed John's anointing as inferior to the priests'.<sup>29</sup> The basis of Innocent's claim was a comparison between royal and ecclesiastical anointings. John's unction had been with catechumen oil, not chrism like the priests and bishops, and John was not anointed on the head as church leaders had been. Innocent III used the practice of royal anointing as a basis in his argument for papal supremacy over royal power, and he had achieved political victory in England in the thirteenth century, which he gained in part on the basis of what he considered inferior royal anointing to that of the clergy.

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<sup>28</sup>Innocent III, "Letter to King John of England accepting his feudal homage (April 1214)," in *Foedera* I, ed. T. Rymer (London: Longman and Green, 1869), 119, translation by David Mustol, San Antonio TX.

<sup>29</sup>See Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation*, 127.



The reign of Emperor Frederick II (r. 1220-1250) highlighted the importance of anointing in the royal and papal power conflicts of the thirteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Frederick was deposed twice, and these events demonstrated that “the doctrine of papal omnipotence [had] reached its apogee and remained there until the drama at Anagni.”<sup>31</sup> Frederick had been elected as a result of a rebellion with the support of the pope and became King of the Romans in 1212, but he did not receive the title of Holy Roman Emperor until eight years later with his consecration in Rome. Pope Gregory IX wrote a letter to Frederick revealing the importance of anointing as the primary source of the emperor’s authority:

[Charlemagne] thought that the difficult yoke imposed by the Roman Church should be carried with pious devotion, the Apostolic See transferred the judgment-seat of the Empire to the Germans, placed it upon your predecessors and your own person—as you will admit that it happened by means of consecration and anointment . . . and conceded to them the power of the sword in the subsequent coronation.<sup>32</sup>

Pope Innocent IV also wrote in the same year pointing to anointing as a key to the papal and royal relationship: “For there is a special bond or union between the pope and emperor because the pope *consecrates* [emphasis added] and examines the emperor, and the emperor is the protector of the pope and takes an oath to him and holds the empire

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<sup>30</sup>For a fuller treatment of Frederick II than the one offered here, see H. J. Dyus, “The Emperor Frederick II and the Sicilian Church” *Cambridge Historical Journal* 3 (1930), 134-163.

<sup>31</sup>Robert Folz, *The Concept Empire in Western Europe from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. by Sheila A. Obilvie (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 1969), 87.

<sup>32</sup>Gregory IX, “Letter to Frederick II (October 1239),” trans. Sidney Z. Ehler and J. P. Morrall, *Church State Through the Centuries* (Westminster, MD.: Newman, 1954), 77.

from him.”<sup>33</sup> Hostiensis, a cardinal and younger contemporary of Innocent IV, further elaborated the role of unction in the higher status of the pope over kings:

I maintain that the jurisdictions are separate and that both proceeded from God. . . . Nevertheless, in proportion as one approaches closer to God it is greater than the other; therefore the priesthood is greater. . . . It is for this reason that a bishop is anointed on the head but a king on the arms and a bishop with chrism but a king with oil, to inform us that the bishop is a vicar of our head, i.e. Christ, and to show how great is the difference between the authority of a pontiff and the power of a prince . . . for the difference between the priestly dignity and the royal is as great as that between sun and moon.<sup>34</sup>

It is noteworthy that Frederick wrote a letter to the European kings in response to being deposed that addressed several items in defense of his right to power but anointing was not part of the counter argument:

You and all kings of particular regions have everything to fear from the effrontery of such a prince of priests when he sets out to depose us who have been divinely honored by the imperial diadem and solemnly elected by the princes with the approval of the whole church at a time when faith and religion were flourishing among the clergy, us who also govern in splendor other noble kingdoms.<sup>35</sup>

Care must be exercised in arguing from silence, but it would seem that Frederick would have limited options against papal claims in regard to anointing. The pope clearly had the upper hand since the origin of becoming emperor lay in the transformation that was believed to happen with the consecration that came through unction.

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<sup>33</sup>Innocent IV, *On Decretales*, 2.2.10, *Licet* [no. 76], *Commentaria Super Libros Quinque Decretalium* (ca. 1250) (Frankfurt), fol. 194; cited and translated by Tierney, *The Church and State Crisis*, 153.

<sup>34</sup>Cardinal Hostiensis, “On Decretales,” 4.17.13, *Per Venerabilem* [no. 78], *Summa Domini Henrici Cardinalis Hostienis* (1250-1253) (Lyons, 1537), fol. 215-216; cited and translated in Tierney, *The Church and State Crisis*, 156.

<sup>35</sup>Frederick II, “Letter of Frederick to the kings of Christendom (1246),” in *Historia Diplomatica Friderici Secundi*, VI, 1, ed. J. Huillard-Breholles (Paris: Bottega D’erasma, 1860), 391; cited and translated by Tierney, *The Church and State Crisis*, 145.

The papacy of Boniface VIII sparked renewed vigor in theorists and marked the beginning of the end of papal dominance in European politics.<sup>36</sup> Boniface claimed ultimate authority in both temporal and spiritual realms. His *Unam Sanctum*, likely the most famous Church/state document from the Middle Ages, was a theological statement justifying the ultimate supremacy of the pope's inclusive authority in ecclesiastical and royal matters. Boniface boldly proclaimed:

That there is one holy, Catholic and apostolic church we are bound to believe and to hold, our faith urging us, and this we do firmly believe and simply confess; and that outside this church there is no salvation or remission of sins . . . . Certainly anyone who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not paid heed to the words of the Lord . . . . But that the spiritual power excels any earthly one in dignity and nobility we ought the more openly to confess in proportion as spiritual things excel temporal ones.<sup>37</sup>

Boniface argued for papal preeminence on the basis of the origin of royal authority coming from the spiritual, which his papal predecessors had understood as coming initially at consecration, "For, the truth bearing witness, the spiritual power has to institute the earthly power . . ."<sup>38</sup> Instituting the earthly power occurred in consecration with anointing. The result for Boniface was that the pope was responsible for judging temporal powers while not being subject to human judgment, "Therefore, if the earthly power errs, it shall be judged by the spiritual power, if the lesser spiritual power errs it shall be judged by its superior, but if the supreme spiritual power errs it can be judged only by God not by man . . . ." Boniface concluded, "Therefore we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be

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<sup>36</sup>Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 145.

<sup>37</sup>Boniface VIII, "*Unam Sactum*," in *Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII; State vs. Papacy*, ed. Charles T. Wood (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 121.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

subject to the Roman Pontiff.”<sup>39</sup> Boniface’s declarations resulted in a firestorm of reactions from kings and theorists.

The bold assertions of Boniface VIII and the intense struggles between him and Philip IV of France inspired a surge in royalist and papalist writings. Papal apologists like Giles of Rome (ca. 1245-1316) and James of Viterbo (ca. 1255-1308) exalted ecclesiastical over royal power. James referred to the Roman Church as the only perfect “kingship or royal authority.”<sup>40</sup> The basis for submission of kings to the pope was that royal authority originated with the church according to James: “All human power is imperfect and unformed unless it be formed and perfected by the spiritual power.” Anointing, although not specifically mentioned by James, would be assumed in previous assertions by pope’s such as Innocent and other papal theorists as the point of origin in forming political power.

Church/state power struggles were evident in England during the time that surrounded the appearance and evolution of Thomas’ Holy Oil and the Ampulla. A few examples will suffice in demonstrating how the issue of papal influence in English politics contributed to the creation of the legends of Holy Oil. When Boniface VIII became pope, England and France were on the precipice of war, and the two countries were garnering finances in preparation for military conflict. Both turned to the prosperous Church as a source of war funds. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 had declared that kings could only tax clergy and monasteries with papal approval. Popes had acquiesced during the thirteenth century for justifiable wars, such as a crusade. The

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Translated and cited by John B. Morrall, *Political Thought in Medieval Times* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 89.

situation in 1296 was that both France and England were considered Christian nations raising funds from the Church under the banner of a just war. The pope, sensing his right to end the conflict, issued the papal bull *Clericis Laicos* in 1296 that threatened both kings with excommunication unless they ceased taxing the Church. The bull denied the kings full authority in their kingdoms by commanding their bishops to civil disobedience. It was the French king Philip IV, not the English monarch, who was successful in contesting the pope for the right to elect the clergy and make ecclesiastical appointments. Philip cut off all forms of negotiable currencies from France to Italy. The end result was that Boniface capitulated to Philip in the bull *Etsi de Statu* in July 1297: “We add to this declaration that if some dangerous emergency should threaten the aforesaid king [Philip] or his successors in connection with general or particular defence of the realm, the above mentioned decree [*Clericis Laicos*] shall by no means extend to such a case of necessity.”<sup>41</sup> England was not able to counteract the pope’s right over ecclesiastical appointments until the statutes of Provisors in 1351 and 1390, which put the right of ecclesiastical benefices in the hands of the king instead to the pope.<sup>42</sup>

Another example of English movement away from papal interference occurred around the Parliament of Carlisle in 1307. Among the charges leveled against the papacy policy was the tendency to channel gifts and legacies meant for the Holy Land to other purposes.<sup>43</sup> Edward II later used the conclusions of the Parliament of Carlisle in his

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<sup>41</sup>Boniface VIII, “Bull of *Etsi De Statu* (July 1297,” in *Les Registries de Boniface VIII*, ed. George Digard, M. Faucon, and A. Thomas (Paris: Boccard, 1884), 942.

<sup>42</sup>For further treatment, see Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 195-197; and Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 373-375.

<sup>43</sup>For more detailed discussion, see Sophia Menache, *Clement V*, in *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought* 36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75-79.

efforts to limit papal intervention in England, even to the point of arresting a papal collector and refusing to arrest those under papal excommunication.<sup>44</sup>

English kings ruled in a hierarchical, top-down system and therefore were interested in a model that could free them of papal interference without eliminating divine involvement in the political process. The political theorist John of Paris presented an argument that removed the point of origin of royal power from the pope without jettisoning divine origins.<sup>45</sup> John wrote in 1302 concerning the source and origin of royal authority:

The royal power both existed and was exercised before the papal, and there were kings . . . before there were Christians. Therefore neither the royal power nor its exercise is from the pope but from God and from the people who elect a king by choosing either a person or a royal house. . . . It would seem that the power of inferior pontiffs and ministers is derived from the pope more than the royal power, for ecclesiastical prelates are more immediately dependent on the pope than secular princes. But the power of prelates is not from God through the pope but immediately from God and from the people who elect or consent.<sup>46</sup>

The power for ecclesiastical leaders, according to John of Paris, came directly from God without the intervention of the pope. John continued in his treatise to address the source of royal power:

But if the priest is greater in himself than the prince and is greater in dignity, it does not follow that he is greater in all respects. For the lesser secular power is not related to the greater spiritual power as having its origin from it or being derived from it as the power of a proconsul is related to that of the emperor, which is greater in all respects since the power of the former is derived from the latter. . . . And so the secular power is greater than the spiritual in some things, namely in temporal

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>John of Paris wrote prior to the first appearance of Thomas' Holy Oil. For an example of another Medievalist writer with similar perspective and impact writing afterward, see Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of the Peace*, ed. and trans. Abbabel Brett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-542.

<sup>46</sup>John of Paris, *On royal and papal power: A translation, with introduction of the De potestate regia et papali of John of Paris*, trans. Author P. Monahan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 188.

affairs, and in such affairs it is not subject to the spiritual power in any way because it does not have its origin from it but rather both have their origin immediately from one supreme power, namely the divine.<sup>47</sup>

The myth of Thomas' Oil had the potential to accomplish the very thing for which John of Paris was arguing. The oil could affirm the divine consecration of the English monarch and bypass the pope's intervention since Thomas' Oil was supposedly sent from heaven. The efficacy of the oil was independent of the papacy and did not need ecclesiastical consecration, and the unction had potential to establish the source of royal power independently from papal intrusion.

In the beginning of the thirteenth century, there were efforts in England to achieve political equality with the emperor by qualifying the unction of royal anointing.

Richardus Anglicus, a respected English canonist, first defended the equality between spiritual and secular authority and then turned attention to distinctions between kings:

But, on the other hand, it is evident that many kings are not subject to the emperor, for it seems that, just as they were subdued by force, so they can return by force to their proper liberty. Again we read of kings invincible by command of the Lord (Ecclesiastes 18:1) which we do not read of the emperor. Again, the people of a city can confer jurisdiction and ruling authority . . . much more those of a kingdom. And the army elects an emperor, so by the same reason it can elect a king . . . Since then both the emperor and king are anointed with the same authority, with the same consecration, with the same chrism . . . why should there be a difference in their powers?<sup>48</sup>

Similar thinking was later evident in Edward II's coronation that reflected a new English attempt to elevate the English king and to eliminate the gap between ecclesiastical and royal anointings. The *ordo* of 1308 called for the bishop to anoint the head of English

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 188-189.

<sup>48</sup>Ricardus Anglicus, gloss on *Compilatio I* (ca. 1200), in "Richardus Anglicus als Glossator der *Compilatio I*," *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht*, CVII, ed. F. Gillmann, (1927), 626; cited and translated by Tierney, *The Church and State Crisis*, 161.

king with chrism in direct violation of papal mandates.<sup>49</sup> Royal anointing was a foundational element in the struggle for power between papalists and royalists as well as among kingdoms, as will be demonstrated in the following section, in the decades preceding the creation of the legend of Thomas' Oil. The creation of the myth is best understood in the context of efforts to elevate Edward's kingly status in the midst of papal assertions of temporal dominance and growing competition among kingdoms, especially between France and England.

### *The French/English Contest and Thomas' Oil*

Tensions had been intense between France and England for nearly one hundred and fifty years when Edward II came to power, and the strain included competition for supremacy in regard to royal image making. The general rivalry between the two countries began with William the Conqueror (r. 1066-1087) and reached an apex in the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). In the midst of continued rivalry between the two countries, competition occurred, as would be expected, in regard to the image of the two sovereigns. The similarities in the coronation *ordines*, the regalia, and various consecration traditions, indicate a fluid exchange between the two countries. The way the English handled the royal anointing oil, for example, was similar to that of the French. The French had four nobles, and each held a pole attached to a corner of a canopy that covered the monarch and the *Sainte Ampoule* during anointing. In a similar visual presentation, four English knights held poles with a gold canopy over the sovereign and catechumen oil.<sup>50</sup> Other similarities in the coronation ceremonies of the

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<sup>49</sup>Richardson, "The Coronation in Medieval England," 116-117.

<sup>50</sup>See Bertie Wilkinson, *The Coronation History* (London: George Philip and Son, 1953), 7.



two countries include anointing the same parts of the sovereign's body, anthems,<sup>51</sup> and revisions to the *ordos*.<sup>52</sup>

The English tried to emulate many of the royal accomplishments and symbolism in France. Much of the English coronation was an effort to display that the English king was in no way inferior to the French king.<sup>53</sup> The two kingdoms competed for supremacy of the image of their rulers. Consecration was at the heart of royal image-making and therefore encompassed a variety of practices and traditions in which each country labored to be current with or outdo the other. These areas of rivalry included such things as having a canonized king, the locale of coronation, the kings' working of miracles, and anointing; all related in some way to the act of consecration.

#### *Competition in Royal Canonizations*

The process of canonization and the making of a cult did not occur in an ideological or political vacuum. This procedure of making a royal cult in England was a response to domestic royal concerns in part, but foreign issues must also receive attention as part of the occasioning of such ecclesio-political matters. The canonization of a king was one area of consecration in which the English took the initiative and the French followed the English example. Henry II was responsible for much of the propaganda that surrounded the cult of Edward the Confessor, which led to his canonization. Henry commissioned Osbert de Clare, a monk at Westminster, to write a biography of Edward. The work proclaimed Edward as having had the gift of healing and that the healing

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<sup>51</sup>Henry G. Richardson, "The Coronation in Medieval England," 136-150.

<sup>52</sup>Thurston, *The Coronation Ceremony*, 9-48.

<sup>53</sup>Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe*, 99. For further discussion see Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation*, 14-26.

phenomena continued after his death as people made pilgrimages to the shrine that Henry had created. Henry pushed for Edward's canonization and succeeded in 1161. Edward's name and parts of his regalia became a permanent addition to the English royal consecration ceremonies as symbols of the uniqueness of the country's royal heritage. Neither France nor Germany had a sainted king at that time. The German emperor was quick to gain the same advantage as the English and was successful in having Charles the Great canonized in 1166. The English lost the advantage to the French toward the height of royal competition in 1297 when Louis IX (r. 1226-1270) was canonized as Saint Louis.<sup>54</sup>

The English responded to their lost advantage of a canonized king over the French in the next revision of the English coronation *ordo* of 1308. Andrew Hughes of the University of Toronto notes a hymn the English added to the coronation service in reaction to the recognition given to the French king: "The tune seems deliberately contrived to stress that the king [Edward II] had a saint as a predecessor, perhaps a reminder that the canonization of Louis IX in 1297 did not confer a greater holiness on the French monarch."<sup>55</sup> The English initiated the practice of associating the king with a royal saint for political reasons. The French response of insisting on the canonization of one of their own kings indicates that the competition between England and France for supremacy of royal image was heating up at the end of the thirteenth century.

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<sup>54</sup>Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation*, 122-123.

<sup>55</sup>Andrew Hughes, "The Origins and Descent of the Fourth Recension of English Coronation,," in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. Janos Bak (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 197.

*Competition Regarding the Place of Coronations*

The English attempted to copy and match French royal accomplishments in regard to the architectural beauty and structural grandeur of the edifice for coronations. English motivation to build Westminster Abbey, the place of English royal coronations, was, in part, a response to the newly built cathedral in Rheims.<sup>56</sup> The French finished construction on an impressive new gothic cathedral for the consecration of their kings in honor of their miracle-working Saint Remi in 1241. The style of architecture was an innovation of northern France and at the time not previously used in England.<sup>57</sup> Within four years of the completion of the cathedral at Rheims, the English had begun construction of their new Gothic cathedral at Westminster in honor of their sainted king who also worked miracles, Edward the Confessor.

Henry III (r. 1216-1272) ordered the construction of the new coronation cathedral in 1245 most likely in part in reaction to the French and their newly built site for French coronations.<sup>58</sup> The French played a significant role in demonstrating to Henry the importance of Westminster. His first coronation took place in Gloucester in 1216 because England was at war with the French, and they were in possession of London and the Westminster monastery. Henry, under papal approval, experienced a second coronation later in 1220 at Westminster. The French had overshadowed Henry in two

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<sup>56</sup>Paul Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets: Kingship and the Representation of Power 1200-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 9. argues for a variety of French cathedrals influencing Westminster Abbey's architecture but says it was selected "... Rheims cathedral as its predominant planning schema."

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>58</sup>Jean Bony, *The English Decorated Style: Gothic Architecture Transformed 1250-1350* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 3, concludes that the Abbey was a "... unbiased summary of the artistic situation in northern France . . .," Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets*, 7, refers to the similarities as, "translation and representation." Scholars seem to generally agree that France, and in particular Rheims, had an impact upon the design and building of Westminster Abbey.

ways: first, they had prevented his proper coronation ceremony in the traditional location of Westminster, and second, they had built a magnificent cathedral for coronations that far surpassed the place where Henry had received his consecration. Henry was determined to narrow the gap; he hired the architect from Rheims to design the “English Coronation Church.”<sup>59</sup> The result was a cathedral architecturally copied from Rheims that was on par with the French. The English would soon have as grand a place to crown their monarchs as did the French, and Westminster Abbey was also associated with a worker of miracles as was the cathedral at Rheims.

### *Competition with Royal Healing*

Both the French and the English claimed that their kings could cure scrofula, a common medieval skin disorder, by the simple touch of their hand. The royal ability to heal scrofula is of particular interest to this study because both countries tied the capacity to cure to the inaugural anointing.<sup>60</sup> The extant documents indicate that the French made the claim first in the beginning of the twelfth century, and then the English responded with similar claims in the thirteenth century.<sup>61</sup> Guibert of Nogent (1053-1124), an abbot of the small abbey of Nogent-sous-Coucy in France, wrote the earliest known documentation of French kings healing in the twelfth century:

But what am I saying? Have we not seen our Lord King Louis [VI (r. 1108-1137)] performing a customary marvel? With my own eyes I have seen people suffering from scrofula on the neck and other parts of the body crowd around the king in order to be touched by him—and to his touch he added also the sign of the cross. I was there quite near him, and even helped to keep the crowds from pressing too

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<sup>59</sup>See Henry G. Richardson, “The Coronation in Medieval England,” 136-138.

<sup>60</sup>For a fuller treatment on the nature of the disorder, see Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 11. I am dependent on Bloch for much of the detail in this section.

<sup>61</sup>Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation*, 125-126.

close upon him. The king, however, showed his innate generosity toward them, drawing them to himself with his serene hand and humbly making the sign of the cross over them. His father Philip had also zealously applied himself to the exercise of this glorious and miraculous power . . . .<sup>62</sup>

Guibert's writing is noteworthy for several reasons. He presented himself as an eyewitness to the healing powers of Louis VI; the event was not hear-say for Guibert. He also indicated that the royal practice of healing scrofula was customary, not an isolated event. Guibert also pointed out that the ability to cure extended beyond Louis; his father, Philip I had the same gift. The noted twentieth-century French historian Marc Bloch concluded that the practice began with Philip I (r.1060-1108) and predated any English claims for their kings.<sup>63</sup>

No evidence of a king's healing scrofula exists before Philip, and Guibert's treatment is the only evidence of the practice from that time.<sup>64</sup> The volume of documentation from the end of the thirteenth century is greater. The treatment of royal healing was fuller and more detailed beginning with the reign of Saint Louis (r. 1226-1270) into the fourteenth century.<sup>65</sup> This increase in French claims corresponded to a

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<sup>62</sup>See Guibert de Nogent, "De Pignoribus Sanctorum," in *Patrologia Latina Database* [full text data base on line]; available from <http://bearcat.baylor.edu/search/tPatrologia+Latina+Database+/tpatrologia+latina+ datase/1,2,4,B/1856~2460492&FF=&1,0,,2,0>; Internet; accessed 29 June 2006.

Quid quod dominum nostrum Ludovicum regem consuetudinario uti videmus prodigio? Hos plane, qui scrophas circa jugulum, aut uspiam in corpore patiuntur, ad tactum ejus, superaddito crucis signo, vidi catervatim, me ei cohaerente et etiam prohibente, concurrere. Quos tamen ille ingenita liberalitate, serena ad se manu obuncans, humillime consignabat. Cujus gloriam miraculi cum Philippus pater ejus alacriter exercebat, nescio quibus incidentibus culpis amisit.

<sup>63</sup>The date of origin for either France or England is not imperative here; I am much more interested in establishing that France considered their king superior to the English monarch on the basis that included at least the king's ability to heal scrofula. The evidence available at this point is that the French initiated the claim and the English followed with similar claims.

<sup>64</sup>Bloch, *The Royal Touch*. 14.

<sup>65</sup>For a collection of many of these documents, see Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 74-88.

greater number of similar claims for English kings. The augmentation of the frequency and description of royal touching for scrofula in both countries also coincided with the first appearance of Thomas' legend.

French preachers and orators used the king's ability to heal scrofula as a means for proving their superiority over other kings, and they especially noted English kings. Guibert's concluding remarks on the topic in the early twelfth century are particularly pointed concerning the English: "What is the practice of other kings on the subject of healing scrofula? I will keep silent on this matter; yet as far as I know, no English king has ever presumed to attempt it."<sup>66</sup> Guibert indicated that he had no interest in commenting on other kings regarding healing, yet he singled out the English to deny their kings' ability to heal. Guibert's comments show that neither country was willing to give any ground on claims to an image of royal supremacy.

The competition between France and England for royal supremacy that was based on healing continued into the fourteenth century and into the reign of Edward II. A French poet sang this song to Philip IV (r. 1285-1314):

For [the French king] healed scrofula  
Solely by touching it.  
Without placing plasters on it;  
No other king could do this.<sup>67</sup>

The poet's song indicates that the French were willing to vary the details of royal claims to healing to keep a competitive edge on a broader European plane as other kings began to make similar assertions of touching for curing.

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<sup>66</sup>"*Super aliis regibus qualiter se gerant in hoc re, supersedes; regem tamen Anglium neitiquam in talibus audere scis*" J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina Database*, 156.616 [full text data base on line]; available from <http://bearcat.baylor.edu/search/tpatrologia+latina/tpatrologia+latina/1,3,5,B/1856~2460492&FF=&1,0,,1,0;> Internet; accessed 28 April 2006. Cited in Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 25.

<sup>67</sup>Guillaume Guiart, *Historie de France*, 22; cited in Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 84.

The important issue here is not merely that royal competition surrounded healing of scrofula but that France and England based the king's ability to heal on their anointing. The foundational issue in this competition was the effort to determine which country had the most sacred form of royal consecration. So even though the English would eventually match the French in royal healings, English kings would remain inferior because they had an inferior form of anointing oil.

The first documented account of an English king having the ability to heal scrofula was by Peter of Blois, a Frenchman living in England in 1180. Blois was working for the English as a cleric of King Henry II, and he attributed the king's ability to heal to royal anointing:

I would have you know that to attend upon the king is [for a cleric] something sacred, for the king himself is holy; he is the Anointed of the Lord; nor has he, the king, received the sacrament of royal unction to no purpose, and if the efficacy of this were unknown or doubted, the decrease of the plague . . . and the cure of scrofula would establish its truth most fully.<sup>68</sup>

This historically isolated account that an English king had the ability to heal was likely the first occurrence of royal healing claims in England. Bloch notes an increase in the documentation of the practice after Henry's death in 1189: "For the following century, we have a series of documents, increasing in number as we approach the year 1300, indicating that his successors inherited the same gift."<sup>69</sup> This rise corresponded with the increased citations from the French during the same period. Royal image-making associated with anointing was growing at the time Edward II came to the throne; the

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<sup>68</sup>Cited in Thurston, *The Coronation Ceremony*, 66.

<sup>69</sup>Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 22.

French and the English competed over which country had the greatest king, as demonstrated by the ability and status that came through anointing.

However, the kings of England still lagged behind the French in regard to curing scrofula because of the tie with royal anointing. Peter the Blois used the phrase “royal unction,” to describe the source of Henry’s ability to heal. “Royal unction”, a product of the Church, was certainly considered substandard if compared to the divinely-given oil at Clovis’ baptism, which was preserved in the *Sainte Ampoule*.<sup>70</sup> The English continued to trail behind the French until ten years into Edward’s reign and the creation of Thomas’ legend of heaven-sent oil for England.

#### *Competition in Royal Anointing*

When Edward II came to the throne, several changes occurred in the *ordo* of 1308 in an attempt to advance the dignity of English kingship on the Continent and particularly in regard to the French. The *ordo* added a “categorical affirmation of the sovereign rights of the king” as part of the service.<sup>71</sup> The addition of the song *Unxerant* emphasized the king’s divine status “by pointedly recalling the chant of the consecration of the Paschal Candle to compare the baptism of Christ the King to the anointing of Edward the King.”<sup>72</sup> A comparison of Christ’s baptism to the anointing of Edward had interesting parallels with the French legend of the *Sainte Ampoule*.

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<sup>70</sup>Medieval England had three types of oil, all blessed by the bishop on Maunday Thursday: oil for the sick, oil for the catechumens (both were simple olive oil), and the chrism, which was used for more sacred ecclesiastical purposes such as confirmation, ordaining priests and bishops. Peter the Blois referred to the Chrism, also used in coronation ceremonies, as “Royal unction,” See Legg, “The Sacring of the English Kings,” 28-31.

<sup>71</sup>Hughes, “The Origins and Descent of the Fourth Recension,” 198.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 197-198.



The English kings had had a lesser dignity compared with the French for centuries because of the disparate anointing oils; the French a miraculous oil that was seen as being given by God for consecrating the supreme French monarch. A significant change occurred in Edward's coronation to close the gap between the two countries in this regard. The 1308 *ordo* called for the archbishop to anoint the head of the king with chrism. This change included two revised practices. The English, before 1308, used only catechumen oil in the coronation service and did not apply this lesser oil to the king's head. The change to chrism and the application to the monarch's head was indeed a definitive move in light of papal policy. Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) had directed that chrism was for clergy only and not to be used in coronation services (except in France because of the *Ampoule*). Innocent III reinforced the order in the early thirteenth century when he declared that only bishops were anointed on the head with chrism; the king received oil only on the arms or shoulders.<sup>73</sup> However, the English 1308 revision, which introduced the application of chrism to the English monarch's head,<sup>74</sup> failed to achieve sacerdotal equality with France since the French had the most sacred of oils, the holy chrism of *Sainte Ampoule*.

The French were well aware of the royal supremacy that the *Sainte Ampoule* brought their kings, and they promoted that advantage. The French *ordo* of 1270 inserted Hincmar's legend prominently in their consecration service. Because of this myth, the

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<sup>73</sup>Richardson, "The Coronation in Medieval England," 116-117.

<sup>74</sup>The 1308 revision called for the king to be anointed in five parts of his body. In order: the hands, between the shoulders, the elbows, and the forehead with the sign of the cross, received holy oil. Then the archbishop made a second cross on the king's forehead with chrism. The fourteen-century French *ordo* called for the same body parts of the king to receive unction only in the reverse order of the English tradition, and instead of chrism the French obviously used the ointment from the *Sainte Ampoule*. See Legg, "The Sacring of the English Kings," 31-32.

French held that their ruler outshone “all the kings on the earth.”<sup>75</sup> The French king had the title *Rex christianissimus* (the most Christian king).<sup>76</sup> The English were ineffective in contradicting these claims because of the disparity in anointing oils.

Even thirteenth-century English historians recognized the superior status of the French king due to the anointing with oil from heaven. Matthew Paris, a Frenchman and prominent English historian of that time who had little admiration of either his own king or the French people,<sup>77</sup> repeatedly acknowledged the French kings’ superiority on the basis of the *Ampoule*. In 1250, the historian Paris said, “The king of France is the first of royals of Christendom for the celestial oil of which he is anointed.” He mentioned the heaven-sent oil again in 1257, “The archbishop of Rheims who anoints the French king with the divine chrism (on which account the French king is considered the most eminent of all kings), is the chief and most distinguished of all the peers of France . . . by virtue of St. Remi, for to him that famous inheritance descended.”<sup>78</sup> Paris attributed special might, authority, and pre-eminence in Europe to the French kings because of the unction of their royal consecration.

Perhaps the most significant description Matthew Paris provided was the subordination he expressed that Henry III personally experienced in the presence of the French king, an experience that was based on the different anointings of the two kings. Paris wrote that as Henry was traveling back to England from a crusade, he requested

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<sup>75</sup>Cited in Deborah A. Fraioli, *Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War* (London: Greenwood, 2005), 51.

<sup>76</sup>Cited in Ullmann, “Thomas Becket’s Miraculous Oil,” 129.

<sup>77</sup>Hallam, *Capetian France*, 336.

<sup>78</sup>Matthew Paris, *English History, 1235-1273* (London: Bohn, 1852-1854), 3.211-212.

permission from the French king to pass through France in route to England so that he could see the country. Paris commented on the seating arrangements of the kings at a dinner: “The guests were arranged in the following order. The French king, who is the king of all terrestrial kings, on account of the heavenly unction bestowed on him, and also on account of his power and his eminence in chivalry, sat in the middle, whilst the king of England sat on the right hand and the king of Navarre on his left.”<sup>79</sup> Here is a thirteenth-century English historian proclaiming the superiority of French kings! From the perspective of English monarchs, Matthew Paris was documenting for future generations that English kings were inferior because of their anointing. Henry III attempted to keep pace with the French by continuing devotion to the canonized King Edward and by maintaining the construction of Westminster Abbey, but definitive equality could not be achieved until the English also had heaven-sent oil. Henry’s grandson, Edward II, would attempt to overcome that deficit with the creation of the legend of Saint Thomas’ Holy Oil.

### *Edward’s Domestic Context and Thomas’ Oil*

Edward II would have benefited from the revered and miraculous image associated with the Holy Oil of Thomas had he gained papal approval for a second anointing.<sup>80</sup> J. R. S. , Professor Emeritus of Medieval History at University College Dublin, in his effort to revise the notion that Edward II lacked personal spiritual depth, points out that “It should not be thought, for example, that when Edward sought to be

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 3.108.

<sup>80</sup>J. R. S. Phillips also argues that the Thomas’ Holy Oil first appeared during the reign of Edward II. See J. R. S. Phillips, “Edward II and the Prophets,” in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlax Symposium*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Dover, NH: Boydell, 1986), 192.

anointed with the Holy Oil of St Thomas he was acting simply out of political weakness.

There is little doubt that he genuinely believed that the oil had the powers ascribed to

it.”<sup>81</sup> Yet clearly, Edward was in a domestic political situation that needed the

advantages that a second anointing with celestial oil could bring. Phillips goes on to say,

Edward’s most striking involvement with the order [of the Dominicans] was the episode of the Holy Oil of St Thomas of Canterbury between 1317 and 1319, when Nicholas of Wisbech . . . persuaded Edward to ask the pope to allow him to be anointed with the oil, in the hope that the ceremony would end the political troubles in which he was then [sic] immersed.<sup>82</sup>

Although Edward likely would have affirmed the powers ascribed to the Holy Oil, he was in a political position that needed the bolstering that the oil would have provided.

Edward’s clashes with barons over power can be divided into three phases. J. S. Hamilton of Baylor University elaborates on these stages.<sup>83</sup> The first, 1307-1313, was a period characterized by a fight for control and much of the struggle centered on the influence of Gaveston, which ended in his murder. The second stage, approximately 1313-1322, included another political struggle that included the Ordinances and the rise of Thomas, earl of Lancaster, who feverously labored to restrict Edward’s royal power. Hamilton describes the third stage, 1322-1327 as a time of tyranny, which ended with Edward being deposed and murdered. The first two stages need a brief examination in light of the timing of Edward’s request for a second anointing.

Although historiography on the role of Piers Gaveston has been inconsistent in the past, there is little doubt that Edward’s relationship with this favorite contributed to

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<sup>81</sup>J. R. S. Phillips, “The Place of the Reign of Edward II,” in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, ed. Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York, England: The University of York, 2006), 229.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>83</sup>For a fuller treatment, see J. S. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston Earl of Cornwall 1307-1312: Politics and Patronage in the Reign of Edward II* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 11-12.

the political tension experienced in the king's reign.<sup>84</sup> Many, perhaps most, of the frustrations in Edward's kingship stemmed from the relationships with his court favorites, especially Gaveston.<sup>85</sup> Edward's connection with Gaveston contributed to the issuing of the Ordinances in 1310-1311 that greatly restricted the king's power.

The Ordinances limited Edward in regard to royal actions like going to war, leaving England, making grants, appointing political leaders, and changing the royal council without the approval of the barons.<sup>86</sup> The Ordinances of 1311 stated,

And in addition to this we having regard to what was done by the most noble king, the father of the present king, by whose adjudgment the aforesaid Piers abjured the realm of England and whose will it was that our lord the king, his son, should adjure forever his company, and that since by the common assent of all the realm and of the king . . . and he did leave it, and that his return was never by common assent, but only by the assent of some individuals, who to it on condition of his behaving well after his return; and now his bad conduct is established beyond doubt, for which conduct and for the great wickedness aforementioned and for the many others that could befall our lord the king and his people . . .<sup>87</sup>

The document called for a complete replacement of Edward's favorites. The Ordinances were specifically harsh toward Gaveston: ". . . Peter Gaveston as the evident enemy of the king and of his people [is to] be completely exiled as well from the kingdom of

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<sup>84</sup>Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston*, 11-12, points out that an accurate understanding of Gaveston's role in the political tension was tainted early in the historical accounts because of the trauma of deposing an anointed king. Both Gaveston and Edward II were typecast to justify such a drastic event. See Hamilton for further discussion on the historiographical developments.

<sup>85</sup>Michael Prestwich, *The Three Edwards: War and State in England 1272-1377*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Methuen, 1981; London: Routledge, 2003), 71. For fuller treatment on the growth of hostility toward Gaveston, see Roy M. Haines, *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon, His Life, His Reign, and Its Aftermath, 1284-1330* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 65-70.

<sup>86</sup>See Gwilym Dodd, "Parliament and Political Legitimacy in the Reign of Edward II," in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, ed. Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (York, England: The University of York, 2006), 174.

<sup>87</sup>The entire document, "The New Ordinances, 1311, is produced in *English Historical Documents*, ed. David Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3.527-539. All citations from the Ordinances are from Douglas.

England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales as from the whole lordship of the king overseas as well as on this side, forever without ever returning.” The Ordinances were concerned with Edward’s royal image and claimed that Gaveston’s influence resulted in “the king and his subjects [being] dishonoured in all lands.”

Much of the turbulent relationship between Edward and the barons revolved around issues of control. The barons were attempting to remove exclusive decision-making away from the king and his court to include the nobles. Edward responded to the nobles efforts to create an inclusive parliament by attempting to call and arrange “secret” parliaments and councils.<sup>88</sup> The request of a second anointing occurred in the midst of this vying for power.

The relations between Edward and many nobles continued to deteriorate over the next several years and Gaveston was at the center of the controversy. Gaveston’s primary offense was his arrogance toward other magnates and his influence over the distribution of the king’s patronage.<sup>89</sup> When the strain between Gaveston and the nobles ended in the favorite’s execution, an irreconcilable breach resulted between the king and many of the nobles. The contentions between Edward and other magnates, which were based on Gaveston’s control over patronage, had brought the kingdom to the brink of civil war repeatedly, from the beginning at Edward’s coronation to the death of Gaveston.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>See John R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322: a Study in the Reign of Edward II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 190-201.

<sup>89</sup>The possible homosexual relationship between Edward II and Gaveston was not of primary importance in his death. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston*, 17, states, “The favorite was murdered because of his control of patronage, not because of access to the king’s bedchamber, even if the former may have been an outgrowth of the latter.”

<sup>90</sup>See Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston*, 46-49; Haines, *King Edward II*, 87-94.

Following the death of Gaveston, Edward displayed political strength in regard to the barons by enlisting support from the French and the English Church until he obtained his desired settlement.<sup>91</sup> From 1316 to 1318, the years immediately preceding the attempt to use Thomas' Oil, Edward was actively laboring to gain the support of influential barons in disputing the demands of Thomas of Lancaster.<sup>92</sup> Edward, with the assistance of Aymer of Valance, Earl of Pembroke, was on the brink of regaining control in 1318, when the letter from John XXII appeared outlining the legend of Holy Oil sent from heaven.<sup>93</sup> There is little doubt that Edward could have greatly benefited from a second consecration with a miraculous heaven-sent oil in light of the political struggles in the realm.

Edward's foreign relations were another area that could have benefited from a second anointing. He had suffered a military defeat to the north in Scotland by Robert Bruce in 1314. The image of the English king as inferior to the French king on the basis of anointing was another issue the Holy Oil of Thomas could assuage. The pope's denial of Edward's request for a second anointing was in line with the pontiff's disparate treatment of the kings of France and England. Pope John XXII referred to French kings as the "Most Christian Kings" and refused Edward a source that could possibly raise him to a similar consecrated level.<sup>94</sup> Pope John's failure to grant a second anointing also highlighted papal ability to interfere with English politics.

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<sup>91</sup>See J. R. S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, 1307-1324, Baronial Politics in the Reign of Edward II* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), 38-69.

<sup>92</sup>See *ibid.*, 136-177; Haines, *King Edward II*, 95-97.

<sup>93</sup>Cannon, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Monarch*, 216.

<sup>94</sup>Sophie Menache, "The Failure of John XXII's Policy toward France and England: Reasons and Outcomes, 1316-1334, *Church History* 55 (1986), 174-175.

Thomas' Oil was not part of the subsequent coronations of Edward III or Richard II. The legend did not appear again until the last year of Richard's reign, but some important details had changed regarding Becket's Holy Oil. The most obvious was the replacement of a stone or crystal ampulla with an eagle artifact. What was the history of the symbolism of an eagle, and what was the range of possible meanings of the bird in medieval England? The next section of this chapter addresses the content of the legend in 1399 and then directs attention to the symbolism of eagles in the Middle Ages.

### *The Content of the Legend in 1399*

After the letter of Pope John XXII in 1318, the next documented evidence of Thomas' Oil was in the reign of Richard II in 1399. Thomas Walsingham told the story of Richard's finding an eagle ampulla. Richard was, according to Walsingham, investigating the relics in the Tower left to him by Edward III and unexpectedly found the eagle, phial, and prophecy given to Thomas by the Virgin Mary. After reading the prophecy concerning the power of the oil, Richard asked the archbishop to anoint him a second time with the heaven-sent oil from the eagle. The archbishop refused on the basis that Richard's anointing at his coronation was sufficient. Richard, however, carried the eagle as he went to Ireland. Upon Richard's return, the archbishop retrieved the eagle ampulla and kept it safe until Henry's coronation.<sup>95</sup>

Walsingham's description of the legend indicates an evolution in the myth that extended beyond the addition of an eagle Ampulla. Walsingham's account of the legend is worth repeating in total:

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<sup>95</sup>Douglas, *English Historical Documents*, 4.414, provides the documentation.



Henry IV was crowned king at Westminster by the hands of Lord Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury . . . and as an augury of richer grace in the future, as it was believed, he was anointed with that heavenly oil which the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, once entrusted to the keeping of the Blessed Thomas, Martyr, Archbishop of Canterbury, while he was in exile, prophesying to him that the Kings of England who should be anointed with this oil would be defenders and friends of the Church. This oil, kept in a golden eagle and stone phial, was hidden for a long time, but at last was miraculously revealed when the Lord Henry, first Duke of Lancaster, was fighting the king's battles across the seas. The eagle was handed over by a certain holy man, who found it by divine revelation. He gave it to the most noble prince Edward [the Black Prince, who died before his father in 1376], first-born of the illustrious king of England, so that he might be anointed with this oil as king after his father's death. Prince Edward deposited this oil in the Tower of London, enclosing it in a chest secured with many locks, and there it lay hidden, either through forgetfulness or neglect, until the time of King Richard son of the prince.<sup>96</sup>

The modern historian T. A. Sandquist examined the various manuscripts and provided a few additional details from the variant readings.<sup>97</sup> Thomas was in the church of Saint Columbe in France. Some manuscripts indicated that the first king anointed would be the greatest among kings, would regain Normandy and Aquitaine, build churches in the Holy Land, and drive out the pagans from Babylon. The Virgin Mary promised victory and prosperity when the king would carry the eagle close to his chest.

The legend implies parallels between the eagle, Roman Imperial augury, and the *Sainte Ampoule*. It is a point of interest that Walsingham used the word “augury” to describe the future benefit of the Ampulla. Indeed, the description of the delivery of the eagle Ampulla looks like Roman Imperial augury in its appearance, military, and royal functions.

First, the legend describes the eagle as having descended (even though by the hand of the Virgin Mary) in the likeness of the descriptions of the doves at Jesus' and

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<sup>96</sup>Thomas Walsingham, cited in Douglas, *English Historical Documents*, 4.414.

<sup>97</sup>Sandquist, “The Holy Oil of St. Thomas,” 332.

Clovis' baptisms, which in turn resembles Roman augural flight of birds. The description of the Ampulla coming from heaven is similar to an account of the flight of birds.

Second, the Ampulla shares similar military roles with Roman avian omens. The appearance of an eagle signaled military victory for the Roman army. So too, the Ampulla, according to the revised legend of 1399, was to bring military victory to the English king who held the eagle in his possession. The Ampulla, like the Roman eagle standards, was portable and represented divine assistance in military campaigns in Normandy, Aquitaine, and in the Holy Land.

Third, avian omens appeared in the Roman world as a confirmation of divine election of the emperor. The Ampulla and its discovery were surrounded by divine revelation, according to the legend, "until the time of King Richard, son of the Prince." The prophecy was laden with the sense of divine timing for the confirmation of an English monarch, which included victory in specific times and places. Roman augury and the Ampulla share the common purpose of strengthening a sovereign's claim to power.

The revised legend of 1399 alludes to the French. The reference to regaining Normandy and Aquitaine is the clearest because the French possessed these lands. The mention of "the greatest among kings" contradicts the similar claim by the French king on the basis of the *Sainte Ampoule*. Both the French and the English now had a legend of Holy Oil that included a bird, a dove and an eagle, respectively. The reference to the church of Saint Columbe would certainly have called to mind the French legend of *Sainte Ampoule* since "columbe" is Latin for dove. If the inference was intended, then the eagle's descent by the hand of the Virgin Mary would have, at the very least, put the

English legend on par with the French's descent of an ampulla by a dove. However, the Imperial Roman implication of the eagle was clear enough; the Ampulla symbolized the world dominance of England and the country's superiority to the French.

### *The Symbolism of the Eagle*

The use of the eagle in royal symbolism in Western Europe had a long history. "Charlemagne as the restorer of the Roman Empire in the West naturally took as the symbol of his rule that ancient eagle which had led victorious legions on a thousand battle fields."<sup>98</sup> He revitalized the Imperial Roman imagery of the eagle by using it on the official coat-of-arms. The enduring impact of this avian tradition and its relevance at the time of the debut of the English Ampulla is evident in the *Bust of Charlemagne*, a French relic dated around 1350 created to house fragments of Charlemagne's skull. The bust displays the Emperor in a vest covered by eagle emblems.<sup>99</sup>

The eagle became the standard symbol of the Holy Roman Empire. Conrad III, (r. 1138-1152) adapted the single-headed eagle and used the double-headed eagle as the

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<sup>98</sup>Francis H. Herrick, *The American Eagle: a Study in Natural and Civil History* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), 225. The eagle as an icon moved from Rome to Constantinople in the form of a two-headed eagle. The trajectory of the fourteenth significance can be traced to Ivan III (r. 1462-1505) took the Byzantine symbolism of the two-headed eagle to Russia in 1472. The often quoted twentieth century George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, rev. ed., trans. J. Hassey (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 509, indicated the Eastern influence:

Ivan III . . . married the daughter of the Despot Thomas Palaeologus, the niece of the last Emperor of Byzantium. He assumed the imperial Byzantine two-headed eagle in his arms, introduced Byzantine ceremony into Moscovy and soon made Russia the leader of the Christian East as Byzantium had once been. Russia became the obvious heir of the Byzantine Empire and it took over from Constantinople Roman concepts in their Byzantine form. If Constantinople was the New Rome, Moscow became the "Third Rome."

The Holy Roman Empire also appears to have had influenced on Ivan's choice to incorporate the eagle symbolism as a state emblem. Ivan, when he saw the Empire utilize the two-headed eagle for the emperor while the heir displayed only a one-headed eagle, he adopted the same imagery. For a full discussion of the argument, see Alef Gustave, "The Adoption of the Muscovite Two-headed Eagle—a Discordant View," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 16.1 (1966): 1-12.

<sup>99</sup>The *Bust of Charlemagne* currently housed in the Cathedral Treasury in Aachen, Germany.

imperial standard.<sup>100</sup> The symbolism of the double-headed eagle remains somewhat of a mystery in the absence of medieval explanation. Modern scholars who make comment most frequently conclude the two heads represented the emperor's reign over both East and West. However, it seems possible that the heads looking in opposite directions could have asserted the emperor's authority over both temporal and spiritual realms, the probability of which is sustained in light of on-going struggles between popes and emperors.

As the time approached of the first appearance of the eagle Ampulla during the reign of Richard II, eagle motifs increased in foreign coronation regalia. In Spain, a thirteenth-century crown, probably from Aragon, depicts several eagles.<sup>101</sup> The top of Louis IX's scepter, the French king who generated a response in the 1308 English *ordo* because of his canonization, portrayed an eagle. When Richard II married Isabella of France, she received a crown with an eagle depicted on it from the Duke of Gloucester.<sup>102</sup> Most notably, Boniface adopted eagles for his stole. The British medieval historian Richard Barber comments on this imagery, "For the struggle between pope and emperor for power over the clergy was now extended into the purely secular field. Pronouncements in the heat of the early contest were taken to their logical extremes, until Boniface VIII wore the imperial eagle on his vestments."<sup>103</sup> Eagles, as representative of

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<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>101</sup>Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe*, 604-605.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>103</sup>Richard Barber, *The Penguin Guide to Medieval Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 191.

Roman imperial might had become more common by the time Richard II attempted to incorporate avian imagery in a second consecration using the Ampulla.

The eagle took a more prominent role in the symbolism of English royal authority at the coronation regalia of Richard II in 1377. The Royal Mantle, a stole that was the last item put on the monarch during the coronation service, had eagles embroidered on it. The *Liber Regalis*, used at Richard's coronation, described the vesting,

Then shall he be vested in the royal mantle, which is square and worked all over with golden eagles. Then shall the metropolitan or bishop say: Receive this pall, which is formed with four corners, to let you understand that the four corners of the world are subject to the power of God; and that no man can happily reign upon earth, who has not received his authority from heaven above.<sup>104</sup>

The document provides an explanation about the symbolism of the eagle, and it ties the bird to the themes of worldwide power and authority.

Although Richard was only ten when he became king and his role in the coronation is undetermined, the unprecedented appearance of eagles in his coronation festivities is striking. The day after the coronation, according to a report of Walsingham, Richard set up an elaborate eagle artifact: "In the midst of the palace a hollow marble pillar was set up, surmounted by a large gilt eagle, from under the feet of which, through the four sides of the capital, flowed wine of different kinds throughout the day."<sup>105</sup> The eagle was obviously an important and well-used symbol surrounding Richard's coronation and represented Roman power and control. Later in his reign, he turned to its

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<sup>104</sup>*Liber Regalis*. See Douglas, *English Historical Documents*, 4.403.

<sup>105</sup>Cited in Taylor, *The Glory of Regality*, 257.

iconographical value with the creation of the eagle Ampulla, imagery particularly significant in light of the possibility of his imperial ambition.<sup>106</sup>

*Richard II and Imperial Designs in England*

Walter Ullmann, professor of ecclesiastical history at the University of Cambridge (1949-1983), has pointed out that kingdoms in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries sought the title of emperor within the confines of their own kingdoms.<sup>107</sup> The maxim *Rex in Regno suo est imperator* was popular among various kings at this time. Ullmann clarifies,

This . . . did not mean that the king aspired to a status equal to that of a medieval emperor or harbour any universalist ambitions. The French, the Sicilian, and indeed the English kings, not to go further afield, were realistic enough not to entertain such unworldly dreams. But, then, what did it mean? The short answer is that the king wished to play in his own kingdom the role and function of the late Roman emperor which was abundantly documented in the early available Roman law, *Corpus iuris civilis*.<sup>108</sup>

Ullmann cites an early thirteen-century English canonist in regard to a king being an emperor in his own realm: “*Quod dictum est de imperatore dictum habeatur de quolibet rege vel principe qui nulli subest. Unusquisque enim tantum iuris habet in regno suo*

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<sup>106</sup>Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1997), 243, notes connection between Richard and eagles. The roof of the chancel of the Great Hospital, built in 1381, has a lavish display of eagles. Saul explains the appearance of eagles as “probably a reference to the visit . . . of Richard and his queen, Anne, the daughter of Emperor Charles IV.”

<sup>107</sup>Walter Ullmann, “This Realm of England as an Empire,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 30 (1979), 175-203.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

*quam imperator in imperio.*"<sup>109</sup> Imperial notions for the English king to be an emperor within England were present in Richard's reign.

There is evidence that points to Richard II having designs for being an emperor of Britain as well as the Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>110</sup> Medievalist Michael J. Bennett of the University of Tasmania argues for Richard's imperial intent,

In 1399 . . . [Richard] intended to have the Duke of Surrey crowned as king of Ireland. In the Gaelic Ireland, and in the wider Celtic fringe, there were already chieftains who boasted royal titles. The submission of the Gaelic 'Kings' in 1394-5, and their deference to his 'most exalted crown, implied a model of high-kingship or king-emperorship which Richard could not have failed to find flattering and congenial.<sup>111</sup>

There is additional evidence that points to the possibility of Richard's imperial aims that includes his supposed talk of laying down his English crown for a higher one, his moving his seat of power from place to place in England in the late 1390s in the style of the Holy Roman Emperor, and his allegedly taking the eagle Ampulla with him to Ireland.<sup>112</sup>

However, the English had long held universal imperialist hopes. They used claims to Trojan/Roman origins in the promotion of a wider rule beyond the Isles (partially perhaps in reaction to French similar Roman claims). English propagandists

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<sup>109</sup>"What was written about an emperor might be held as said about a king or prince (ruler) whithersoever you please, who is subject to no one. Indeed each one has as much (authority) of law in his own kingdom as an emperor in an empire." Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Saul, *Richard II*, 239-239, points out Richard's intense interest in promoting his image within his realm. Saul says, Richard showed and almost obsessive interest in projecting his own image. In every artistic medium—in sculpture, writing and painting—he flaunted an idealized royal image before his subjects. He regularly had himself portrayed as a ruler-in-majesty, a remote godlike monarch to whom obedience was due."

<sup>111</sup>Michael J. Bennett, "Richard II and the Wider Realm," in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, ed. Anthony Goodman and James Giles (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1999), 195-196. See also E. Curtis, *Richard II and Ireland, 1394-1395, and the Submission of Irish Chiefs* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), 21-32; and D. Johnson, "Richard II and the Submission of Gaelic Ireland," *Irish Historical Studies* 22 (1980), 1-20.

<sup>112</sup>See *ibid.*, 203-204.

created a myth of royal superiority based on monarchical ancestry related to Constantine. The twelfth-century English historian, Geoffrey of Monmouth, stated that it was common knowledge that the Trojan Brutus would establish a race of British kings who would rule the world: “By common consent of all, Brutus took with him the Augur Gero and twelve other men and set out for the temple [of Diana], carrying everything necessary for a sacrifice.”<sup>113</sup> It is noteworthy that Geoffrey mentioned Brutus taking along an augur. The goddess responded to Brutus by prophesying, “Down the years this [island of Britain] will prove an abode suited to you and your people, and for your descendants it will be a second Troy. A race of kings will be born there from your stock and the round circle of the whole earth will be subject to them.”<sup>114</sup> Geoffrey held the common belief that the Romans were descendants of Troy.<sup>115</sup> According to Geoffrey, the destiny of the English, on the basis of Trojan/Roman descent, was to rule the world. This claim mirrored French rhetoric and put the English on par in regard to ancestry.

At the Council of Constance, fifteen years after the appearance of the eagle Ampulla, the English defended their royal superiority against the French by appealing to English Trojan/Roman heritage:

England is superior in the antiquity of its faith, dignity and honour and at least equal in all the divine gifts of regal power and numbers and wealth of clergy and people. During the second age of the world, the excellent royal house of England arose and it continues in real existence to this date. Among the many holy palmers whom it has produced and whom none cannot here well enumerate, there are St.

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<sup>113</sup>Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988), 1.11.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Geoffrey, *The History of the Kings of England* 111.1, recorded that when Caesar first saw the island of Britain, he said, “Those Britons come from the same race as we do, for we Romans too, are descendant from Trojan stock.”



Helen and her son, the Emperor Constantine the Great, born in the royal city of York.<sup>116</sup>

The English were eager to demonstrate their superiority and the distinctive character of their monarchs based on a relationship to Imperial Rome, and the Ampulla fit into that scheme of thinking.

Bennett thinks that Richard became the focus for some people in 1395-1396 who wanted to retake the Holy Land and reunite Christendom, especially France and England.<sup>117</sup> Philippe de Mezieres, in his *Letter to King Richard II*, appears to make such an imperial appeal to Richard in relationship to ending hostilities with France, his potential marriage to the French princess, Ann, and retaking the Holy Land.<sup>118</sup> Wenceslas, the emperor elect, and Charles VI of France were not viable candidates for the job of governing an empire because of drunkenness and mental instability respectively. Bennett postulates, “There were serious moves to elect Richard as Holy Roman Emperor in place of Wenceslas. The dean of Cologne led a mission to this end in the summer of 1397, and over the following months Richard assiduously cultivated German allies.”<sup>119</sup> D. M. Bueno de Mesquita of Cambridge University makes similar claims:

The English envoys . . . at the Diet of Frankfurt in May 1397 were entrusted with the task of forwarding Richard’s cause [of election] among the German princes; and two of the electors . . . became his vassals in return for a pension . . . . Four German knights took the oath of homage to him in October; and gifts recorded in the Issue

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<sup>116</sup> Cited in Cannon, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Monarchy*, 270.

<sup>117</sup> Bennett, “Richard II and the Wider Realm,” 197.

<sup>118</sup> See Philippe de Merieres, *Letter to King Richard: a Plea made in 1395 for Peace between England and France*, trans. G. W. Coopland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1975), 1-74.

<sup>119</sup> Bennett, 197.

Rolls, under the date of 1 December, not only to the two electors who had already taken allegiance to him, but to two more.<sup>120</sup>

Bennett's and Bueno De Mesquita's conclusions, however, must be received with caution since they are based on chroniclers. Walsingham recorded in the spring of 1399 that Richard was assured that the Empire's electors were prepared to choose him as the King of the Romans. Richard's negotiations, according to Walsingham, had been proceeding quietly for some time.<sup>121</sup> Walsingham further portrayed Richard as deceived by false prophets that presented him as a future emperor and the greatest ruler in the world.<sup>122</sup> The Ampulla would have been considered one of these prophecies for the chronicler. Walsingham also referred to Richard's forces that moved north into Scotland as an "imperial army."<sup>123</sup> If Richard had imperial motives, a second anointing with a container that was symbolic of the Roman Empire, an eagle, and holy oil sent from heaven would have been an appropriate plan of action.

If Richard had imperial plans, anointing with an oil that was divinely sanctioned apart from the papacy would have been extremely beneficial in light of the history between popes and emperors and current trends in the election of emperors to pull away from papal intervention. The power and influence of the emperor had diminished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was an era of papal excommunication of emperors and of emperors deposing popes. The princes had gained greater independence as a result of a vacuum of leadership during a long interregnum (1254-1273).

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<sup>120</sup>D. M. Bueno de Mesquita, "The Foreign Policy of Richard II in 1397: Some Italian Letters," *The English Historical Review* 56 (1941), 632.

<sup>121</sup>Walsingham, *Chronica et Annales*, 199.

<sup>122</sup>See *Ibid.*, 233-234.

<sup>123</sup>Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ii.133.

The movement within the Holy Roman Empire was away from papal dependence for imperial coronation. The German princes at the Diets of Rhense and Frankfurt in 1338 claimed the right to elect emperors without papal intervention.<sup>124</sup> The majority of the electors were to determine who would receive the title of Emperor and King of the Romans on the basis of their election alone. The Golden Bull of 1356 reaffirmed the princes' electoral right of coronation.<sup>125</sup> If Richard had used the Ampulla, it would have fit into this movement away from the papacy as the source of emperorship. The Ampulla could have affirmed Richard as the divinely consecrated emperor in the likeness of Roman tradition without the intrusion of the pope.

### *The Legend's Loss of Significance*

The English Holy Oil and Ampulla never reached the same degree of fame in England or on the Continent as did the French *Sainte Ampoule*. The twentieth-century German historian Percy E. Schramm argues that the English legend of the Ampulla was neglected after Henry IV: "The discovery [of the eagle Ampulla by Henry] does not seem to have made a great impression, for the *ordines* make no mention of any special oil, and no trace remained of this fresh attempt to secure recognition of this heaven-sent oil for England as well as for France."<sup>126</sup> Walter Ullmann corrected Schramm's oversight. Ullmann points out a fifteenth-century Portuguese document that provides an account of the coronation of Henry VI (r. 1422-1461); the text indicates that Henry's *ordo* included the eagle and the miraculous oil. Ullmann concludes that this evidence "shows that the

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<sup>124</sup>Veit Valentin, *The German People: Their History and Civilization from the Holy Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 111.

<sup>125</sup>The Emperors, however were to continue to be crowned by the pope until 1530.

<sup>126</sup>Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation*, 138.

use of the eagle as well as the miraculous oil was in fact authenticated in a copy of the *Liber Regalis* of the mid-fifteenth century.”<sup>127</sup> J. W. McKenna of the University of California provides additional evidence of the use of Becket’s Holy Oil and the eagle at the coronations of Henry VI (r. 1422-1461 and 1470-1471) and Edward IV (r. 1461-1470 and 1471-1483). However, the use of the Ampulla for these and other coronations of the fifteenth century simply worked against the perceived value of the relic because so many kings were deposed during that century. The oil failed to benefit those kings whose reigns ended so miserably.

Foreign and ecclesiastical developments also hampered the widespread reception of the story. The Hundred Year’s War with France ended in 1453 and most likely had an impact upon the urgency of the competition of royal image-making between the two countries. The Council of Constance and the Conciliar Movement lowered the need for English kings to advance their claims to spiritual authority. The council terminated the Great Schism and reduced papal authority. The first part of the fifteenth century abridged much of the foreign impetus for the legend surrounding the Ampulla. An important factor for sustaining the legend was eliminated in the second half of the fifteenth century: the war with France had ended.

A treaty in the second half of the fifteenth century between Edward IV and the Duke of Burgundy is evidence that the English Ampulla did not have the same royal benefit as did the French *Sainte Ampoule*. With renewed hostilities against the French, Edward negotiated with Burgundy in July 1474 for access to the *Sainte Ampoule* under the assumption that the English would conquer Rheims. Edward wanted the right to English coronations at Rheims’ cathedral so that he and his successors could use the

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<sup>127</sup>Ullmann, “Thomas Becket’s Miraculous Oil,” 130.

*Sainte Ampoule*. If they could not go to France for any reason, then Burgundy would make the Holy Oil of the French relic available for a ceremony elsewhere.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps Edward's concern for the right to use the *Sainte Ampoule* simply reflected his aim to be the king of France and his sense of needing the French oil, but the reputation of the English Ampulla was not sufficient in itself to fulfill Edward's ambitions.

The rise of the Tudor dynasty, specifically the reign of Henry VIII, further weakened royal need for miraculous oil. The competition between the papacy and the monarchy reached an apex with Henry. He had requested Pope Clement VII to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in 1527 so that he could marry Anne Boleyn. The pope refused to dissolve the marriage, and Henry did not wait for the pope to change his mind. In 1533, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, annulled the marriage and legalized the then three-month secret marriage between Henry and Anne. The following year Henry severed ties with Rome and assumed the title of Head of the Church of England by the Act of Supremacy. The need for the legend of the Becket's Holy Oil and the Ampulla to affirm Henry's reign and his ecclesiastical position, therefore, became superfluous.

The importance of anointing for ecclesiastical affirmation reached a low point when Henry's young son, Edward VI (r. 1547-1553), assumed the throne at his father's death. Thomas Cranmer erased the theological and political significance of the Holy Oil of the Ampulla at the coronation of Edward VI:

The solemn rites of coronation have their ends and utility, yet neither direct force nor necessity. They be good admonitions to put kings in mind of their duty to God, but no increasement of their dignity; for they be God's anointed, not in respect of the oil which the bishop useth, but in consideration of their power, which is

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<sup>128</sup>See McKenna, "*The Coronation Oil of the Yorkist Kings*," 104.

ordained of their sword, which is authorized, of their persons, which are elected by God, and indued with the gifts of his Spirit for the better ruling and guiding of this people. The oil, if added, is but a ceremony; if not be wanting, that king is yet a perfect monarch notwithstanding, and God's anointed, as well as if he was inoiled.<sup>129</sup>

Edward's rise to power certainly would have benefited from the legend of the Ampulla because he was only nine years old when Henry died, yet Cranmer saw no need for a miraculous oil to advance the young king's right to the throne. Cranmer's reference to "the oil the bishop useth" is drastically different from the notion of heaven-sent oil. Anointing for Cranmer was solely an outward sign; Edward was already king by heredity, perhaps by an act of Parliament, or, more importantly, the king was God's anointed regardless of symbolic recognition of that election.

The issue of anointing in the coronation of Queen Mary I (r. 1553-1558) supports the recent scholarly opinion of Christopher Haigh, the Tudor historian at Christ Church, Oxford. Haigh argues that the English Reformations were reversing and reversible.<sup>130</sup> Mary attempted to turn England back to Catholicism after it had made significant movement toward Protestantism under the leadership of Edward's guardians. Cranmer had lowered the significance of anointing at Edward's coronation; conversely, Mary sought to heighten the importance of the oil by asking a bishop for a new supply of freshly consecrated unction.<sup>131</sup> The notion of a divinely provided Holy Oil had been abandoned at this time; the Ampulla survived but its legend was gone. The request for

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<sup>129</sup>Cited in Schramm, *A History of English Coronation*, 139.

<sup>130</sup>Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993), 1-21.

<sup>131</sup>Tanner, *The Historic Story of the Coronation Ceremony*, 73; Richard C. McCoy, "'The Wonderful Spectacle': The Civic Progress of Elizabeth I and the Troublesome Coronation," in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. Janos Bak (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 118.

new oil demonstrated the close connection that had existed between royal anointing and the Roman Church. Mary was attempting to re-establish England as a Catholic nation by going back to ecclesiastically supplied oil and abandoning the legend of the Ampulla.

Initial thoughts about the Legend's loss of significance naturally focus on the Puritan period, especially the reign of Charles I. The Puritans are renowned for rejecting most everything the Ampulla signified. They placed literacy over ceremony, dismissed religious iconographic expression, worked for simplicity of visual expression in religious ceremonies, and participated in the removal and destruction of much of the king's regalia. Parallels between the House of Commons' declaration regarding ecclesiastic innovations and the Ampulla are readily apparent. On September 1, 1641, the House passed and published a set of resolutions:

It is this day ordered by the Commons in Parliament assembled: That the churchwardens of every parish church and chapel respectively, do forthwith remove the communion table from the east end of the church, chapel, or chancel into some other convenient place; and that they take away the rails, and level the chancels as heretofore they were before the late innovations: That all crucifixes, scandalous pictures of any one or more persons of the Trinity, and all images of the Virgin Mary, shall be taken away and abolished; and that all tapers, candlesticks and basins be removed from the communion table; That all bowing at the name of Jesus, or towards the east end of the church, chapel, of chancel, or towards the communion table be henceforth forborne.<sup>132</sup>

Moreover, Puritans were concerned about the act of anointing at Charles' coronation. William Laud (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury, was responsible for the *ordo*, the staging, and was the Master of Ceremonies at Charles' coronation. One of the accusations against Laud at his later trial was that he altered the text of the consecration toward absolutism. Although modern scholars have cleared him of the accusation, the

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<sup>132</sup>Cited in *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625-1660*, ed. Samuel Rawson Gardiner, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1889, 1968), 197-198.

seventeenth-century Puritans did not.<sup>133</sup> It is safe to assume that the Puritans would have rejected much of the symbolism of the regalia in general and the notion of royal transformation by oil.

However, the most that can be said about the Puritans' influence in the loss of the legend's significance is that they possibly contributed to the efforts to destroy the actual statue of the Ampulla along with the rest of the royal regalia in the seventeenth century. The essence of the Ampulla's legend was its connection with Becket's Holy Oil and the royal transformation that came from anointing. Neither of these benefits was still associated with the Ampulla when the Puritans came into existence during the reign of Elizabeth. The Ampulla was simply one of the many elements of the regalia by the time of Elizabeth's coronation. The myth of the Virgin Mary descending with an eagle containing divinely given oil for the radical change of the monarch had fallen out of use.

The history of the Ampulla reached a nadir with the regicide of Charles I on January 30, 1649. When Charles fled London in June 1642, he left behind his regalia, which the Rump Parliament confiscated for two reasons. First, the Parliament was in need of funds because of the civil war, and second, it wanted to divest the country of all remnants of royalty and popery. The House of Commons passed a bill on October 4, 1649 and demanded that the regalia be "totally broken and that they melt down all the gold and silver and sell the jewels to the best advantage of the commonwealth."<sup>134</sup> The guards encountered resistance when they attempted to retrieve the regalia. The Clerk of

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<sup>133</sup>Henry Everett, Paul Bradshaw, and Colin Buchanan, *Coronations, Past, Present and Future* (Cambridge, England: Grove, 1997), 7.

<sup>134</sup>Cited in Baker, *The Symbols of Sovereignty*, 53.



the Jewel House tried to protect the crown jewels but was arrested and jailed at Fleet prison. Most of the royal ornaments and their history were subsequently lost.

Following the government of Oliver Cromwell and the interregnum period, England restored the monarchy under Charles II. Efforts began to refashion the regalia for Charles' coronation. The documents surrounding that event create doubt whether the Ampulla and Anointing Spoon had been destroyed with the rest of the royal ornaments. Two documents, one currently in the British Library and the other at the Library of the Society of Antiquities, provide a list of the regalia taken for destruction by the Commonwealth, and neither document mentions the Ampulla.<sup>135</sup>

A common theory is that the Ampulla and Anointing Spoon survived because the English considered these pieces more sacred and kept them separately at Westminster Abbey.<sup>136</sup> Yet other lists indicate the Ampulla among the items that needed to be replaced. These lists work against the notion that the relic survived. Edward Walker wrote in 1661, "All the royal ornaments and regalia heretofore preserved from age to age in the Treasury of the Church at Westminster were taken away, sold and destroyed. The committee met divers times, not only to direct the remaking of such royal ornaments and regalia but even to settle the form and fashion of each treasure."<sup>137</sup> Among the ornaments he included were the Ampulla and Spoon. The workman, Sir Robert Vyner, provided a receipt on June 20, 1662, for his work creating the new regalia, and this list also includes an ampulla.

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<sup>135</sup>George Holmes, *Europe: Hierarchy and Revolt, 1320-1450*, 3-4.

<sup>136</sup>For example, see Davenport, *The English Regalia*, 32.

<sup>137</sup>Cited in Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe*, 150-151. See also Barker, *The Symbols of Sovereignty*, 58-59.

It is clear, however, that not all the regalia were lost during the Commonwealth era. Records indicate that several royalists purchased pieces of the regalia. One inventory mentions that a man named Kinnersley purchased a silver spoon for sixteen shillings. At least four other royal ornaments from the earlier regalia also survived.<sup>138</sup>

In efforts to guard the Ampulla from destruction, in all likelihood, someone either deliberately altered it in an attempt to conceal the relic or inadvertently damaged it. The Ampulla was probably not replaced in 1662 but was repaired. The body of the eagle and the screw in the neck were manufactured in the fourteenth century.<sup>139</sup> This date places the original creation of the present Ampulla (or at least parts of it) in the late fourteenth century. The gold eagle survived the interregnum, but the legend and the eagle's connection with the Imperial Roman culture were lost.

### *Summary*

The legend of heaven-sent oil of Thomas Becket appeared for the first time in England amidst significant developments in Church/state relationships. A primary purpose of the legend was to provide Edward II with greater independence from the papacy that still had the capacity to interfere in England. The Holy Oil most likely had a two-stage development. The first stage occurred in the reign of Edward II in 1318 and then virtually vanished until the last year of Richard II in 1399 with the addition of an eagle to the legend.

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<sup>138</sup>Barker, *The Symbols of Sovereignty*, 56.

<sup>139</sup>See William Jones, *Crowns and Coronations: A History of Regalia*, 283; Twining, *A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe*, 150-151.

Political and ecclesiastical reasons, both domestic and foreign, called for the creation of the myth in 1318. Domestically, Edward was regaining a degree of royal power after nobles had usurped much of his authority, and he needed to strengthen his claim to power by the miraculous qualities associated with Thomas' Holy Oil. The foreign urgencies in occasioning the myth occurred in the context of the deteriorating relations between France and England. Much of the political propaganda between the two countries involved royal image-making, the heart of which was royal anointing. England, for the most part, continually lagged behind the French in at least three areas: a cathedral for royal consecrations, the king's healing touch for scrofula, and the sanctity of anointing oil. Saint Thomas' Holy Oil, as a legend of celestial oil, had the potential to level the field between France's ampulla and England's burgeoning legend.

Ecclesiastical developments contributed to Edward's need for the benefits that Becket's Oil could provide. The late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were times of decreasing papal influence and increasing centralized monarchical governments. Thomas' Oil had the potential to strengthen Edward's growing need for greater independence from the pope. The papacy had a previous history of weakening the royal image of British monarchs and reinforcing the notion of a superior French monarchy based on the holy chrism of the *Sainte Ampoule*.

The legend of Thomas Becket's Oil had evolved from its first appearance in 1318 with Edward to its second debut with Richard II in 1399. The addition of the eagle matched the symbolism of the Roman Imperial eagle in regard to the supremacy of the king and as Roman avian omens for divine approval of the sovereign. The competition over the materials and benefits of anointing continued between France and England. The

appearance of the eagle Ampulla complemented the English focus on their Roman origins and imperial designs. The inclusion of the eagle in the legend of Thomas' Oil finally provided the English with the potential of a royal image that was superior to the French and fit well with any imperial designs Richard II might have had for being an emperor within his own realm or to be the next Holy Roman Emperor.

The legend and the significance of the eagle faded after the coronation of Henry IV. The primary factors in the diminution of the myth included: the easing tension between France and England at the close of the Hundred Years War, and the legend's apparent lack of effectiveness as seen in the deposition of numerous kings in the fifteenth century. The greatest blow to the continuance of the myth was the rise of Henry VIII and his usurping the function of the pope in England as the Head of the English Church. Cranmer minimized the effectiveness of royal anointing at the coronation of Edward VI, but Mary in her attempts to reverse that movement in an effort to reconnect England to the Catholic Church abandoned the notion of heaven-sent oil. The Ampulla continued to lose its connection to Becket's Holy Oil and most of its Roman symbolism after the interregnum period.

Why has an eagle been in the consecration of the English monarchs since the end of the fourteenth century? The answer is grounded firmly on the Ampulla's origins in the symbolism of the Imperial Roman eagle and its use in the divine confirmation of the ruler and the imperial might of the state. This symbolism helped England at a crucial time of royal image-making in the political and ecclesiastical exigencies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The connection of the Ampulla with the legend of Thomas Becket's Holy Oil and England's associating itself with Rome for an imperial image are gone, but

anointing and the presence of an eagle in coronations still signify the blending of state and Church in a nation that is proud of much of its heritage.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

#### *Summary of the Study*

This dissertation demonstrates that the creation of the legend of the English Ampulla in the fourteenth century was a syncretistic blend of Christian and Roman symbolism of divine royal election and empowerment. Roman understanding and its use of augury is the starting point for investigating the presence of the eagle Ampulla that first appeared in the fourteenth-century English ecclesiastical royal consecration ceremony. The Roman world, as the culture in which Christianity debuted, had a profound and lasting impact on the new religion. Augury, defined as divination by the flight of birds, was pervasive in the intellectual, political, and military venues of the Roman Republic and Imperial eras to the extent that many people in the culture were predisposed to the possible significance of any flight of a bird.

Homer's work is a key source in understanding augury in the intellectual life of the Greco-Roman world because his epics were a recognized authority on the topic and extensively used in first-century education and entertainment. Augury played a significant role in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as the appearance of birds developed the plot and characters. Augury was salient in Homer's works through such literary devices as irony and prolepsis. Homeric literature, especially in light of its popularity, contributed to the first-century audience's awareness of the possible implication of the flight of birds in literature and life.

The political use of augury was also a contributing factor in the first-century awareness of the flight of birds. The legend of the founding of the Roman Empire attributed augury as the means for the selection of the capital city and the first king. The Romans used this legend as evidence of their greatness and promoted the significance of the flight of birds by repeating the founding myth from generation to generation. All important political decisions included an augur whose work kept the importance of avian omens continually in Roman public life and private awareness. Augury was a vital element in establishing the right to the throne for many emperors during the first decades of the Imperial era (27 B.C.E-96 C.E.). Emperors, according to Suetonius, whose ascent to power was questionable because of a lack of heredity, a shift in dynasties, or military intervention in the transference of power, used the flight of a bird to confirm their divine appointment as ruler. Eagles, in particular, played a prominent role in several emperors' ascent to the throne. Successful candidates for the emperorship who appealed to augury had at least one eagle omen pointing to their divine destiny as rulers of Rome.

The importance of the eagle was also evident in the Roman military. The eagle functioned as a most decisive avian omen. Soldiers interpreted the appearance of an eagle in battle as a sure sign of victory. The eagle represented power and strength, and its appearance inspired troops. The eagle was also symbolic of Roman supremacy. The Romans linked the eagle to Jupiter, the king of the gods to the king of the avian world. The eagle, therefore, came to represent the worldwide dominance of Roman emperors and the Empire. An iconographic depiction of an eagle, the eagle standard, officially became the primary recognized symbol of Roman authority and might in the late second-

century B.C.E. The eagle henceforth became the symbol of Roman domination for the ancient Mediterranean world for centuries to come.

In light of the prominent significance of the flight of birds in the Greco-Roman first-century culture, the authorial audience of Luke's Gospel likely considered parallels between the descent of the dove at Jesus' baptism and Roman avian royal confirmation. The flight of a bird, in the contexts of Luke's Gospel and the Roman milieu, confirmed the divine election of a new king. Luke's audience consisted of non-Palestinian Greco-Romans who would have been familiar with augural symbolism, practice, and significance. These readers lived in the era that was prolifically producing detailed literature about augury. The extant literature of this time has the most numerous and thorough descriptions of augury. Writers such as Homer, Livy, Tacitus, Dio, Cicero, and especially Suetonius contributed to a consistent awareness of the possible imperial significance of the flight of birds among first-century readers and auditors including those of Luke's Gospel. The bird appeared in Luke's Gospel to function in ways similar to Roman augury: the setting of the baptismal dove was a context of divine confirmation of an authority figure; the story functioned as a literary guide for the readers/hearers, and the dove identified a king among royal competitors.

The similarities would have caused readers to understand the dove functioning in the likeness of Roman imperial augury, but readers would have surely expected an eagle as confirmation of the divine election of a ruler. In Luke's baptismal account, his reference to the dove, which was a bird considered to be weak and vulnerable in the Roman culture, markedly contrasts with first-century C.E. connotations about the mighty eagle, considered king of the avian world. Three key cultures in the first- and second-



century Mediterranean milieu (the Greco-Roman, the Jewish, and the Christian) each portrayed the dove as the antithesis of the eagle. Such an understanding and contrast between birds complement Luke's consistent message that the Messiah and his kingdom are antithetical in concept and practice to the Roman emperor and the Roman Empire.

The Church in the first four centuries gave signs of being conflicted in regard to the role of divine guidance through the flight of birds. On the one hand, the Church, like the Jewish community, rejected Roman augury as a pagan practice. Their main arguments were that the methods for interpreting avian omens lacked standardization, the same argument raised by Cicero. Cicero pointed out that various territories used opposite techniques for acquiring and interpreting the significance of the flight of birds. One region, according to Cicero, used a wide variety of birds, but the Romans used only a few. One geographical area might read a bird flying away on the left as a negative omen, yet Romans saw it as a favorable sign. Roman augury was for many early Christian writers an unreliable source of prognostication in light of the hermeneutical disparity among interpreters. Most writers who rejected the practice (i.e., the authors of the *Didache* and the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Tertullian, Minucius, Cyprian, and Origen) attributed the successes of augury to demonic influence. When the flight of birds accurately foretold an event, these writers held that demons, not God, were directing the birds' flight. For these authors, Christians were to seek only God for guidance; the Church Fathers considered looking elsewhere for divine direction to be a form of idolatry.

On the other hand, several Christian writers portrayed the flight of a dove in the likeness of Roman augury as a reliable source of divine guidance in the selection of

ecclesiastical leaders (i.e., *Protoevangelium of James*, *the Martyrdom of Polycarp*, and Eusebius). Eusebius is of special interest for this study because he clearly rejected the Roman practice of augury as pagan and demonic, yet affirmed the account of the descent of a dove in the selection of Fabianus as bishop from among multiple candidates, which was in the style of Roman augury. Eusebius demonstrates a syncretistic view of divine confirmation of leaders through the flight of a dove and the rejection of Roman avian omens, which accomplished the same task. This syncretism most likely was the result of the biblical depiction of the dove at Jesus' baptism. Eusebius was probably able in part to justify a Christianized version of Roman augury because the baptismal dove in the Gospel accounts was antithetical to the kind of bird but identical in function to the Roman eagle.

The early Church leaders associated the dove at Jesus' baptism with his anointing and the Holy Spirit. The connection likely led the early Church to introduce anointing with oil in the baptismal rite of new members in recognition of receiving the Holy Spirit. The practice of baptismal anointing quickly evolved into the application of two distinct types of oil. The Church used plain olive oil for a pre-emersion exorcism and chrism (a blended oil) for post-emersion reception of the Spirit. The Church came to consider chrism as a distinct vehicle for conveyance of the Spirit and authority and used it to consecrate bishops and eventually kings. Early and medieval Christian art reflected this combination of the dove, baptism, and anointing, by depicting the baptism of Jesus with a dove descending with an ampulla of oil in its beak. These three elements (the dove, baptism, and oil) are the foundation of the French legend of the *Sainte Ampoule*.

The first extant documentation of royal anointing, Julian of Toledo's depiction of Wamba, reveals that royal anointing in itself failed to safeguard kings from would-be usurpers. Wamba had to squelch a rebel who claimed the throne in part on the basis of being anointed. Julian attributed divine confirmation to Wamba's anointing in the miraculous flight of a bee at the consecration. This divine intervention in regard to Wamba's royal anointing was a forerunner to the development of the ninth-century French legend of heaven-sent oil by the conveyance of a dove.

Many of the medieval struggles between Church and state and between kingdoms, especially France and England, included issues related to anointing. A unique and symbiotic relationship between France and the Roman Church developed partly because of anointing. The Church benefited from royal anointing in that the French king became the "Defender of the Church." The French kings also benefited from ecclesiastical anointing because they were elevated above the nobles and any would-be contenders for power. French kings decreased the chance of power-transfer conflicts before their death by anointing their heirs. The anointing of the king also raised his ecclesiastical status and provided him the opportunity for greater influence in the Church, which was often a source of Church/state conflict.

Pepin I was the first French king to introduce anointing as a political and ecclesiastical means of securing power. The symbolism of his anointing contributed to his ability to overthrow the Merovingian Dynasty and establish the Carolingian line of kings in the eighth century. Pepin had his sons anointed, thus setting a precedent for a more peaceful dynastic transition.

The basics of the French legend of the *Sainte Ampoule* came into existence with the reign of Louis I's son, Charles the Bald. The archbishop of Rheims, Hincmar, created a myth of heaven-sent oil at Clovis' baptism as a way of under-girding his own ecclesiastical status and bolstering Charles' reign. The ninth-century myth stated that when Archbishop Remi could not reach the oil to anoint the newly converted Clovis at his baptism in 800 because of the crowds, Remi prayed and a dove descended from heaven with an ampulla of oil to anoint the king. The legend, however, had mediocre reception during the Carolingian Dynasty.

The popularity of the *Sainte Ampoule* legend burgeoned along with the power and influence of the Capetian Dynasty from the eleventh to thirteen centuries. The symbolism of heaven-sent oil helped to centralize governmental power in the monarchy by increasing the kings' and their sons' images as the divinely chosen and anointed monarchs. The legend of Remi's heavenly sent oil also helped in identifying Rheims, the place of his tomb and storehouse of his oil, as the primary location for French coronations, which in part limited royal rivals.

Anointing was a significant element in the Church/state struggles, especially in the thirteen and fourteenth centuries. The papacy, in their efforts to maintain the upper hand, denied most kings access to chrism or anointing on the head. The French kings, however, retained anointing on the head with the superior heavenly provided oil of the *Sainte Ampoule*. As neighboring kingdoms vied for the ecclesiastically given right to anoint their sovereigns, the French kings maintained the title "most Christian," a title that gave them an advantage over other European kings based in part on the *Sainte Ampoule*.

Roman literature, Roman symbolism, and hope of recapturing Roman dominance were present at the time of Hincmar's creation of the legend of *Sainte Ampoule* in the ninth century. The French defended their superiority by maintaining their Trojan heritage as it passed through Rome. Later coronation celebrations in Rheims had themes that joined the dove of Clovis' baptism and the Roman imperial eagle. Medieval French kings established their royal status in part on a syncretistic blend of Roman and Christian avian themes.

The similarity of myths as well as the political and ecclesiastical contexts of the English legend of Thomas Becket's Holy Oil indicates a great likelihood that the English adopted a version of France's *Sainte Ampoule*. A narrative began to circulate in England during the reign of Edward II in the fourteenth century that sounded much like the account the French gave of the *Sainte Ampoule*. Supposedly, the Virgin Mary descended from heaven and gave Holy Oil to Becket a hundred and fifty years earlier for the anointing and empowerment of future English kings. The similarities between the two myths are too great to deny that the English borrowed, at least in part, from the French tradition.

The purposes of the creation of the English legend were most likely intended to counter papal intervention in English affairs, French claims and benefits of having the "most Christian" king, and to strengthen Edward's domestic power. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were a time of intense power struggles between the Church and state based in part on the source of royal authority originating in anointing. The legend of Thomas' Oil had the clear potential of creating greater autonomy for Edward II from papal interference.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were also a period of developing notions of nationalism, increased competition between England and France, and royal image-making. Much of the political propaganda between the two kingdoms included efforts on each side to present their king as superior. The consecration of kings was at the center of royal image-making, and the English typically had lagged behind the French in three areas: a grand cathedral for anointing kings, royal ability to heal, and the claims of Holy Oil for royal consecrations. The construction of Westminster Abbey and English claims to royal healing abilities began to close the gap, but the English still were using inferior unction in royal consecrations compared with the French heaven-sent oil at the time of Edward II's reign.

The papacy had a history prior to Edward II of weakening the image of English monarchs, particularly in comparison to French kings. Papal injunctions had previously forbidden the use of chrism as well as the anointing of the king's head in royal consecrations. Such restrictions had been less influential in France in view of the benefits of the *Sainte Ampoule*. The ecclesiastical decrees, however, had opened the way in England, at least in part, to King John's humiliation of becoming the vassal of Innocent III and making England his fiefdom in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Conversely, Innocent declared the French king to be the most authentically Christian king.

The first extant mention of heavenly sent oil in England is from the height of domestic political distress in Edward II's reign. His problems included severe criticism because of his court favorites—especially Piers Gaveston—the military defeat at the hands of Robert Bruce of Scotland, and England being on the verge of civil war over

tensions between the crown and the majority of nobles. Edward was obviously hoping for the political benefits that second anointing with Becket's oil would bring to the image of his battered kingship. John XXII had recently become pope, and in the midst of growing antipapal sentiments among Edward's opponents, the pope denied Edward's request for a second anointing.

The creation of Becket's myth in the first decades of the fourteenth century occurred at the time of nascent nationalistic awareness and provided the English with the opportunity to make their kings symbolically equal with the French regarding royal image-making. Thomas Becket's Holy Oil had the potential to establish the image of an English king who was as sacred as the anointed French monarch.

After John XXII's denial of Edward's request for a second anointing with the Holy Oil in 1318, the myth disappeared until the end of Richard II's reign in 1399, when it reappeared. The legend had evolved from its debut in 1318 to include an eagle in the likeness of the Roman imperial eagle. The addition of the eagle Ampulla matched the symbolism of the Roman imperial eagle that had been seen in Western and Eastern European kingdoms throughout the Middle Ages. Constantinople, Charlemagne, Russia, and the Holy Roman Empire adopted the Roman eagle as their symbol of might and power. Eagles began to appear more often in royal regalia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were especially prominent in the coronation and reign of England's Richard II.

Imperial aspirations were apparently alive in England and Richard II during the fourteenth century. Notions of a king being an emperor in his own realm were present in Western Europe and England. The chroniclers indicate that Richard had intentions of

being the next Holy Roman Emperor. The English, in the likeness of the French, appealed to Roman heritage as evidence of their destined greatness. The legend with the eagle Ampulla had reappeared in the midst of imperialistic ambitions and Roman symbolism of might and dignity.

The end of the fourteenth century was the apex for the popularity of England's myth of Thomas' Oil and the eagle Ampulla sent from heaven. The kings after Henry IV used the myth sparingly to bolster their royal image. Henry VIII secured the title "Head of the Church of England" in the sixteenth century and greatly diminished the ecclesiopolitical need for the legend. Thomas Cranmer reflected the low perception of the oil at the coronation of Edward VI; oil did not consecrate a king, according to Cranmer, only God did apart from the application of unction. The Puritans had little influence on the legend's loss of significance because the legend had disappeared by the time they arrived on the scene during the reign of Elizabeth. The Puritans were likely a guiding force in the attempts to destroy the Ampulla, along with the other royal regalia in the seventeenth century. The Ampulla, or at least its body and head, appears to have survived the interregnum period. Today, although the legend has passed into obscurity, the symbolism of dignity and might is still present in the current use of the relic.



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