

Religion and Civil Society Project

Iconology of the Royal Power: the Fracture of the Royal Seal

Throughout the Middle Ages, the royal insignia and rituals associated with them attempt to present royalty as an institution of divine origin, having a sacred character. The analysis of political theology and sigillography in medieval monarchies represents an approach to the iconography of royal seals and their avatars. The disclosure of the royal seal presupposes an annihilation of the political power of the king at the ceremony of breaking his seal before the chancellery. The extinction of an image also extinguishes a presence which, more than being something just physical is something that continued to live in the seal. The image of the king printed on the seal that authenticates a diploma is a mystical and figurative image, which has great symbolic impact, with a particular aesthetic and religious-mystical character, no matter what era it is found in.

This study, carried out by Alfons Puigarnau, will be developed through the specific analysis of the royal fracture in the Aragonese monarchy, using the archival documentation especially conserved in the archives of the Crown of Aragon as well as in other archives, particularly the Archive of the Cathedral of Barcelona and the Cathedral of Vic.

After the king's death, apart from the usual funeral, they proceed to the destruction of his royal seal. There are archival references on the king Jaime II and Alfonso III of Aragon. In the area of Cataluña, one of the most ancient cases of the destruction of a seal matrix is that of the Chapter of the cathedral of Vic. On 19 June 1309, the canons were called to chapter, presided by the bishop Berenguer de Guardia and it was stipulated that the writings for signing with a seal of the Chapter should be carried out using a new round seal, recently developed.

This means that the previous destruction of a seal was recent. Later on, in 1404 and in the same cathedral Chapter, the seal was broken up, with the usual solemnities and before the bishop himself, who was Diego de Heredia at that time.

In his literary journey, when speaking of the bishop of Mallorca, Antoni de Galiana, Villanueva says that after this bishop's death, on 10 April 1375, his secretary, Joan Vilanova, presented his two silver seals to the Chapter and that the destruction of the seal was carried out right there. In the case of the count-kings of Cataluña the phenomenon is the same.

Being close to his death, the king Jaime II ordered his solicitor and trustee of the matrices of his seals, Bernat d'Aversó, to call together notable people (*vocatis aliquibus notabilibus personis*) and tell them to proceed with the destruction of these seals (*frangi faciatis per frustra taliter dicta sigilla nostra, videlicet bulla, tabularum seu majestatis et commune*) and to deliver the three broken seals (*ipsa tria sigilla sic confracta tradatis personaliter*) to the illustrious infant Alfonso, "our beloved eldest son and heir".

Meanwhile, King Alfonso III, will declare to the notary that the will of his father with regard to the destruction of the seals has been carried out in the presence of people of the court (*frangeretur coram notabilibus personis*).

The Scholar Ferran de Sagarra (Barcelona, 1853-1939) was the author of an immense Catalanian sigillography: inventory, description and study of seals of Catalonia (5 vols., 1916-1931). Thanks to this work and the many books of in the Catalanian archives it is possible to address an issue such as the destruction of the royal seal in Catalonia and make a proposal of the iconology of power. Therefore, there is abundant documentary material for proposing a topic so significant and yet limited. The proposal of Alfons Puigarnau is another beautiful piece of art, where the experience of a new research group can contribute immensely to the international scientific community.