

EARLY MODERN COURT STUDIES



Edited by Liesbeth Geevers and Harald Gustafsson

Dynasties and State Formation in Early Modern Europe

Amsterdam
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Early Modern Court Studies

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*Edited by
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Cover illustration: Family potrait by David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl (1690–99) showing Queen Dowager Hedvig Eleonora, Charles XI of Sweden, Prince Charles (XII), Queen Ulrika Eleonora, Princess Ulrika Eleonora, Duke Frederick IV of Holstein-Gottorp, Dowager Duchess Fredericka Amalia of Holstein-Gottorp (sister of Queen Ulrika Eleonora) and Duchess Hedvig Sophia of Holstein-Gottorp (daughter of Charles XI)

Queen Ulrika Eleonora and Dowager Duchess Fredericka Amalia were sisters. Their children, Hedvig Sophia of Sweden and Duke Frederick IV of Holstein-Gottorp were married in 1698.

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2. Divine Right of Dynasty: Deposing the God-Given Monarch in Protestant Europe

Cathleen Sarti

Abstract: In the early modern period, the discourse on divine right of monarchy reached a peak. At the same time, depositions of monarchs by their own subjects increased as well, events which were — in theory — not possible within the political ideology of divine right. This chapter argues that the theory of divine right and the practice of depositions did indeed complement each other when taking a closer look both at the ideas of divinely legitimated monarchy and of the course of events during a deposition. In particular, the role of the dynasty and of the form of government within divine right of monarchy is discussed further and identified as central to early modern political thought.

Keywords: divine right of monarchy, depositions, Northern Europe, political thought, political culture

‘Kings are called Gods by the prophetical King Daud, because they sit vpon GOD his Throne in the earth, and haue the count of their administration to giue vnto him. Now in this contract (I say) betwixt the king and his people, God is doubtles the only Iudge, both because to him onely the king must make count of his administration (as is oft said before) as likewise by the oath in the coronation, God is made iudge and reuenger of the breakers: For in his presence, as only iudge of oaths, all oaths ought to be made.’¹
— James VI/I, the only Stuart king in three generations not to be deposed by his subjects. He was the son of the deposed Mary I of Scotland, father of the deposed

¹ [James VI], *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*.

Charles I of England and Scotland, and grandfather of the deposed James II/VII of England and Scotland.

The scholarly king of Scotland and later of England as well, James VI/I of the house of Stuart was just the highest-ranking author of one of the many political texts justifying monarchical rule as God-given in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The combination of new media (book printing in all its different formats), the questioning of hitherto indisputable truths about God and the world, and the growth of literacy and education among European populations led to intense discussions about the basis of political order. The discourse on the divine right of monarchy reached a peak especially in the latter half of the sixteenth century, but also during the seventeenth century.²

At the same time, depositions of monarchs by their own subjects increased. In Protestant Northern Europe, 25 per cent of all monarchical reigns between 1500 and 1700 ended with the monarch being deposed.³ Discourses on divine right, political order or the right of resistance, and actual political unrest and rebellion came together at this point. Looking at depositions and their surrounding discourses therefore provides an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the divine right of monarchy.⁴

As I argue in this chapter, such a deeper knowledge of how contemporaries understood divine right is needed due to a common misrepresentation of divine right as the right to rule of an individual monarch and as a right which protected monarchs from depositions.⁵ Most influential was the study by John Neville Figgis, first published in 1896, in which he presents the idea of a divine right of kings, based on English cases, as the basis for non-resistance and passive obedience. Moreover, he linked the divine legitimization of monarchy to hereditary right by primogeniture and to the accountability of monarchs to God alone.⁶ This misrepresentation is based on an overemphasis on political writings by James VI/I, Jean Bodin and others, and the monarchical spectacle of supposed sacrality, evident in rituals such

2 See also Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 19.

3 See Sarti, 'Depositions of Monarchs', p. 581, footnote 2.

4 Kern, *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandsrecht* discussed this connection between discourses on divine right and resistance theory with practice for the early Middle Ages.

5 Greenleaf, 'The Thomasian Tradition and the Theory of Absolute Monarchy', p. 747 understood divine right as including non-resistance to an unlawful or lawful monarch. See also Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings*, pp. 5–6; Burgess, 'The Divine Right of Kings Reconsidered', pp. 841–2.

6 Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings*, pp. 5–6.

as the royal touch, while at the same time ignoring actual historical events and discourses outside of scholarly circles.⁷ If consideration is given not only to political writings and royal representations of power, but also to the turn of political events, and discussions in councils, parliaments, broadsheets and newspapers, theatre plays, street ballads, and on the streets, a different picture of the political culture and discourse on divine right emerges.⁸ Understanding the nexus between the rise in divine right discourses and the parallel increase in political conflict during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries requires an approach which includes political *culture*, not just political thought.⁹

Since the early Middle Ages, the idea of the divine right of monarchy was often expressed through the formula of *dei gratia*, or by the grace of God. Monarchs used and still use this formula in their letters, when issuing coins and basically everywhere they can. Arguably, this formula refers to both a sense of humility — an office is given by God's grace and not earned in any other way — and also a sense of legitimation — God gave the office, and the officeholder is responsible only to him.¹⁰ In political thought, the latter interpretation was deemed controversial and the subject of debate. In particular, questions were discussed as to whether a monarch stood above or was subject to any laws, whether an institution or a selected group of people could judge them, what the role was of sacral powers like the Church or the pope, and whether there were any other limits to a monarch's power.¹¹

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the interpretation of the divine right of monarchy as related to non-individual rulership, and argue that

7 On such an approach, see also the criticism in Charette and Skjönsberg, 'The History of Political Thought', pp. 470–83.

8 Already Figgis stated that divine right was 'essentially a popular theory, proclaimed in the pulpit, published in the market-place, witnessed on the battle-field', Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings*, p. 3.

9 Niggemann, *Revolutionserinnerung* uses such an approach for the political culture in late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century England, see pp. 71–2, 251–7. See also Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), *Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?* Similar ideas were discussed in Kevin Sharpe's trilogy on Tudor and Stuart rule in England, Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*; Sharpe, *Image Wars*; Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule*.

10 Range, 'Dei Gratia and the "Divine Right of Kings"' expands on this tension between these two interpretations, see esp. p. 131. In the early modern period, divine right was often interpreted as only being responsible to God, that is, not being judgeable by anyone else. See Charles I's speech on the scaffold, Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution*, document 88b, pp. 293–5, here p. 294.

11 A short overview of the research on each point is offered by Range, 'Dei Gratia and the "Divine Right of Kings"', p. 133 and p. 135. See furthermore Burgess, 'The Divine Right of Kings Reconsidered', p. 840–1. More extensively, different ideas and strands of political discourse during this period are presented in Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought*.

contemporaries understood divine right as going beyond the single body natural of a king or queen. I do not dispute that divine right might refer to an individual monarch, but argue that more often its usage included notions of shared rulership and even of the political order specific to one kingdom.¹² As such, both the dynasty and the wider structure of a realm became more important than the single individual who wore the crown at a specific moment in time. The basis of this analysis are depositions in Protestant Northern Europe. Protestantism as part of the political culture of these realms is therefore one basis for this study. In this chapter, 'dynasty' is used as 'families who rule, who strive to pass on their patrimonies to their descendants'.¹³ Moreover, the divine right of monarchy was not a single political idea but contained a whole cluster of ideas and conventions, forming the background for a political culture in which the monarch was both at the top and at the centre of a polity, but never without limitations or ruling alone. Finally, divine right, even if applied to an individual ruler, was not everlasting. Divinely legitimated monarchs could be forsaken by God.

The Political Thought of the Divine Right of Monarchs

One of the main foundations for political thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth century was the Bible.¹⁴ Especially in the Protestant realms of Northern Europe, it was thought important to turn to scripture — Luther's principle of *sole scriptura* — for all kinds of questions, including how to live together in a political community.¹⁵ The problem was that the Bible texts are contradictory. The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans was usually quoted in this context: '[1] Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. [2] Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.' (Romans

12 One example of this was the Latin East crusader kingdoms, see Jordan, 'Corporate Monarchy', p. 3. See also Earenfight, 'Absent Kings', p. 33.

13 Geevers, 'The Invention of Dynasty', p. 25. See also Geevers, 'Ny dynastisk historia', pp. 88–9 for a discussion of the term. The term 'dynasty' is under discussion right now, and a new research field is emerging, of which this book is part. See furthermore Duindam, *Dynasties*; Gustafsson, 'Dynasty Formation'.

14 See among others Weber-Möckl, *Das Recht des Königs*; Pečar, *Macht der Schrift*; Queckbörner, *Englands Exodus*; Pečar and Trampedach (eds), *Die Bibel als politisches Argument*; Pietsch, 'Das zweischneidige Schwert der Friedfertigkeit'; Killeen, *The Political Bible*.

15 See also Oakley, 'Christian Obedience and Authority', esp. p. 171.

13: 1–2). This seemed clear: whoever is in power is there by the will of God. Any resistance against this power is against God's will. However, the stories of Jesus and his apostles contradict this. The New Testament tells of several acts of resistance against secular powers, even acts that were obviously legitimated and enjoyed the aid of God: '[17] Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, [18] And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. [19] But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, [20] Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life ... [29] Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.' (Acts 5: 17–20, 29) This was divinely sanctioned resistance to worldly power!

Furthermore, going back to the Old Testament, God was not initially in favour of monarchy; the people of Israel demanded a king like all the other nations, and not 'just' judges presiding over them as God had given them. When the prophet Samuel conveyed this demand to God, this was his answer: '[7] And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.' (1 Sam. 8: 7) According to this, God did not want another ruler over his people aside from God himself. In the end, he came around to this idea, but the first king was not really a success story: Saul grew suspicious of his son-in-law David and feared rebellion. He became so paranoid that his rule suffered and, in the end, the said son-in-law replaced him as the king of the Israelites. David was more successful and was used throughout the later Middle Ages and early modern period as an example of a good monarch, or even as the model for replacing a bad ruler with a good one.¹⁶ The Bible has at least as many stories of bad kings as it has examples of good rulership.

As these examples from the Bible, one of the earliest political texts, already show, living together in political communities has always been accompanied by discussions about political order. In the Western tradition, ideas were written down and discussed throughout the ages from Plato's *Politeia* and

16 See more on David and Solomon as examples of good rulership, Fábíán, 'The Biblical King Solomon', pp. 54–5. The story of Saul and David played a role in the narratives after the deposition of James II/VII, and was connected to a national English sense of being chosen by God, see Niggemann, *Revolutionserinnerung*, p. 130; and more extensively on the latter, Queckbörner, *Englands Exodus*. See also Straka, 'The Final Phase of Divine Right Theory', p. 641 for the comparison of Saul and David with James II/VII and William III in 1689. This story was also referenced during the deposition of Erik XIV of Sweden when he was compared to Saul to de-legitimise him.

Aristotle's *Politics*, Augustine's *City of God* and Aquinas's *De regno, ad regem Cypri*, to Machiavelli's writings, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Locke's *Two Treatises* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract*, and many more. Furthermore, practitioners of government wrote practical advice for their rulers or their successors, or participated in the scholarly discussion on political thought as James VI/I did or, later, Frederik II of Prussia.¹⁷ Above all in the Middle Ages and early modern period, European political communities and political thought were based on Christian ideas and a Christian worldview which permeated every aspect of life. Of course, ideas of divinity, divine legitimation or divine favour were also widespread in ancient communities. Moreover, traces of the connection between the divine and monarchy can still be found in today's monarchies: British coins claim D G (*Dei Gratia*) and F D (*Fidei Defensor/Defensatrix*) next to the portrait of Elizabeth II, linking the monarch to the Church, faith, and God. Nonetheless, the pre-modern royal realms stand out in the intensity of the discourse about the relationship between sacral and temporal rule, the divine legitimation of monarchs, the role of God in politics and political, and the struggle to form realms and communities pleasing to God (*gottgefällig*). After the Reformation, the question what was pleasing to God gained a confessional note, and it became a point of conflict to which confession a realm and their monarch professed.

In these discourses, however, the interests of the author have to be considered — in political thought, the author is never dead.¹⁸ James VI/I, who wrote one of the most influential books for seventeenth-century political thought on divine right as well as the quote from the beginning of this chapter, was the son of Mary I of Scotland, better known as Mary Stuart or Mary, Queen of Scots. It was obvious that he would argue that no one was allowed to judge a divinely legitimated monarch: even though she was an anointed queen, his own mother was judged and executed by mere mortals, by the English to add insult to injury.¹⁹ The French state philosopher Jean Bodin, who argued in favour of monarchs having absolute sovereignty, lived during the French Wars of Religion in which the question of how a monarch believing in a false God could be divinely legitimated

17 Joseph Canning notes the importance of writers engaged with political reality as well for the late Middle Ages, see Canning, *Ideas of Power*, p. 1. Frederik II published on the basis of letters he exchanged with Voltaire a discussion of the art of rulership, arguing against Machiavelli's ideas, [Friedrich II.], *Antimachiavell*.

18 Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, ch. 7, 'The Death of the Author', pp. 142–8.

19 More on James VI/I as political author and king, see Houlbrooke (ed.), *James VI and I*; Burns, *The True Law of Kingship*. See also James's own works, [James VI], *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*; James VI, *Basilikon Doron*.

was 'discussed' in a very bloody conflict with high death tolls on both sides.²⁰ Thomas Hobbes subordinated individual freedom to political order, and argued for the right of absolute monarchy.²¹ This was based on his experiences in the British Civil Wars in which the legitimate monarch was executed, and political order was dissolved along with the previous form of government.²² The experience of the author as an important background element influencing their writings is also seen in writings arguing against divine right, as in the case of John Locke. He supported a right to rebellion and wrote against absolute and divine monarchy, even before having to leave England due to his possible entanglement in the Rye House Plot against Charles II.²³ In Sweden, the nobleman Erik Sparre argued in his *Pro Lege, Rege et Grege* that a monarch must rule together with the council. He was also involved in the political conflict between the Swedish king Sigismund and his uncle, Duke Charles of Södermanland, the later Charles IX.²⁴ Political writings were and are mirrors of the circumstances of their authors.

A closer look at the arguments put forward by scholars writing favourably about divine right reveals the reason why these authors promoted this concept. They firmly believed that political order could only be kept in a divinely legitimated monarchy with a social hierarchy and (supposedly) a clear chain of command.²⁵ According to the prolific James VI/I, monarchy resembled the divine and came close to perfection.²⁶ Only the 'Mortall God' under the 'Immortall God' can keep 'peace and defence', as Hobbes argued.²⁷ This does not necessarily mean that each monarch was divinely legitimated, just that the monarchy and hierarchical forms of political and social order should be kept, and disorder should be avoided at all cost. It is no wonder that in nearly all the depositions in Northern Europe between 1500 and 1700, it was the monarch who had brought disorder to the realm. These monarchs failed in one of their most basic tasks — to keep the peace

20 Fox argues that it was in sixteenth-century France where the theory of divine right was fully formed, see Range, 'Dei Gratia and the "Divine Right of Kings"', p. 132. See Bodin, *Sechs Bücher*.

21 Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

22 Metzger, *Thomas Hobbes*.

23 See Harris (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy* on the impact of Locke's ideas, and more general on him, Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*. See also [Locke], *Two Treatises of Government*.

24 Sparre, 'Pro Lege, Rege et Grege'.

25 See also Greenleaf, 'The Thomasian Tradition', p. 748.

26 [James VI], *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*.

27 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 89.

within the realm and provide order and justice.²⁸ The wish for political order, which seemingly could only be provided by a divinely legitimated monarchy, was shared by a majority in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In 1649, establishing a Republic was the last resort for Charles I's deponents, as it was in 1581 in the later Dutch Republic.²⁹ In all other depositions between 1500 and 1700, the governmental form of monarchy remained untouched, and 'only' the person at the head of government was exchanged.

Divine Right, Dynasties and Depositions

Monarchy as the preferred form of government and as protection against political disorder had, however, inherent problems. The divinely legitimated monarch was not chosen based on their merit, but usually through succession laws and traditions, which could prove susceptible to error, that is, bad rulers. Furthermore, legitimacy by divine right was brought into question due to the Reformation and the subsequent uncertainty as to which interpretation of the divine was the right one. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one question regarding the divine right of kings was especially pressing: what happens when the rule of God and the rule of man are not the same? This became a real political problem when the monarch, seemingly placed on their throne by God, was deemed unworthy — however one might define unworthy. An unworthy monarch was often understood to be a tyrant. However, tyranny was conceived differently in different realms at different times. Religious differences between the monarch and most of his subjects just added a new possible contentious point.

The concept of tyranny, like the concept of divine right, encapsulates various elements.³⁰ Important aspects were legitimate and legal succession, the behaviour of a ruler during their reign, the personal piety of the monarch, and sometimes just the perception of these things by subjects and foreign parties. In extreme cases, like the British Civil Wars, the perceived tyranny of Charles I, problems with his piety and the accusation that he was

28 Related to this is Range's reference to a monarch by divine grace as binding them to Christian ideals and values, Range, *Dei Gratia* and the "Divine Right of Kings", pp. 137–9. See on the principal duties of kingship Schubert, *Königsabsetzung*, p. 46; Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt*, p. 48.

29 Wrede, 'Königsmord, Tyrannentod', p. 243–4; Wende, 'Der Prozeß gegen Karl I.', p. 185. See for the Dutch contexts Helmers and Janssen, 'Understanding the Dutch Golden Age', p. 7.

30 One of the best recent discussions of the political idea is offered by Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide*. In recent years, several publications highlighted the continued importance of understanding tyranny and tyrants, see Greenblatt, *Tyrant*; Snyder, *On Tyranny*.

blood-guilty clashed with the deep piety of leading members of the political, and especially the military, elite.³¹ These people shared a deep belief in the imminence of Judgement Day, and were therefore very worried about who would lead them and their fellow English (not much thought was given to the rest of the British Isles) in the last stand, the fight of good versus evil after the coming of Christ.³² Having the wrong leader would reflect badly on them and endanger their afterlife. They probably felt closer to the apostles imprisoned by the Sadducees than to Paul advising a new political community. Deposing the king was not based on any anti-monarchical sentiments but, in contrast, on a deep belief in divinely sanctioned monarchy.³³ The monarchy was given by God, but not necessarily to the individual occupying the throne, especially if they lost God's favour by becoming a tyrant. Charles I was explicitly called 'tyrant, traitor, and murderer, and public enemy to the Commonwealth' in the sentence that the High Court gave him, showing how important it was to the judges to rid the kingdom of such a king.³⁴

But what happened after an individual was identified as not (or no longer) divinely sanctioned and was therefore deposed? Looking at who actually replaced a deposed monarch, the close relationship between the new monarch and the old is strikingly obvious. In England, Scotland, Denmark-Norway and Sweden, in six out of ten cases the new monarch was the closest family member. In a loose composite monarchy like the Kalmar Union uniting Denmark, Norway and Sweden, a deposition could mean a complete separation from the other kingdoms and the dynasty: in 1523, Christian II's Swedish deposer Gustav Eriksson (Vasa) was not related to the union king from the Oldenburg dynasty, and instead established an independent kingdom, thereby ending the Kalmar Union.³⁵ In the other parts of this personal union, Denmark and Norway, the Oldenburg Christian II was replaced by his paternal uncle Frederik I, also an Oldenburg. The cohesion between Scotland and England in a similar case in 1689 was greater: both kingdoms in this personal union replaced their shared monarch James II/VII with his oldest daughter and her husband, Mary II and William III. Even when the monarchy was abolished as in 1649, the opponents to Charles I first tried to convince him to abdicate in favour of one of his sons, or to have one

31 See Crawford, "Charles Stuart, That Man of Blood" for this understanding of Charles's tyranny.

32 Pečar, *Macht der Schrift*.

33 See also for the situation in the 1690s in England, Straka, 'The Final Phase of Divine Right Theory'.

34 Gardiner (ed.), *The Constitutional Documents*, pp. 378–9.

35 See in general Gustafsson, 'A State That Failed?'

of the Stuart sons forcefully replace their father. After all, this had worked in 1327 when the English king Edward II was forced to abdicate and his son, Edward III, became king. From the point of view of 1648/49, the forced abdication of Mary I of Scotland and her replacement by her son, James VI, had also been successful. Considering all the trouble evoked by the much more complicated situation surrounding the deposition and succession of Richard II by his cousin, Henry IV, especially later in the fifteenth century with a whole chain of depositions legitimising their actions with this event, the combination of forced abdication and succession by the eldest son was an attractive solution.³⁶ In other words, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an individual monarch who had clearly lost God's favour could be deposed, but the monarchy and, if possible, the ruling dynasty should be preserved to ensure political order and legitimacy. In Sweden, the irrational behaviour of Erik XIV showed, in the eyes and words of his contemporaries, that he was punished by God with the spirit of Saul. Hence, he had obviously lost God's favour.³⁷ Erik's replacement with his oldest half-brother was therefore an accepted solution. This idea of dynastic responsibility for ruling members was apparently so well-known that even the slightest hint was enough to legitimate the Dutch stadholder's interest in English affairs in 1688. William III came with an invasion army to England in 1688 and declared this justified: 'And since our dearest and most entirely beloved Consort the Princess, and likewise ourselves, have so great an Interest in this Matter, and such a Right, as all the World knows, to the Succession of the Crown.'³⁸ For readers not as well-informed about the British royal family tree as the contemporaries of the Glorious Revolution in England apparently were: William was third in line to the English throne — and the first male candidate — as the nephew of James II, and he was married to the first in line, Mary, James's eldest daughter. This dynastic connection of William III of the House of Orange moreover led to part of the political elite addressing the infamous 'Letter of Invitation' to William, giving him further legitimation to invade England in 1688.

Of course, this line of succession only applies if you leave out the new-born son of James II, James Francis Edward Stuart.³⁹ In general, minor heirs, especially if they were very young, were ignored unless they served the

36 I have expanded on this argument in Sarti, 'Depositions of Monarchs', pp. 586–7.

37 Hildebrand (ed.), *Svenska Riksdagsakter*, document 381, here p. 339.

38 *Journal of the House of Commons*, pp. 1–6.

39 See on the relation between divine right and the events in England in 1688/89, Straka, 'The Final Phase of Divine Right Theory'.

purpose of the deponents, as was the case with the one-year-old James VI of Scotland. In comparison, Charles (IX) of Sweden ignored Sigismund's children and their claim to the throne (Sigismund's eldest son, Wladyslaw, was four at the time of Sigismund's official deposition in 1599, his sister Anna Maria six). Generally, the governmental form of monarchy was accepted throughout the early modern realms, the ruling dynasty was preferred to anyone else, and usually it was just the individual occupying the throne at that time, and most often also the head of the dynasty, who was no longer accepted. Looking at depositions more broadly, the need for a suitable rival candidate with a strong claim to the throne becomes obvious. Such a strong rival candidate was usually a member of the ruling dynasty, though not necessarily according to the laws of agnatic primogeniture.⁴⁰ Despite the blood relation to the deposed 'tyrant', these rival candidates were accepted by their new subjects.

The political events and the discussions surrounding the attempts to replace Charles I with one of his sons in England, or the replacement of Sigismund with Charles IX in Sweden, highlight the importance of a certain dynasty for a specific realm. Even when the reigning monarch proved unacceptable, they were not replaced by just anyone. As far as possible, dynastic succession laws were observed, or — if a specific dynasty was not connected to the realm as in the early sixteenth century in Sweden — traditional forms of legitimate succession such as election by council and/or parliament were used. Sixteenth-century England kept the Tudors, their northern neighbour Scotland the Stuarts, and a century later, even the radicalised religious and military elite in England tried to keep the Stuarts. Forty years later in the Glorious Revolution, it was still the Stuarts who prevailed, now widely accepted in England and Scotland. Late sixteenth-century Sweden was happy with the Vasas, and in the 1520s, Danish deponents of the Oldenburg king Christian II chose his paternal uncle as leader of the opposition and the new King — and a branch of the Oldenburgs still sits on the Danish throne today.

In Protestant Northern Europe, only early sixteenth-century Sweden did not have an established dynasty, or at least not a royal one. The Sture had been the leading family in Sweden since the middle of the fifteenth century but their representatives never claimed the throne. Instead they ruled as governors (*riksföreståndare*). Even in 1501, Sten Sture the Elder did not claim the throne when the king was deposed who had ruled within the construct of the Kalmar Union, the personal union between Denmark,

40 See also Duindam, *Dynasties*, pp. 127–42.

Norway, and Sweden. Christian II, the son of the king deposed in 1501, came back in 1520, waging war against the Sture government and defeating the leading member of the Sture family, Sten Sture the Younger, in battle. This led to Sten's death, and left the family with Nils, Sten's eight-year old son, and Svante, his three-year-old son.⁴¹ Lacking an established royal dynasty, and with the leading noble dynasty lacking an adult male leader (although Sten's widow Kristina Gyllenstierna was a formidable ruler and military commander), Sweden instead turned to its tradition as an electoral monarchy, choosing its next king by election and acclamation as it had in 1448 with Karl Knutsson (Bonde).⁴² Since most of the noblemen of the right age were dead or imprisoned by the time Sweden defeated Denmark and deposed Christian II, the choice was easily made to elect the military leader and accepted captain of Dalarna, Gustav Eriksson (Vasa). As Gustav I of Sweden, he later established a hereditary monarchy, and successfully left the kingdom to his eldest son, Erik. The depositions among his sons were again a sign of the acceptance of the dynasty but not necessarily of the individual favoured at the moment by the succession law of primogeniture. These depositions also referred back to the Swedish custom of choosing a king amongst the last king's relatives, preferably the sons.⁴³

Depositions as political conflicts about who was the right ruler for a monarchy showed the connection between a dynasty and a realm as well as the conservative preference for political stability.⁴⁴ Nothing was worse than anarchy, or anything which was perceived as anarchical, whether by the ruler, the political elite or various opposition groups. The stance on social and political order differentiates pre-modern European kingdoms from modern polities where law and order are no longer necessarily the most important political values on which everyone agrees. If in such a pre-modern polity the ruling individual was not able to guarantee stability, thereby losing their legitimacy and God's favour, or was in anyway else perceived as tyrant, the dynasty was expected to step in — and usually it did. An established dynasty offered a broader historical context, a longer tradition than any individual could, and consequently political stability superseding the individual failure of one of its members. Depositions were not simply power struggles, or palace coups within the dynasty. No dynastic

41 To complicate matters, Sten Sture the Younger was related to the Sture family through his great-grandmother, but took the name Sture (instead of his dynastic name Natt och Dag) for political reasons, to show kinship and political allegiance.

42 Yrwing, 'Konungavalet i Strängnäs 1523'.

43 See also for Denmark, Gustafsson, 'Dynasty Formation', p. 347.

44 See also Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt*, esp. p. 31.

rival candidate, however powerful they might be, could successfully defeat the monarch without the support, or at least the meaningful passiveness, of the majority of the political elite and the inhabitants of the kingdom.

Realm and Crown

Directly related to this last argument is another: that divine right entailed an understanding of traditions and political culture which was supposedly given by God, and specific to an individual realm.⁴⁵ This included ideas of who belonged to the cluster of people who could legitimately sit on the throne: elected monarchs from a pool of candidates related to the royal families in Scandinavia, even after the hereditary right was introduced; or close relations of the last monarch in the British Isles.⁴⁶ Electoral capitulations or oaths also played a role, which James VII of Scotland really should have realised when he never bothered to take this coronation oath in Scotland.⁴⁷ But more broadly, it also included the very important question of who else was destined to rule the realm. Here, ideas of consensual rule were dominant.⁴⁸ Consensual rule meant that the aristocracy and their institution, the Privy Council, but also representative institutions like parliaments or the Nordic assemblies (the things) contributed to the government of the realm. Furthermore, maybe most importantly in the realms of Northern Europe being discussed here, the idea of each realm having a specific tradition and law that had existed since time immemorial was influential.⁴⁹

Conversely, depositions were less likely when the political elite had substantial influence, or hereditary monarchy was a securely established custom of the realm. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Sweden had eleven different individuals as monarchs (two of them ruled more than once), seven of whom were deposed. By 1600, Sweden had an established tradition and process of deposing monarchs. Interestingly enough, the next Swedish deposition after Sigismund's in 1599 was in 1792, the assassination of Gustav III at a masked ball. In the intervening two centuries, the ruling dynasties,

45 There has been a broad debate on the relation between kingdoms and God, and even more, on the relation between specific kingdoms and God. The political thought on this topic is discussed by von Friedeburg, among others, 'Bausteine widerstandsrechtlicher Argumente', pp. 137–43.

46 Electoral monarchy and hereditary principles did not have to be mutually exclusive, see Schnettger, 'Dynastic Succession in an Elective Monarchy'.

47 This problem is discussed by Israel, 'General Introduction', p. 8.

48 See on this concept Schneidmüller, 'Konsensuale Herrschaft'.

49 See Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution*.

first the Vasas and then several small dynasties that could claim somewhat of a dynastic relation to the Vasas, struggled to produce heirs to the throne. In the end, the Swedish elite had quite some influence on their monarchs, and even Swedish absolutism did not last very long. The eighteenth century was already termed the Time of Liberty, and when Gustav III tried to grab more power at the end of this century, he was deposed.

Norway also had a strong tradition of getting rid of kings in the twelfth and thirteenth century. However, the end of this civil war era coincided with the introduction of hereditary monarchy in the 1240s. After that, Norway usually stuck with its monarchs until the very end, or until Denmark or Sweden forced it to depose them. Norway had to be forced by Denmark to depose even Christian II, who really earned his title of tyrant (though not in Norway) as well as to dethrone Erik of Pomerania in 1440 — although it has to be admitted that all these kings were much less tyrannical in Norway than they were in Denmark or Sweden. Usually, Norway was left to the political elite to govern as long as they generally accepted the king, who was resident in Copenhagen. It seems there was simply no need for a deposition when consensual rule was observed due to the struggles within the dynasties, or when resistance to depositions was entrenched as a custom of the realm.

One problem with these distinctive traditions and customs of individual realms concerned the unions of kingdoms of different kinds in the early modern period.⁵⁰ This is easily seen with Sigismund of Sweden, oldest son of the Swedish king John III, grandson of Gustav I, and basically as Swedish as they come. However, being elected to the throne of Poland-Lithuania, speaking Polish, and — even worse — being Catholic, in addition to not being in Sweden after inheriting the throne led to him being ousted. He was viewed as a foreign king — bringing a ‘foreign rule [with] violence and tyranny’ (*fremmede Härskap [med] Wäld och Tyranni*) to the kingdom.⁵¹ Even in the nineteenth century, all documents about him were collected in a publication on Swedish relations with foreign powers. A similar conflict within a personal union is also apparent when England executed the Scottish king, Charles I. Even though Charles I was by no means liked in Scotland, they usually had other traditions for dealing with unpopular kings: Scottish nobles imprisoned their monarch or forced them to do their bidding, and afterwards were quite happy to accept them once again as kings. But executing the Scottish king, who was coincidentally also the English king,

50 See Backerra, ‘Personal Union’.

51 Stiernman (ed.), *Alla Riksdagars och Möters Besluth*, p. 481. More extensive on this, Sarti, ‘Sigismund of Sweden’.

went too far, and was yet another reason to continue the British civil wars.⁵² These different customs and traditions could also lead to a monarch of a personal union being deposed in one of the realms, but not in the other. John II of Sweden (deposed in 1501) continued to rule over Denmark and Norway until his natural death, as did Sigismund of Sweden (deposed in 1599) in Poland-Lithuania. That the deposition of James II of England led to his deposition as James VII of Scotland was a sign that these two realms had grown together and shared their traditions and customs — at least enough to continue wanting to be ruled by the same monarch and dynasty.⁵³

Conclusion

We need to broaden our understanding of the divine right of monarchy to gain a better understanding of how contemporaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw this principle: not as a static idea unchanged since time immemorial, but in actuality, a concept under discussion. In this discussion, monarchs were interested in emphasising their elevated individual position in this concept, dynasties used it to legitimise the whole house and its special role in a realm, and many inhabitants of a realm understood it as their proto-national identity to be part of a God-favoured realm. For them, the form of government was important — it had to be a monarchy, not a republic without a divinely legitimated ruler. Furthermore, people believed that the legitimate ruler of their monarchy had God's favour, unless they lost it. Then, God's favour would automatically pass to the next legitimate ruler of the specific dynasty ruling the realm. In the worst-case scenario, the dynasty as a whole lost God's favour, or was not available to rule the realm. In such a case, rare as it was, going without a monarchy was the only option, for example for the devout believers of the New Model Army. In fact, establishing a new dynasty in England that was not God-favoured was one of the very few options not even discussed. In Protestant Europe, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, exchanging one dynasty for another, except when the first dynasty died out, was inconceivable, and in the few cases of foreign rulers (or rulers perceived as foreign) in monarchies, there was huge opposition to them (William III in England, Sigismund in Sweden, the Danish Kalmar Union kings in Sweden). In the eighteenth century, dynasties and their territories

52 Russell, 'The Anglo-Scottish Union', p. 249.

53 See Brown, 'The Vanishing Emperor', p. 68 and p. 73. Morrill, 'The British Problem', p. 3.

were exchanged much more readily (e.g., Lorraine and Tuscany). This set an example for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when changing or in fact choosing the ruling monarch and dynasty from diverse candidates became a standard of monarchical politics. The divine right of dynasty had by then lost its hold as one of the most popular political ideas, even though traces of the connections between monarchs, dynasties and realms with God, the divine and the Church remain.

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