The royal consecration ordines of the Pontifical of Sens from a new perspective

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1 Historians have long turned to royal consecration ordines for insights about early medieval kingship. Christian royal consecrations go back into late antiquity, but ordines for these rites first emerged in Carolingian Europe, above all in ninth-century west Francia. Generally speaking, an ordo is a liturgical text that prescribes the actions and words of celebrants during a rite. Ordines for royal consecration are thus transcripts for that most significant of rites, a king’s or queen’s inauguration. Supplemented by written or archaeological sources, ordines speak to the very essence of medieval rulership: what legitimized and constituted it.

2 But there are problems with traditional Ordines-Studien. Historians often study ordines with an eye to actual ritual; Schramm tried to match each west-Frankish ordo with a specific consecration. Yet the leap from textual description to ritual performance is dubious. Texts, as Philippe Buc reminds us, are also «forces in the practice of power»: interpretations, not just reflections, of the world around them. Liturgy was a common battleground for competing politics in the early middle ages, and the fight did not stop once pen hit vellum. Actual consecrations are important (they had larger audiences than texts after all), but consecration ordines are primarily evidence for the motives, perceptions, and beliefs of their compilers, only secondarily for actual rituals.

3 A second problem with Ordines-Studien is its text-based approach. A textual purview makes sense with liturgy. From at least the eighth
century, most ordines are standardised from one liturgical manuscript to
another. We would be nominalists indeed if we insisted that Ordo
romanus 41 in one manuscript must be strictly distinguished from Ordo
romanus 41 in another. Context does change meaning though –
sometimes more than our scholarly editions suggest. Medievalists have
long recognised that manuscripts too were «forces in the practice of
power»12. Just as texts interpret rituals, manuscripts interpret texts. This
is particularly true with royal consecration ordines, which were not
standardised across liturgical manuscripts until the late tenth century11.

4 Sometimes, we lack contemporary manuscripts. This is the case with a
lost manuscript of Liège containing the ninth-century ordines of Hincmar
of Reims (printed in the seventeenth century by Sirmond before the
manuscript was lost) and with ordines that survive in the formulae of
their textual descendents (like the Anglo-Saxon ordines excavated from
the formulae of medieval French manuscripts)14. We would not want to
lose such sources. But codicologically-disembodied exceptions should not
define the rule. Manuscript evidence is too often ignored or distorted to
fit a text-based mould. Textual assertions should not drown out
codicological ones. In this paper I will shift the perspective from texts and
Hincmar, to manuscripts and a new archbishopric: Sens.

5 St. Petersburg, Nat. Libr., lat. Q.v.I., no. 35 [hereafter P] is a liturgical
book of 107 folios for the archbishop of Sens15. It is deluxe, with a
hierarchy of scripts and extensive decorations (gold initials, purple
ornaments, architectural designs, floral embellishments and birds)16. The
date is probably late ninth-century17. Its contents are those of a pontifical
(which united the functions of a sacramentary, libelli, and a
benedictional), hence its moniker «pontifical of Sens». Note however
that pontificals were still novel in the late ninth century18. We are better
off listing contents: the annual and occasional blessings and a large
collection of non-eucharistic ordines.

6 In P, texts labelled as ordines are quite varied in content. Ordo had many
«class», «rank», «ecclesiastical order», as well as ordo in the
liturgical sense19. Even liturgically, however, the word cast a wide
semantic net20. Some ordines contain full texts of blessings and prayers;
others give only incipits. Some have detailed rubrics to guide the
celebrant through the rite; others just list texts to be read. Sometimes,
liturgical and other meanings blend into one another: in the ordines for
the ordination of clerical «orders», the ordo (the liturgical text) confers
(and, in some sense, represents) the ordo (the ecclesiastical rank). Most
ordines in P are familiar textlike the ordo for dedicating a church (Ordo
romanus 41), which appears under the uncial heading ordo ad aeclesiam
dedicandam at f. 35r-41r (one of the ordines romani). But innovation lurks
behind the familiar in this archbishop’s book.

7 The greatest innovation of P is in its royal consecration ordines. In the
ritual-aimed, text-driven discipline of Ordines-Studien, these (pl.) go by
the single title «Erdmann Ordo», a conflation coined by Schramm21.
Some explanation: amongst historians of « coronations »\(^2\), the word « Ordo » (usually capitalised) is used to describe almost any king-making (or often king-blessing) text, regardless of source or source-title\(^3\). « Ordines » are given monikers, or enumerated, and printed together in modern editions. Specialists usually know that there is a difference between what is strictly a \textit{benedictio} and what they call an « Ordo », what comes from a sacramentary and what comes from a chronicle\(^4\), but perhaps some pedantry is in order.

The « Erdmann Ordo » is (are ?) in fact two separate \textit{ordines} and, four pages later, a « benediction »\(^5\). Not only are these « three » texts rather different in content, and, in the case of the \textit{benedictio}, physically apart; they already have their own headings in the manuscript: \textit{incipit ordo ad ordinandum regem} (f. 85v-92v), \textit{incipit ordo ad ordinandum reginam} (f. 92v-94v), and \textit{item benedictio ad ordinandum regem} (f. 97r-97v). Medieval liturgists were slippery enough about their own use of the term \textit{ordo} that we only increase our confusion by calling two spades and a shovel a Spade. The stakes are higher still. Medieval liturgists were slippery on purpose. By ignoring how compilers changed \textit{ordines} by presenting them in new ways, we ignore our evidence.

For instance, Schramm did not include the five prayers between the queen’s \textit{ordo} and the \textit{benedictio} (f. 95r-96v) in what he called the « Erdmann Ordo »\(^6\). Schramm’s reason for categorising these texts as a unit (and underplaying Sens initiative) was that they appeared together in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 17333, a pontifical copied for Hugh the Great, bishop of Nevers (1011-1065). There, the \textit{benedictio} was inserted into the king’s \textit{ordo}. Schramm thought that these manuscripts were unrelated\(^7\). As Jackson has shown, however, the Nevers texts were copied straight from the Sens manuscript\(^8\). Bishop Hugh may have attested his submission to Sens on a page of the queen’s \textit{ordo} itself\(^9\). But Jackson, although he corrects Schramm here, follows him in prioritising the « Erdmann Ordo » over \textit{P} at folios 85r-96v. Jackson thus omits the five prayers between the queen’s \textit{ordo} and the \textit{benedictio} from his « Ordo XII », declaring that they « have nothing to do with coronations »\(^10\). It seems to me that « \textit{BENEDICTIO QUANDO AD BELLUM CONTRA HOSTES PROFICISCITUR} », « \textit{ITEM BENEDICTIO QUANDO CONTRA PAGANOS PUGNANDUM EST} », « \textit{BENEDICTIO UBI UOLUERIS} » (e.g. ...\textit{Bella comprimat, famem auferat, pacem | tribuat ac inimicorum omnium insidias longe repellat Amen...}), and « \textit{BENEDICTIO PRO QUALIBET TRIBULATIONE} » are here for a reason. They have everything to do with the relationship between an archbishop and a king (« \textit{IN NAUITATE SANCTE MARIE} » is slightly less obvious, though it could pertain to the queen), if they do not say much about « coronations ». But « coronation » is just a small part of what this manuscript presents. We cannot ignore \textit{P}’s presentation of rulership rites as the passive recording of evidence for coronation rituals. \textit{Au contraire}, \textit{P}’s presentational strategies – even the very inclusion of these texts in this manuscript – are more significant political assertions than anything in the texts themselves.
This is not to discount expert examination of these texts. Schramm, Bouman, Bautier, Jackson, and Nelson among others have ably examined these texts’ genealogies and ideological significance. To summarise: in the king’s *ordo*, we have a petition/response text in which the king swears to protect the church upon a request from the bishops, the anointing and blessing of the king with several prayers, and the king’s investment with sword, crown, ring, scepter, and staff, completed by a special mass. In the queen’s *ordo*, we have an anointing, the investment of crown and ring, and a mass. The five prayers have to do with tribulations (in language that seems closely linked to the role of a king as a protector against tribulations), and Mary (which may echo the queen’s role). The *benedictio* is a second set of investment blessings for the same regalia as in the king’s *ordo*, in the same order, with slightly different texts (which may be why the Nevers book inserted them into the king’s *ordo*).

The picture of kingship gleaned from these texts is resolutely Carolingian. The *ordines* betoken a conception of rulership common in early medieval ecclesiastical circles, in which kingship (later queenship) is an office or ministry bestowed by a prelate. This was part of a wider political metaphor: society as *ecclesia*, in which each *ordo* (« rank ») of society has its own ministry (authority as well as obligations) – including the king. This view of kingship did not always reflect politics as they were practiced (Ullmann overemphasised its political effectiveness). But it was consistently argued. The prayer texts of our *ordines* are typical in their presentation of ministerial duties: the king must protect the church, maintain justice, uphold the orders of society, and fight against those who threaten any of his charges. The queen must maintain dignity, to combat heresy and paganism, and support the church.

These are not just familiar claims, they are – in the case of the king’s *ordo* – familiar texts. This whole *ordo* is based upon consecration texts for earlier Carolingian kings, especially those of Louis the Stammerer. One can, for instance, trace a rough genealogy of the petition/response in the king’s *ordo* straight through similar texts that have survived for Odo (888), Carloman (882), and Louis the Stammerer (878). In the lost Liège manuscript, Louis the Stammerer promises to uphold a chapter from the capitulary of Quierzy in 877 (of his father Charles the Bald). This same promise, updated to suit the times (Charles as father, or grandfather, depending on who is swearing), was repeated at several consecrations in the late ninth century. *P*’s *ordo* preserves the text, but loses the particular references to Charles and Quierzy. We cannot be certain as to when this happened, since it could have been as early as 878, but we might posit a fuzzy *terminus post quem* of 882. For it was in that year that Carloman made the last-recorded reference to Quierzy in his *promissio*.

The reason we cannot be surer is that the king’s *ordo* is stripped of localising references. This is significant. Earlier west Frankish consecration *ordines*, like those of Hincmar, are, in keeping with the *ad hoc* nature of contemporary consecrations, more like memoranda than
transpersonal texts 39. Names and details abound. P’s king’s ordo is the finale of a slow semantic legerdemain. Hincmar and other compilers of late ninth-century Carolingian ordines used «ordo» both in the sense of a liturgical text and of an «arrangement» or «process» (how such-and-such a king was consecrated), giving their texts a liturgical ring. The compiler of P took this transformation a step further: by stripping particular references, he transformed the meaning of «ordo» even though his text was derivative. In the petition/response, he kept the cachet of old words, but de-personalised, de-Carolingified them by removing references to Charles the Bald and Quierzy. By so doing, he stressed the transpersonality of royal ordination, an ordo like any other in this large pontifical 40.

With the queen’s ordo, the road to transpersonalisation was different. The queen’s ordo and the king’s ordo are dissimilar texts. The queen’s ordo is rubric-heavy, while the king’s merely gives titles. Its text, as Nelson has shown, is also firmly ministerial – queenship is no accident of marriage here, but a state instituted (instituitur) or ordained (ordinare) by an archbishop 41. Unlike the king’s ordo, it has no clear source. While the text borrows from the ordination ritual for an abbess, as Nelson points out, it is not a massive verbatim copy-job like the king’s ordo42. The compositional process thus appears to have been the writing of a novel text in a standard liturgical vocabulary, not the re-contextualisation of older texts.

In fact, the queen’s ordo may have been composed (in the conventional sense) by someone at Sens 43. The titles archiepiscopus (93r), pontifex (93r), and summus episcoporum (93r) for the celebrant show that the text was written with an archbishop in mind. Furthermore, this section of P later became a locus for sénnois assertions about archiepiscopal authority. In the tenth and early eleventh centuries, subscriptions of suffragan bishops were entered into this book here (including Hugh of Nevers’s), as was a passage from Hraban Maur’s de institutione clericorum on the authority of the archiepiscopal pallium (94v). The ordo ad ordinandam reginam was clearly linked in sénnois minds to their archbishop’s authority.

What is lost in the conflation «Erdmann Ordo» is that these different texts were juxtaposed on purpose by the compilers of P. In spite of their compositional differences, they are placed side by side with almost mirroring names. By accepting their unity as a given, we miss the magic. The king’s ordo legitimises an novel production (the queen’s ordo) thanks to its conservative, traditional texts (but stripped of their particulars). Reciprocally, the queen’s ordo, composed ex nihilo as a declaration of archiepiscopal authority over the bestowal of transpersonal rulership (or, as Nelson points out, an assertion of authority in a political world where legitimate queenship was increasingly important 44), completes the transformation of the historicising sources of the king’s ordo into a transpersonal domain.
This is just the tip of the iceberg. The whole manuscript serves to reinforce the idea that these royal ordines are ordines in the transpersonal, liturgical sense – just as repeatable (and independent of the peculiar bloodline or qualities of any given king or queen) as the ordo for dedicating a church or for ordaining a priest. How? St. Petersburg Q.v.I., no. 35, like most deluxe Frankish liturgical manuscripts, uses a hierarchy of scripts: large capitals for the first word of every text, uncial headings, rustic capitals at the start of new clauses and sometimes as rubrics. In the early middle ages, such a hierarchy was a recognizable canvas for the painting of legitimacy by association. In our manuscript, only important texts are singled out for decoration: the litanies of the saints at the opening of the book, the benedictions for the most important holidays, the frontispiece to the section for the ordination of clerics, and the striking frontispiece for the ordination of the king – depicting a crown hanging beneath an arch bordered by two birds.

Moreover, similar material is similarly decorated: opening sections (f. 8r, 10r, 19v); the main headings for penitential material (f. 5r), clerical ordination (f. 9v), and royal ordination (f. 85r); litanies (f. 5v-7v); analogous prayers (e.g. f. 19v and f. 93r); abbreviations near the start of anointing rituals (e.g. f. 20v and 86r); major festivals (f. 59r, 64r, 67v); transitions and other opening texts (e.g. f. 15v, 23v, 90v). There is a strong sense of codicological order to raise the profile of such juxtapositions. Each quire is numbered, and large decorations occur at the beginnings (f. 5r: quire I, 85r: quire XII) or ends (f. 20v: quire QII) of major quires. In the case of fol. 85r, the first of quire XII (entirely given to the king’s ordo), the last page of the preceding quire, fol. 84v (Q XI), is executed in a scrunched minuscule, compressed so as not to run over into the next quire. This allows the quire containing the king’s ordo to open grandly, in the arch mentioned, in gold letters over a purple backdrop: INCIPIIT ORDO AD ORDINDANDUM REGEM. Royal ordination is literally depicted as one of the most important liturgical functions of the archbishop for whom the book is constructed, on par with penitence, clerical ordination (including episcopal), and the celebration of Easter and Pentecost – and related to aspects of all the above. Thus, by codicological as well as textual decree, our manuscript promotes a transpersonal view of kingship and queenship, stressing the authority of the archbishop in bestowing these ordines.

What is the historical significance of this? We return to our fuzzy terminus post quem in the 880s. At the end of the ninth century, a series of Carolingian deaths deprived the Frankish world of legitimate male Carolingians. Charles the Fat was the last legitimate male Carolingian to rule as sole emperor, but he was deposed by his illegitimate nephew Arnulf in 887, dying in 888. Then, as vividly described by contemporary annalists, many claimants dissolved the empire into little regna of their own. Not all were non-Carolingians. None were both legitimate and male-line, however, and many, including Odo, elected as king in west Francia, had no Carolingian blood at all.
In the ninth century, legitimate, male-line Carolingian blood had become a significant symbolic commodity. When Boso tried to ride to kingship in Provence in the 870s on the legitimacy of his Carolingian wife, an elaborate consecration, and his own great power, he was defeated by all four then-ruling Carolingians \(48\). In 888, things were different: the only legitimate, male Carolingian was a child. Norms shifted, as Michel Sot and Régine le Jan have argued, towards military prowess, though episcopal ordination became a *sine qua non* \(49\). Odo was consecrated by none other than Archbishop Walter of Sens \(50\). Now, the Carolingian Charles the Simple, child in 888, came back; he received consecration from Archbishop Fulk of Reims and opposed Odo as the legitimate king \(51\). He did not prevail against Odo but he did become king after Odo’s death. In 922, however, he was himself resisted by Robert of Neustria (Odo’s brother), who was himself consecrated, again by Walter of Sens. When Robert died in the battle of Soissons against Charles, the archbishop of Sens now consecrated Robert’s son-in-law, Radulf, as king. Nelson has already connected the politics of this period with *P’s ordines*. Royal wives were a major source of legitimacy for Radulf, neither Robertian nor Carolingian himself, but married to a wife who was both \(52\).

Petersburg Q.v.I., no. 35 and its consecration *ordines* may be read as Archbishop Walter’s move in this reshuffling of norms, the defence he put up against legitimist (rémois) arguments of royal authority, and for transpersonal rulership. The manuscript itself was an assertion of this archiepiscopal authority in the post-Carolingian world. This is true whether or not, as is wholly possible, St. Petersburg Q.v.I., no. 35 was toted through west Francia and used for the consecrations of Odo, Robert, or Radulf and/or their wives \(53\). This is true whether or not the texts of this manuscript were influential in later Frankish and Anglo-Saxon traditions \(54\).

To put it a different way: «After the death [of Charles the Fat], the kingdoms which had been obedient to his authority, as though they lacked a legitimate heir, were dissolved into parts from their former unity. Now they did not wait for a natural lord, but each one decided to make a king for itself out of its own guts (\(unumquodque de suis visceribus regem sibi creari disponit\)) », \(55\). Thus, Regino of Prüm \(56\). For a hundred and fifty years, kingship had been associated with the legitimate males of the Carolingian family. Perhaps some had always doubted this association; others had certainly sought to challenge or mitigate it in the long history of Carolingian kingship. But 888 changed the game. Elites now had to ask themselves a question: how do you make a king from your own guts? More to the point, how do you make a king who will serve in your own interests? For the archbishop of Sens, the answer to both was obvious: use a book.
NOTES


17. Bischoff dated it to the third quarter of the ninth century, but it is likely that an old-fashioned hand might be used in a liturgical context. See N. RASMUSSEN, *Les pontificaux..., op. cit.*, p. 93, n. 23. The dating remains disputed however, with Lobrichon arguing for an earlier date. See G. LOBIGHON, « Nouvelles recherches..., » *op. cit.*.


22. Coronation was only a part of early medieval consecration, but the synecdoche is widely used.


25. Beware the ontological confusion of JACKSON, *OCF*, p. 144: « The two [that is, (1) the *ordo ad ordinandum regem* and the *ordo ad ordinandum reginam* as a unit and (2) the *benedictio*] are actually separate ordines, but because in manuscript *B* the second set was
inserted into the first, between nos. 14 and 15, I have chosen to treat them as Ordo XIIIa and XIIIb.

26. Though he chose the name because Carl Erdmann had written about (four of) these prayers: C. ERDMANN, « Der Heidenkrieg in der Liturgie », Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 46 (1932), p. 129-142.


29. Among the suffragan submissions written in this part of the manuscript, two Hughes attest their submission to Sens at the top and bottom of f. 93v (in the middle of the queen’s ordo).

30. JACKSON, OCF, p. 143-144.


36. JACKSON, OCF, p. 120.

37. JACKSON, OCF, p. 132.

38. See JACKSON, OCF, p. 132.

39. JACKSON, OCF, p. 29.

40. Cf. J. NELSON, « Early Medieval Rites... », op. cit., p. 309, n. 42. This would represent the moment at which a contemporary asserted the transpersonality of ordines.

41. J. NELSON, « Early Medieval Rites... », ibid., p. 308-309; p. 306-308 for the Hincmarian attitude.

42. J. NELSON, « Early Medieval Rites... », ibid., p. 309.

43. Cf. J. NELSON, « Early Medieval Rites... », ibid., p. 309-311; For « composition » of ordines, see Jackson, « Who wrote Hincmar’s Ordines ? ».

44. J. NELSON, « Early Medieval Rites... », ibid., p. 311.


47. See below.


52. J. NELSON, “Early Medieval Rites…”, op. cit., p. 311.


56. Overquoted perhaps. An underappreciated commentator is the Panegyric of Berengar (Gesta Berengari, though the title in the original MS is in Greek), which reads, “Ille [Charles the Fat] quidem sic astra subit; miseranda cupido / Sed populos pervasit agens, / qui limite lato / Unius imperio soliti concurrere, plures / Ut sibi queque legat proprium gens” (Thus he [Charles the Fat] ascends to the heavens; but a lamentable desire, raging, spread through the people, who had been accustomed to march forth under the rule of one, so that henceforth theyusted after many tyrants through the diverse lands, and each people chose one for itself), *MGHPoetae* 4.1, p. 359.
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