

CHAPTER ~ 1

Introduction

This book is about the messages of power that sites created by, or associated with, rulers could send to their subjects, to visitors, to ambassadors, and to anyone who saw or entered them. The rulers it considers were principally, although not exclusively, emperors and kings. The period it considers is that reaching from the early Roman Empire to the beginning of the sixteenth century. The sites it considers are, first, what can loosely be termed palaces, whether elaborate stone- or brick-built complexes of buildings, or timber great halls, or earthworks, the residential centers for rulers in one form or another. Second, artificial landscapes around or near the palaces, whether gardens, or parks, or forests managed for hunting. Third, cities founded, enlarged, or patronized by rulers. Fourth, places that rulers made holy, either by endowing them with holy objects, or by constructing or expanding holy buildings there. Fifth and finally, places where rulers were inaugurated into their offices, and places where their remains were placed and memorials to them created.

The book draws on a range of disciplines, including: architectural history, for the light which it can cast on the form and inspiration of rulers' buildings; archaeology, for its role in reconstructing buildings only partially preserved, for providing a deeper context for them from the excavations of the layers in which they sit, and for making possible the interpretation of earthwork sites, for which there is no—or only very limited—written evidence; garden history, for reconstructing the form and assessing the significance of gardens associated with palaces; landscape history, for the understanding of parks and forests; art history, for approaches to understanding the significance of the decoration and embellishment of rulers' buildings, and of the representation of those buildings in paintings or mosaics; literary history, for the light it can cast on images of palaces and their functions conjured up in poems and other writings; and liturgical studies, for their importance in understanding ceremonies and rituals carried out in rulers' holy places.

The book's guiding discipline, however, is history. Its aim is to examine what can be learned from the sites in question about the nature of rulers' power, or at least about how rulers wished to represent their power. Readers will appreciate that the validity of this aim is open to the question of how far such sites were created or modified simply for the enjoyment and gratification of rulers, rather than being designed to send messages of power in the way this book proposes. Readers, in other words, may conclude that, in creating, modifying, or using these sites, rulers were doing no more than fulfilling their personal taste for magnificence, luxury, and self-aggrandizement, and were perceived as doing this by those

who visited the sites. So the palaces, gardens, parks, and forests would have been just the perks of the job of being a ruler and not intended to make any public statement about the rulers' power. The cities founded or enlarged or patronized by the ruler would have been simply for his comfort and convenience. His holy places would have been designed for no more than to guarantee the well-being of the rulers' souls after their deaths. In the end, it is a matter of judgment; for rulers in the period in question have almost never left statements of what their intentions were in building this or designing that. Self-gratification, self-importance, craving for luxury, fears for the fate of the soul after death might have been the real motives for the work undertaken, perhaps even the principal motives.

The case argued in this book, however, is that the sites in question were indeed designed to send messages of power—and consequently functioned as mechanisms by which that power could be consolidated and increased. So, the book argues, the ruler's palace could be an explicit statement of his power. It could be a carefully designed mechanism for presenting him and his power in particular ways and to particular groups, whether his high-ranking subjects or the ambassadors of other rulers (Part I). Gardens could function similarly, especially where they served as open-air stages for courtly meetings and rituals; and so too could parks and forests, especially in what were the ritualized proceedings of the imperial and royal hunts (Part II). The cities built by, or modified by, rulers were similarly expressions of the rulers' power to control cityscapes and the built environment in which some of their subjects lived. And, like the palaces, they were mechanisms for displaying that power. This could be achieved through great buildings and piazzas built in the ruler's name and serving to impress and overwhelm those who saw them. But it could also be achieved through the creation in the cities of processional ways in which the rituals of rulership could be played out to the greatest effect (Part III). The holy places created or patronized by rulers were, the book argues, no less committed to representing and reinforcing rulers' power. In them, a ruler could associate his power with especially holy objects and with divinities themselves (Part IV). Messages of power could be sent too by the places where the rulers were inaugurated, and the places in which their remains were deposited—all the more when inauguration places and funerary places were fixed sites associated with the rulers' dynasties. A ruler's burial place could send a message of power not only about the deceased ruler, but also about his successors in office who were, of course, responsible for the implementation of the funerals (Part V).

In exploring these matters, the book makes no claim to being a definitive statement, for it is by no means a comprehensive survey of the types of site in question, valuable and illuminating as that would no doubt be. Such a survey, examining developments over time and space and the interrelationships of sites over time and space, would require research of many years' duration and a multivolume work much larger than the present study. This book's objective is more limited. It is to bring together the best and most illuminating examples of these sites, in order to examine the most productive approaches that scholars have used to draw significance from them.

These examples are taken from Europe and from a wide range of historical periods. The earliest considered are Roman imperial sites from the first to the fourth century AD, such as the Imperial Fora in Rome and the Palace of Diocletian in Split. These are followed in

time by sites from the Byzantine Empire, which constituted the continuation of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean, such as the Great Palace of Constantinople, and the great church of Hagia Sophia in that city. Alongside these, the book considers sites of the “barbarian” kingdoms that succeeded the Roman Empire in western Europe, such as the mausoleum of Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths (454–526), in Ravenna (Italy), and the great palace site of Yeavering (England) in the kingdom of Northumbria. Moving on in time again, the book examines sites of the great empire of Charlemagne (768–814) in western Europe, especially the palaces of Aachen and Ingelheim (Germany). It looks too at sites created or modified by the newly emerged Muslim caliphate in southern Spain in the tenth century, notably the palace city of Madinat al-Zahrā, and the Great Mosque of Córdoba. Outside the area of the Roman Empire, the book considers sites such as the timber halls at Lejre (Denmark), the massive royal mausoleum of Jelling in the same kingdom, and the earthworks, which gave the Hill of Tara in Ireland its central importance for Irish kingship. For the later Middle Ages, the book examines sites from the kingdoms of France and England as they emerged from the twelfth century onward, especially the great French palaces in Paris and at nearby Vincennes, and the equally imposing Westminster Palace, which became the chief royal palace of the kingdom of England. For less enduring kingdoms, the book ranges across the thirteenth-century kingdom of Majorca, with one of its principal centers at the palace of Perpignan in south-west France; and the kingdom of Naples and Sicily, with royal and imperial sites at Naples itself, at Palermo where a complex of palaces grew up, at Capua where the triumphal gateway built by the king of Sicily and Germany and Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II (1198–1250), still stands in mutilated form, and at the Castel del Monte, where that ruler’s octagonal castle palace still dominates the surrounding landscape. The book also considers the sites created by the kings of Bohemia in and around Prague, especially those built or enlarged by the king of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV (1346–78), at Prague itself but also at Karlštejn, the castle developed to guard his collection of relics and his regalia. For sites created for rulers other than kings and emperors, the book considers the Palace of the Doge in Venice, and the immensely important monument which is the Palace of the Popes at Avignon, built by Benedict XIII (1334–42) and Clement VI (1342–52), during the period when the papacy was in exile in France. The intention of ranging so widely is to permit the book to use the work of scholars specializing in different centuries and in different countries. That work and the conclusions the scholars draw from it can be very different for different periods and areas, but they can also be revealingly similar, so that bringing them together to an extent that has not often been attempted before can prove revealing and illuminating.

The book’s practical aim is to provide a sort of handbook to how sites created or modified by rulers can yield essentially historical conclusions about the nature of their power, or at least about the power they were claiming to possess. It guides readers around the sites in question, or sometimes around the artistic and literary representations of such sites, in as hands-on a way as is possible without actually taking readers in person to these places. The book attempts to draw to the attention of readers the individual features of these sites, always striving to extract from them the historical conclusions about rulers’ power which they might be perceived as offering. It supports descriptions of the sites with as lavish a col-

lection of photographs and diagrams as has been possible. These are often labeled, and always fully captioned, so that they are an essential part of the fabric of the book.

It is also intended that a reader should be able to go on to consider sites that this book has not considered, and to press further the line of historical questioning that the book has sketched out. For this reason, the book largely provides references for the themes and sites discussed in a discrete section entitled “Research and Reading” (below, pp. 391–416). In addition to providing the equivalent of footnotes to the material in the chapters, this section offers a critical commentary on the most exciting scholarly literature, archaeological reports, or collections of sources bearing on the themes discussed in each chapter, as well as providing a similar commentary on the scholarly literature relating to the individual sites examined.

The book nevertheless has aspirations to provide some sort of answers to two fundamental questions about rulership even if, given that it is not a coherent history of the types of site in question, they must be only provisional. First, its wide geographical and chronological scope permits it to address, in the context of the sites with which it is concerned, the question of how unchanging rulership was across the centuries from the first century AD to the end of the Middle Ages; and how unchanging it was also across the wide area this book embraces, from Bohemia to Andalusia, from Sicily to Scotland and Norway. For scholars have often treated the manifestations of rulership in various areas and periods as very different, so that Roman emperors have been interpreted as radically different rulers from kings of France and England, for example, or from caliphs of Córdoba. Irish kings have been seen, at least for certain periods, as a quite different type of ruler from the rulers of Continental kingdoms or even of Anglo-Saxon England. It may be that these differences of perception are justified by the evidence; but it may equally be that they are illusory. They could arise from differences in the type of evidence that has survived from the areas in question; or from modern interpretations of the past which, for example, have sometimes seen Muslim states such as the caliphate of Córdoba as being of completely different origin and type from those of non-Muslim areas of Europe; or from the simple fact that specialists are often focused on their areas of specialization and too rarely look beyond. This book, in short, has a mission, first, to break down the various chronological and geographical—and cultural—divides apparent in the scholarly literature; and, second, to place squarely on the agenda the hypothesis that rulership was in important respects unchanging across Europe in the millennium and a half or so from the early Roman imperial period to the end of the Middle Ages.

If the book’s contention that sites created by rulers were expressions of, and therefore tools of, their power is sustainable, it becomes necessary to ask what sort of power was in question, and how far this differed from period to period and place to place. To approach this, it has been necessary to adopt a framework within which to describe the power of rulers, so that like can be compared with like across the book’s chronological and geographical range. The framework adopted here is a threefold categorization of types of power. First, the type of power that derives from the exercise of law and the creation of bureaucratic and fiscal machinery to enable the ruler to impose his will on his subjects. It may be given the shorthand label “bureaucratic power.” This is the type of power most familiar in the modern

period, when people obey their governments, because those governments possess the means to make them obey—that is, the complex record-keeping, all the more developed in the present computerized age, which allows them to follow the affairs of their subjects and above all to extract taxation from them. Then there are the hierarchies of officials that allow the governments' instructions to be made known, and the police or military personnel, authorized to use force to ensure that they are followed. And, finally, the system of prisons and other places of punishment to coerce those who do not obey or to punish those whose actions fall outside the laws. An impersonal system of offices and officeholders, regulated by impersonal procedures, regulations, and laws, is a defining feature of bureaucratic power.

But, even in the present, this is by no means the only type of power in existence, and in the past it may not always have been the dominant one. A second type of power, to which we can assign the shorthand label “personal power,” derives from the hold rulers have through their personal relationships with their subjects—a hold which ensures that those subjects (or at least a sufficient number of them) are, as a result of these personal relationships with the holders of power, either constrained to support them, or see it as in their interests to do so. This may have been the type of power that sustained the rulers of the barbarian kingdoms of Western Europe from the fifth century onward, for example, when they developed war bands of military retainers who were committed to them through strong personal bonds, reinforced by oaths of loyalty. Such war bands might thus have been essentially personal in nature, yet they would have assured the power of the ruler in the same way as police forces do in the case of bureaucratic power. It is arguable that throughout the Middle Ages personal relationships created power for lords over their vassals, that is, the military retainers sworn by oath to support their lords especially in warfare. And it is observable too in the early modern period in the relationship between a ruler and the members of his court, like the courtiers of Louis XIV (1643–1715) at his palace at Versailles where they lived, often in personal intimacy with their monarch.

A third type of power is encompassed under the shorthand term, “ideological power,” which is not rationally based on bureaucratic machinery or on personal relations with the ruler, but is based rather on a sense, or a belief, that the rulers occupied a special position relative to the gods or to God. It was this that made their position legitimate and meant that they had to be obeyed, for failure to obey risked supernatural retribution at the hand of the divinity that had granted power to the ruler. So, for example, the Roman emperors were closely associated with pagan gods, and were believed to become gods themselves after their deaths. The barbarian kings who ruled in the areas outside the Roman Empire and, after the end of that empire in Western Europe, in the kingdoms that replaced it, may themselves have been believed to have been descended from gods or to have been closely associated with them. There are indications in the first-century Roman writer Tacitus' account of them that barbarian kings functioned as priests as well as rulers, that they were, for example, close enough to the gods to interpret the neighings and snortings of sacred white horses (Mattingly and Handforth 1970, *Germania*, ch. 10). There are traces of similar ideological aspects of power in the Viking kingdoms of Scandinavia.

Such pagan aspects of ideological power were no doubt disrupted by the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity in the course of the fourth century, and by the subse-

quent conversion of the barbarians to the same religion. But even after this rulers could be viewed—or at least could view themselves—as having received their power from the Christian God, who also guided and supported their rule. For example, the development of the ritual of anointing a king with holy oil developed and represented in symbolic form the idea that the ruler received his power from God.

So, the categorization of power set out above can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Bureaucratic power, which came into existence through the creation of bureaucratic machinery, and the development of laws and ideas about them.
- (2) Personal power, which originated through circumstances that made it desirable for influential members or classes of society to forge personal relations with the ruler.
- (3) Ideological power, which was made possible by ways in which rulers were able to merge their power with existing or new religious beliefs.

There is nothing fixed about this categorization, and the distinctions between the categories are often blurred. Personal power, for example, may shade into bureaucratic power, when subjects of a ruler served him by being appointed to what appeared to be impersonal offices, but still swore oaths of allegiance to him. Were the oaths, then, simply fossilized formalities, or were they the core of the relationship between ruler and subject? Also, some subjects may have perceived and accepted the power of rulers in different ways from others. Some may have devoutly accepted the ruler's divinely given power; others may have been skeptical of this, but nevertheless have felt bound to the ruler by personal bonds, or have been constrained to obey him by virtue of his bureaucratic machinery.

If the aim of this book is to cast light on the nature of rulership across a wide chronological and geographical range, viewing it in the framework of these types of power, readers may object that there are more obvious ways to approach it than through the sites with which it is concerned. It would, for example, be possible to concentrate on how the political theorists of the past explained the power of rulers in their writings. For modern scholars, this has often proved very illuminating, especially for periods like the ninth century, or the thirteenth century, when political theory was an important subject of contemporary scholarship. So it would be possible to study the writings of a scholar such as Hincmar, archbishop of Reims, in the ninth century, or of the English specialist in law, Bracton, or of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. But such an approach is always dependent on the opinions of these theorists. There is no guarantee that what these scholars wrote was representing accurately the nature of rulers' power, rather than describing or discussing what they wished to exist as distinct from what actually did.

Alternatively, it is possible to examine the archives of administrative documents that past governments have left behind them, and scholars have often done this for particular periods and particular states. They have looked at the law codes that particular rulers and their governments produced, at the tax records, at the treasury accounts, and at the accounts of the rulers' landed holdings. But not all the states this book is concerned with left such archives, and in any case documents of this kind are necessarily going to give the impression that power was primarily bureaucratic power, because the documents are themselves the prod-

uct of bureaucratic machinery. They may provide an important part of the answer, but not necessarily a complete one.

Another possible source of information is the narrative writings from the past, the histories and chronicles, the biographies and epic poems, that pertain to rulers and their power. These too can be very illuminating, but once again they are always at one remove from the rulers themselves, and it is never absolutely clear whether the writers in question were portraying those rulers and their power as they actually were, or as they wanted or imagined them to be. In short, documents, chronicles, and other written texts from the past—even apparently impartial ones like law codes—can present prejudiced views of the reality of power. And, for some periods and some parts of Europe, there are no documents and chronicles, either because the societies in question were not literate ones, or because little or nothing in the way of written sources for them has survived the passage of time.

So, while still drawing on these sources, this book takes a different approach. Its aim is to get as close as possible to the rulers themselves, and to understand the nature of their power through the places and buildings they themselves created, or that were created for them. A ruler was after all a real person, living and working in particular places, in particular buildings and indeed in particular rooms or apartments within them. Enormous resources were devoted to these buildings, which were often glowing with rich decorations, and embellished with spectacular images and sculptures. Rulers visited or lived in—and sometimes founded or developed—particular cities, often bearing their names, to which equally enormous resources were devoted. They made ceremonial use of forests, parks, and gardens, which were often the product of their own organization of the landscape. They were crowned in particular places, and buried in particular places, often in great monuments or churches, which they themselves had built. These sites were, in other words, very close to rulers, very much part of their own actions rather than of other people's reflections on them. Understanding them in detail, as this book tries to do, may represent a more direct approach to understanding what kind of power rulers exercised, or at least claimed to exercise.

Were the palaces and cities of rulers designed to accommodate and to give precedence to the bureaucratic offices and the courts of lawyers? Were they dominated by strong rooms for the treasury and cubicles for the treasury clerks? Were their principal spaces given over to law courts? Can we identify the sort of government offices that are so dominant an aspect of the modern city? If so, this would point toward the prime importance of bureaucratic power. Or were the planning and the architecture of centers of power primarily designed to provide the contexts in which rulers could meet with their subjects and forge those personal relationships that made up what is here called personal power? Were palaces, for example, dominated by great halls in which rulers entertained their subjects, enjoyed entertainments with them, held meetings with them, and received oaths of loyalty from them? Were cities characterized by places where subjects could be in the presence of their ruler, perhaps as the latter processed through the city, or held meetings in great public concourses? Were forests and parks primarily designed so rulers could fraternize with their subjects, providing contexts in which messages of personal power could be conveyed? Or was the primary intention of palaces, cities, and planned landscapes, as well as rulers' holy places such as temples

and churches, to emphasize the divinity of the ruler, or at least his relationship to God or the gods? Did the ruler make his appearances in contexts where he was surrounded by priests, in close association with holy objects, and among images that represented his holiness, or at least his divinely chosen status? Did his throne look out from the gallery of some holy building, allowing the ruler to gaze on images of the divine? Were his palaces and cities dominated by holy places—temples, churches, mausolea—which underlined in more or less explicit ways the ruler’s relationship with the deity? If so, this would point toward the prime importance of ideological power.

Of course, in all of this we may still be obtaining only partial clues to the nature of power. Especially in the case of ideological power, what the ruler wanted his subjects to believe about his power may not have been what they actually did believe. Building great churches and palaces to express this power was not a guarantee against their destruction by subjects who did not share his view of his power. For all the resources lavished by Charles IV, king of Bohemia (1346–78), on his palace and cathedral of Prague, much of what he had achieved was swept away in the Hussite Wars of the following century. For all the efforts devoted to the creation of a magnificent church and palace at Westminster by King Henry III (1207–72), none of this stopped an attack on the palace by citizens who destroyed at least some of what the king had created. Perhaps such incidents show that the importance of these sites was accepted by rebellious subjects, even if they had no sympathy for them. Nothing is ever simple. Nevertheless, it is the contention of this book that the study of such sites leads to the heart of what rulers saw the nature of their power as being. It is bringing us as close to them as we are likely to get—to stand in the spaces they made, to look at what remains of the landscapes they shaped, to understand the layout of the cities they conceived and the holy places they created.