Carolingian Traditions and New Beginnings: The Coronation of Rudolph I of Upper Burgundy

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Introduction
1 The Kingdom of Upper Burgundy, also called Transjurane Burgundy and once part of the Middle Kingdom, belongs to the first post-Carolingian kingdoms that came into existence at the end of the ninth century. In the year 888, Charles the Fat (876-888), under whose reign all Carolingian territories had been reunited for the last time, died and Rudolph I (888-912), a member of the House of Welf and son of Conrad II the Younger (860/870), became king of Upper Burgundy. After the unification with the Kingdom of Lower Burgundy in the 940s, the realm became known as the Kingdom of Burgundy and remained as such until 1032.

2 This article will investigate the beginnings of the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy and its ruling dynasty, the Rudolphians. For this analysis, it seems worthwhile to consider the perspective of religion and to adopt Max Weber's approach of three types of legitimization of social authority. Similar to other ruling dynasties in the Early Middle Ages, the reign of the Rudolphians was inseparably connected to the monasteries, the bishops and the clergy in Upper Burgundy. A comprehensive analysis of this conjunction would be beyond the scope of this article, which mainly focuses on the rite of coronation of Rudolph I, who played a pivotal role as first Rudolphian king. At the beginning, our study sheds some light on the ancestry of Rudolph I and his family. It will then focus on providing an analysis of the historiographical sources reporting on Rudolph's coronation, with particular emphasis on the chronicle of Regino of Prüm and the Annales Vedastini. Finally, by contrasting these sources, it will reassess the process of how Rudolph became king of Upper Burgundy.

The initial phase of the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy

3 As far as the beginnings of the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy are concerned, we should first take note of Rudolph's Welf ancestors. Even if he himself was not directly coming from a Carolingian male-line, he had some family ties to the Carolingians: two sisters of his grandfather Conrad I the Elder († after 862), count of Auxerre, namely Judith († 843), who was the second wife of Louis the Pious (814-840), and Hemma († 876), who was the wife of Louis the German (843-876), were married to Carolingian kings. Together with his brother Hugh the Abbot († 886), Rudolph's father, Conrad II the Younger, changed sides from Eastern Frankish to Western Frankish and, thereupon, after the year 860 joined the Lotharingian party, thus supporting Lothar II (855-869), who had ceded the area of Transjurane Burgundy to his brother Louis II of Italy (840-875) in 859. Since Hucbert († 864), a brother of Lothar's wife Teutberga († after 869), had de facto control over
Transjurane Burgundy as the lay-abbot of Saint-Maurice d’Agaune, we may assume that Conrad was entrusted with the Transjurane area in order to remove Hucbert. Conrad probably defeated him in 864 in a battle near Orbe and became abbot of Saint-Maurice himself, which was a religious, geographical, and political centre of power in the Transjurane area at that time. Thus, it is not surprising that Conrad’s son Rudolph I issued his first surviving charter in 878 as humilis comes nec non et monasterii sancti Mauricii Agaunensis abba. Additionally, Rudolph is referred to as marchio in the period before his coronation in 888.

The coronation of Rudolph I

Due to the lack of a historiographical tradition of its own, the body of source material on the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy is unfortunately rather limited, which is also the case with the coronation of Rudolph I. By contrast, the imperial coronation of Berengar I (888–924), for example, is reported in great detail by the Gesta Berengarii. Thus, we can only presume that Rudolph’s coronation took place after the death of Charles the Fat, on January 13th, 888 and before January 28th, 888. Neither do we know exactly how Rudolph became king of Upper Burgundy, since the sources reporting on it are narrative, inconsistent, and, therefore, not very reliable. In addition, some of these historiographical sources, such as the Annales Lausannenses and the Annales Anglo-Saxonici, do not offer much in the way of information, something not unusual for this kind of source material. While the Annales Lausannenses were mainly written late in the High Middle Ages, this is not the case with the Gesta Berengarii, which add in their glosses Hic [Rodulfus] noviter rex a Burgundionibus constitutus erat, and the Annales Fuldenses, which note that Ruodulfus vero filius Chuonradi superiorem Burgundiam apud se statuit regaliter retener. Furthermore, it is important to note that neither the Gesta Berengarii, which, in fact, mention Upper Burgundy solely in this passage, nor the Annales Fuldenses, which, in addition to the events of the year 888, record also those of the year 894, focus on the events in Upper Burgundy.

By contrast, the chronicle of Regino of Prüm provides unique details, although, similar to the Annales Fuldenses, it also reports on Upper Burgundy only in the context of interactions with the Eastern Frankish Kingdom. It relates for the year 888 that Rudolph usurped the area of Upper Burgundy, assembled magnates and sacerdotes in Saint-Maurice d’Agaune, crowned himself and had himself called king. It continues on reporting the conflict that took place between Rudolph and Arnulf of Carinthia († 899), respectively his son Zwentibold († 900). However, it is necessary to pose one central question in this context: how reliable is the chronicle of Regino in this affair? It is clear from the entirety of the report on the year 888, which is about twice as long as the one given by the Annales Fuldenses, and, thus, provides additional information, that the author disapproves of the disintegration of the Carolingian realm and the emergence of non-Carolingian kingdoms as successors. Besides, Rudolph, having Welf ancestors and being an opponent of Arnulf of Carinthia, is not presented in a favourable light throughout the whole chronicle, which is not unbiased towards Lotharingian affairs. It should also be mentioned that, in contrast to the report given by the Annales Fuldenses, Regino, erroneously or not, states that Rudolph already withdrew in the Jura Mountains during the year 888. In addition, it has been pointed out by Carlrichard Brühl that the chronicle is quite often inaccurate in describing coronations. All in all, this presumable self-coronation of Rudolph in Saint-
Maurice, where he was lay-abbot like his father before him\textsuperscript{32} and where thus no other higher ranked ecclesiastical person had its see\textsuperscript{33}, should be interpreted with caution, particularly because yet another detailed account of the coronation of Rudolph has survived\textsuperscript{34}.

6 Reporting on the events of the year 888, the \textit{Annales Vedastini} state that magnates from Upper Burgundy, having convened in Toul, requested the bishop of Toul, Arnald, to consecrate Rudolph, a task the bishop carried out\textsuperscript{35}. The episcopal see of Toul, which belonged to the former Middle Kingdom\textsuperscript{36}, must have been of geostrategic importance to Rudolph, who at that time probably sought to enlarge his territory, thereby competing with the King of East Francia\textsuperscript{37} and possibly also with Guy of Spoleto († 894)\textsuperscript{38}. The question whether the bishop of Toul's\textsuperscript{39} alleged partiality for Rudolph must be considered within the context of the confiscation of goods and the later recompense by Arnulf of Carinthia cannot be clearly traced\textsuperscript{40}. Nonetheless, we may assume that Arnald strove to persevere against the influential neighbouring diocese of Metz, since Metz, similar to Compiègne, had already gained prominence as place for the coronation of the kings of West Francia, in contrast to Toul or even Saint-Maurice d’Agaune\textsuperscript{41}.

7 At first sight, one might interpret the report given by the \textit{Annales Vedastini} as an ecclesiastical coronation or even as if Rudolph were anointed by Arnald of Toul, which seems to contradict the presumable self-coronation described by the chronicle of Regino. Yet, if we attempt to evaluate the degree of reliability of this report, we have to take into account that, first and foremost, the \textit{Annales Vedastini}, written in the abbey of Saint Vaast, record Western Frankish affairs and, only marginally, address events in other regions like Italy or East Francia\textsuperscript{42}. For instance, it is said that Charles the Fat was strangled, whereas the chronicle of Regino and the \textit{Annales Fuldenses} note down a good death of the former emperor\textsuperscript{43}. This also applies to Upper Burgundy, which is mentioned by the \textit{Annales Vedastini} solely in this passage on the year 888 in the context of the coronation of Rudolph in Toul. This mention is embodied as a side note, after a remark on a new bishop in the diocese of Cambrai/Arras, in between the account of the coronation of Guy of Spoleto in Langres and that of his final return to Italy\textsuperscript{44}. All in all, the report on the events after the death of Charles the Fat in the \textit{Annales Vedastini} evidently focuses on the disputed succession in West Francia and should not be read as a reliable source for other parts of the disintegrated Carolingian Empire.

8 Moreover, analysing the two text passages on the coronation of Rudolph in the \textit{Annales Vedastini} and in the chronicle of Regino more closely and comparing them with the aforementioned evidence reveals similarities when it comes to the terms and expressions used: in both texts, the rather unusual epithet \textit{nepos Hugonis abbatis} is added to Rudolph’s name. In addition to that, Regino uses the much more common term \textit{filius Cuonradi}, a designation also used by the \textit{Annales Fuldenses}, which do not title Rudolph as \textit{rex}\textsuperscript{45}. Besides, both texts avoid using the term « Burgundia » or « superior Burgundia » for Upper Burgundy, as do the \textit{Annales Fuldenses}, but instead label it geographically by the terms « Iurus », « Alpes », and « Alpes Penninae », which may be due to a Western Frankish tradition\textsuperscript{46}. Although these textual parallels do not suffice as evidence, they might be seen as hints that Regino\textsuperscript{47} and the \textit{Annales Vedastini}\textsuperscript{48} might have had a common source they used for writing about the coronation of Rudolph. In support of this argument, the two sources should be examined as a whole and compared in detail. Such a detailed comparative examination, however, cannot be accomplished within the scope of this article.
Next, it is necessary to examine what *benedici in regem facere/petere* means in the *Annales Vedastini*. All in all, it is used in four text passages reporting on royal coronations:

1. Louis III and his brother Carlomann II are crowned kings of Western Francia in 879.
2. Odo is crowned king of Western Francia in 888.
3. Rudolph I is crowned king of Upper Burgundy in 888.
4. Zwentibold is crowned king of Lotharingia in 895.

Since the ecclesiastical ritual of coronation existed in the Western Frankish Kingdom as a continuous tradition ever since the anointing of Charles the Bald in 848 and is documented by *ordines*, there is no doubt that the phrase *benedici in regem facere* could mean that Louis, Carlomann and Odo were consecrated kings. However, Martin Lintzel and Walter Mohr have already suggested that the *Annales Vedastini* were influenced by this Western Frankish tradition and use the phrase for designating every rite of coronation, whether ecclesiastical or not. As a direct parallel to the report on the coronation of Rudolph, neither the chronicle of Regino nor the *Annales Fuldenses* mention that Zwentibold was consecrated or anointed. Furthermore, it would have been the only anointing of an Eastern Frankish king in the ninth century. Franz-Reiner Erkens attempts to explain this purported exception by asserting the existence of a Lotharingian tradition that was based on the consecration of Charles the Bald in Metz in 869 and found its continuation in the anointing of Rudolph in Toul in 888. As there is no other evidence than the *Annales Vedastini*, this does not seem convincing to me. Thus, I claim that the phrase *benedici in regem facere* in the context of the coronations of Zwentibold and Rudolph does not inevitably imply that an anointing took place, but must be understood as a phrase designating a ritual of enthronement instead.

**Conclusion**

In the light of all these arguments, neither an anointing nor a self-coronation of Rudolph can be proven beyond doubt. Previous studies have often simply combined the two main sources. Instead, the differences in the accounts of the coronation of Rudolph between the chronicle of Regino, where Rudolph, son of Conrad and nephew of Hugh the Abbot, is said to have usurped Upper Burgundy, called together magnates and bishops – not mentioned by name – in Saint-Maurice d’Agaune and then crowned himself, and the *Annales Vedastini*, where magnates of Upper Burgundy – not mentioned by name either – are said to have assembled in Toul and requested Rudolph, nephew of Hugh the Abbot, to be crowned by the bishop of Toul, should be interpreted as being mainly caused by the divergent intentions and traditions on which these historiographical sources are based. Therefore, I suggest that the coronation and presumable anointing of Rudolph have to be seen as one inseparable rite of enthronement, which might have consisted of secular and possibly also ecclesiastical elements. As shown above, the lack of evidence does not allow us to draw any conclusions regarding the precise nature of the coronation of Rudolph. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, if there had been an ecclesiastical ritual of consecration and anointing following the Western Frankish tradition, some evidence of it should have survived.

Neither can the place of the coronation of Rudolph be determined with ultimate certainty due to the diverging accounts presented by the sources, whereas the coronations of Conrad the Peaceful (937-993) and his son Rudolph III (993-1032) are documented to have taken place in Lausanne. However, Saint-Maurice d’Agaune, situated at the very heart of
the Rudolphians’ central territories and, what is perhaps even more important, the location at which Rudolph II (911/912-937), who succeeded his father Rudolph as king of Upper Burgundy, was probably crowned and buried, seems to be the most reasonable place for the coronation of the first Rudolphian king. In addition, Rudolph is also likely to have been present in Toul at the beginning of the year 888; the conclusion that some sort of coronation may have taken place during that time thus cannot be entirely dismissed.

To conclude, a lot of research has been devoted to support the thesis stating that these new kings – who, like Rudolph, came into power during the gradual disintegration of the Carolingian realm – were in urgent need of ecclesiastical legitimization, which they attempted to gain from an anointing. In contrast to this thesis, recent scholarship argues that rulers’ transitions depended, above all, on the respective current power structure, and that legitimization was often only constructed afterwards by the implementation of ecclesiastical rituals or reports of a tendentious historiography. As Janet Nelson argues, it is furthermore essential to realize that inauguration rituals and anointings are to be understood as interdependent processes between kings and magnates, who were represented by the anointer as an ecclesiastical person. In the case of the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy, I thus challenge the thesis that Rudolph needed ecclesiastical legitimization in the form of anointing because, as lay-abbot of Saint-Maurice d’Agaune, which was to become the royal monastery of the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy, Rudolph did have a strong religious centre of his very own at his disposal, while simultaneously holding political power as well, as François Demotz has shown. In the case of Odo, the first non-Carolingian king of West Francia, Bernd Schneidermüller judges the power structure in a similar way. As far as all the other late and post-Carolingian kingdoms are concerned, I am not in a position to assess whether anointing as a Carolingian tradition of coronation was a suitable or even necessary instrument for establishing and stabilizing the rule of a non-Carolingian king, but I strongly plead for the question to be re-examined in a broader context.

NOTES


4. See F. Demotz, La Bourgogne..., op. cit., p. 101-139.


27. in tutissimis rupium locis salutis presidium quaesivit [...]

26. regemque se appellari iussit.

25. sanctum Mauritium adscitis secum quibusdam primoribus et nonnullis sacerdotibus coronam sibi imposuit Hugonis abbatis, de quo supra meminimus, provintiam inter Iurum et Alpes Penninas occupat et apud


25. Chronicon Reginonis..., ibid., a. 888, p. 130 : Per idem tempus Ruodulfus filius Cuonradi, nepos Hugonis abbatis, de quo supra meminimus, provintiam inter Iurum et Alpes Penninas occupat et apud sanctum Mauritium adscitis secum quibusdam primoribus et nonnullus sacerdotibus coronam sibi imposuit regemque se appellari iussit.

26. Chronicon Reginonis..., ibid., a. 888, p. 130 : Post haec mittit legatos per universum regnum Lotharii et suasionibus pollutionibusque episcoporum ac nobilium virorum mentes in sui favorem demulcit. Quod cum nunciatum esset Arnulfio, ilico cum exercitu super eum irruit ; ille per artissima itinera fuga dilapsum in tutissimis rupium locis salutis presidium quaesivit [...].


28. See above.


30. See above.


32. See above.

33. For the bishops in the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy, cf. F. DEMOTZ, La Bourgogne..., op. cit., p. 121-127. Cf. also ibid., p. 80.


35. Annales Vedastini, ed. B. VON SIMSON, MGH SS rer. Germ., 12, Hanover/Leipzig, 1909, a. 888, p. 64 sq. ; At hi qui ultra lorum atque circa Alpes consistunt, Tullo adunati Hrodulfum nepotem Hugonis abbatis per episcopum dictae civitatis benedici in regem petierunt ; qui et ita egit.


44. Annales Vedastini..., ibid., a. 888, p. 64 sq. : Pauci vero ex Burgundia Widonis civitatis per Geilonem eiusdem civitatis episcopum regem sibi creav erunt. [...] Wido vero rex factus, audiens Odonem in...

51. See above.


56. Chronicon Reginonis..., op. cit., a. 895, p. 143 : Post haec Arnulfus Wormtiam venit ibique optimatis et collègues frances...
Cet article vise à éclairer les débuts du royaume de Bourgogne qui naît en 888 aux bords du lac Léman et à mieux comprendre l’essor de la dynastie régnante. L’attention se focalise d’abord sur les origines de Rodolphe Ier et de sa famille, avant de porter un regard sur les sources narratives témoignant du couronnement de Rodolphe Ier en 888, en particulier, la chronique de Réginon de Prüm et les Annales Vedastini. Enfin, à la lumière de ces sources, l’article vise à réévaluer la question de l’accession de Rodolphe à la couronne de la Bourgogne transjurane.
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**Mots-clés:** couronnement, intronisation, onction, légitimation, Rodolphe Ier
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