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Rulership – Change – Europe: Approaches to the Core Categories of the Volume

The town of Trakai in October 1430: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania has died.¹ In the illustration from Eberhard Windeck's *History of Emperor Sigismund*,² the boyars – the leading political elites of the Grand Duchy – are gathered around his coffin (Fig. 1). They are probably discussing how the succession should take place, for the situation was rather complicated: Vytautas had left no male heir. Moreover, it is doubtful whether such a male heir could have easily succeeded his father, because Vytautas had been granted the rank of Grand Duke for life a few years earlier by his cousin Jogaila, who formally retained an only vaguely tangible position of primacy. Since 1386, the latter sat on the Polish throne as Władysław II. Jagiełło. The succession in Lithuania was to be settled jointly by the highest-ranking elites of both realms. With the death of Vytautas, not only the succession in the Grand Duchy, but also the union with the Kingdom of Poland was at stake. Furthermore, only a few weeks earlier, another conflict had been settled that had thrown the fragile political structure into turmoil. In 1429, the Roman-German King Sigismund of Luxembourg³ had offered Vytautas a royal crown, much to the bewilderment of the Polish elites. They argued that only the Pope, not the Roman King as a peer, could crown kings. In the end, Sigismund's emissaries were held up long enough for a reconciliation to take place between Vytautas and his cousin. The coronation was never carried out, and Vytautas died a few weeks later.

This case study raises various questions aimed at quite different aspects of pre-modern political configurations and specific contingencies of a change of rulership. How do members of a ruling dynasty act towards each other? To which extent are the elites of a certain realm able to demand participation in the succession of new rulers? What role do contractual arrangements play in a conflict between hereditary and elective rights? Which external authorities are involved in such processes and are they also recognised? Furthermore, the case of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a political entity from the overlapping region between Latin and Orthodox Europe, is a reminder that many events which at first glance seem to have taken place on the European “periphery” were in fact quite central; in this case due to the role of King Sigismund. Despite its specificity, this case study from the east therefore shows a significant degree of comparability as well as interconnections with other areas of Europe.

¹ For the following, see the contribution by Sergey Polekhov in this volume.

² For source-critical classification with further reading: Kaiser Sigismunds Buch (2022).

³ On Sigismund, cf. the contribution by Julia Burkhardt in this volume.



Fig. 1: Vienna, ONB, cod 13975, fol. 324r; Lithuanian boyars are consulting after the death of Grand Duke Vytautas in Eberhard Windeck's History of Emperor Sigismund.

The present volume, featuring contributions of a conference in Leipzig held in September 2021, marks the conclusion of the project "Mediation of rulership at the borderlands of Latin Europa in Late Medieval Times" (2017–2021), funded by the German Research

Foundation (DFG). It pursued three main goals: Firstly, the project group intended to contribute to a more dynamic, communication-based understanding of medieval rulership. Secondly, the project design explicitly addressed phases of changes in rulership, which we expected to be particularly suitable moments for analysing continuities and transformations of ruling structures. Thirdly, for the first time, the border regions of Latin Europe were not considered as subordinate appendages to the centre of the continent, but rather as standing on their own. The terms and concepts underlying these aims require a brief introduction before the structure of the volume and its main questions can be discussed.

Rulership – A Controversial Core Concept in Medieval Studies

The starting point of almost every discussion of the phenomenon of “rulership” (*Herrschaft*) is Max Weber’s ideal-typical⁴ definition.⁵ As one of his fundamental sociological concepts, it is closely related to the concept of “power” (*Macht*), which Weber defines as “Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel worauf diese Chance beruht”.⁶ However, while he succinctly characterises power as “soziologisch amorph” (sociologically amorphous), he subsequently devotes more attention to the phenomenon of rulership, which he defines as “Chance, für einen Befehl bestimmten Inhalts bei angebbaren Personen Gehorsam zu finden”.⁷ His approach to rulership thus refers to a transpersonal, institutionalised form of power. While Weber in his later writings deals very intensively with the functioning and above all the legitimacy of rulership, the use of the pair of terms in the early works is not yet fully distinct.⁸ In international research, an exact separation of these two terms is made even more difficult.⁹ Nevertheless,

4 Weber understands an ideal-type to be “ein Gedankengebilde, welches nicht die historische Wirklichkeit (...), ist (...), welches die Bedeutung eines rein idealen Grenzbegriffs hat, an welchem die Wirklichkeit zur Verdeutlichung bestimmter bedeutsamer Bestandteile ihres empirischen Gehalts gemessen, mit dem sie verglichen wird.”, *Weber*, *Objektivität* (1904), 68; cf. regarding this *Olschewski*, *Herrschaftswechsel* (2009), 42–46.

5 On the concept of rulership in Medieval Studies, mostly within the German discourse, see essentially: *Pohl*, *Herrschaft* (1999); *Ubl*, *Herrschaft* (2001), as well as *Vercamer*, *Rulership* (2022), 45 with a summary of existing studies.

6 *Weber*, *Wirtschaft* (2013), 210; cf. *Anter*, *Macht* (2018); cf. in detail on the concept of “power” in the Middle Ages: *Reinle*, *Macht* (2015).

7 *Weber*, *Wirtschaft* (2013), 210.

8 *Anter*, *Macht* (2018), 52 f.

9 *Schneidmüller*, *Macht* (2018), 95; *Pohl*, *Herrschaft* (1999), 443; *Vercamer*, *Rulership* (2022), 33–36 nevertheless attempts a differentiation in English.

Weber's categories offer many points of contact to the field of Medieval Studies. By conceiving rulership as "anerkannte Form von Befehl-Gehorsam-Beziehungen",¹⁰ the focus shifts to the foundations of this recognition or the legitimacy of a prevailing order. In other words, the concept of "Chance" becomes the key to understanding functioning rulership or to explaining its failure.¹¹

With the opening of historical scholarship to impulses from Social Sciences, the focus of research shifted from the rulers to the ruled. Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, for example, were influential in this process, focusing on concrete situations of action with their medium range models of society. Alf Lüdtke's praxeologically¹² inspired paradigm of "Herrschaft als soziale Praxis" (rulership as social practice) was of great importance for German-language research. He introduced the image of the "Kräftefeld [Force Field], in dem Macht durchgesetzt, Herrschaft begründet oder bezweifelt wird." Lüdtke emphasised that rulership is not a simple bipolarity between rulers and ruled.¹³ Instead, he located "rulership" primarily within the interaction, in the process. This trend is taking place in connection with the general opening up of Political History to questions of Cultural Studies during recent years.¹⁴

Another milestone in this context is a still relevant proposal by Bernd Schneidmüller. He deemed Weber's three categories of legitimate rule (legal, traditional, and charismatic) too modern in conception and instead favoured the concept of "konsensuale Herrschaft" (rulership by consensus), which puts a stronger emphasis on the processes of negotiation between rulers and elites of a respective realm.¹⁵ Instead of focusing on the dichotomy of command and obedience or on rigid conceptions of hierarchies, Schneidmüller recommends studying "Verantwortungsgemeinschaften" (Communities of responsibility) in social breadth and depth.¹⁶

Not so much in renunciation of Weber's conception, but rather in a process- and actor-focused adaptation to medieval ruling practices, younger studies have recently

¹⁰ Maurer, *Herrschaft* (2018), 71 f.

¹¹ On Weber's concept of "Chance", see Anter, *Macht* (2018), 48 f.; in a somewhat softer application of the Weberian category, the concept of "Akzeptanz" has also been discussed for Medieval Studies, understood as a "legitim anerkannte Form asymmetrischer Machtbalancen und Ordnungskonfigurationen", Keupp, *Autorität* (2013), 22.

¹² Haasis/Rieske, *Historische Praxeologie* (2015); as well as Jaros, *Iterationen* (2021), 15 f. with basic assumptions and further literature.

¹³ "Den Herrschenden stehen zwar Beherrschte *gegenüber*. (...) Dennoch mögen sich die Herrschenden ihrerseits in Abhängigkeit finden. Und auch die Beherrschten sind mehr als passive Adressaten der Regungen der Herrschenden. Vor allem zeigen sich Ungleichheiten und Widersprüche *zwischen* Herrschenden, ebenso wie *zwischen* Beherrschten.", Lüdtke, *Einleitung* (1991), 13.

¹⁴ On this programmatically: Stollberg-Rilinger, *Einleitung* (2005).

¹⁵ Schneidmüller, *Konsensuale Herrschaft* (2000); engl. version: *id.*, *Consensus* (2013); cf. on its reception: Schneidmüller, *Verklärte Macht* (2018), esp. 109; similarly process- and actor-oriented are the communication situations gathered in Jussen (Ed.), *Macht* (2005) in a cross-spatial and cross-epochal perspective, which does not relate to the concept of "rulership", however.

¹⁶ Schneidmüller, *Verantwortung* (2017).

broken new ground. One example was the Collaborative Research Centre 1167 “Macht und Herrschaft – Vormoderne Konfigurationen in transkultureller Perspektive” located at Bonn University (2016–2021), which sought to liberate the conceptual pair of “Macht” and “Herrschaft” from its European fixation by studying it in the global contexts of the pre-modern period as well as in dialogue between various disciplines.¹⁷

However, such a process-oriented understanding of rulership also has consequences for the conception of the political entity within which rulership is exercised. Rigid conceptions of older German constitutional history¹⁸ are more dissolved – be it with terms like “Ordnungskonfigurationen”,¹⁹ more dynamic understandings of idea of “state” in Medieval Times²⁰ or with an orientation towards the idea of “governance”.²¹

Under these altered auspices, it is becoming apparent that precisely such configurations of rulership, many of which were previously regarded as the exception, are generating increasing interest in research. This concerns, for example, the phenomenon of composite rule (“zusammengesetzte Herrschaften”),²² or unions²³ as special cases. Even such a lofty notion as that of a “dynasty”²⁴ has recently been analysed more process-oriented and thus is losing much of its apparent unambiguity, for dynasties “always bring an element of uncertainty and instability with them”²⁵ In this context, the perspective on rulers as heads of a political entity widens as well. Despite the dominance of male succession to the throne, younger studies have focused more and more on female rulers and appreciated their often-central role within the ruling

17 Cf. the programmatic first volume of the book series: *Becher/Conermann/Dohmen* (Eds.), *Macht* (2018).

18 Cf. *Schneidmüller*, *Verfassungsgeschichte* (2005) as well as *Vercamer*, *Rulership* (2022), 37 f.

19 The term “Ordnungskonfigurationen” – proposed by Bernd Schneidmüller and Stefan Weinfurter already in 2006 – reflect both “Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Wertevorstellungen und politischen und sozialen Ordnungsfiguren.” In sum, it is a matter of “Ordnungsvorstellungen”, “Ordnungsmechanismen” as well as “Ordnungsgestaltungen”, *Schneidmüller/Weinfurter*, *Ordnungskonfigurationen* (2006), 9; cf. its application in *Dücker*, *Reichsversammlungen* (2011), 22 f. and *Burkhardt*, *Mediterranes Kaisertum* (2014), 220.

20 Scholars who apply the term “state” do not use it in the modern sense, but highlight aspects of transpersonality and fixed hierarchies which are more than mere “rules of the game” (*Althoff*, *Spielregeln* [1996]) among elites, that can easily be found in Medieval polities, cf. *Pohl*, *Staat* (2006), *Reynolds*, *States* (2003); as well as: *Becher*, *Macht* (2019) and *Willoweit*, *Verfassungsgeschichte* (1997), 2 f.

21 In Medieval context, “Governance” is understood as “immer wieder neu auszubalancierendes Steuerungs- und Regelungssystem informeller Strukturen” *Widder*, *Heinrich VII.* (2010), 532.

22 *Backera*, *Personal union* (2019), 89.

23 Cf. now *Srodecki/Kersken/Petrauskas*, *Unions* (2023) as well as *Frost*, *History* (2015), 36–46.

24 Critical of the term of dynasty via the example of the Hohenzollern: *Pečar*, *Dynastie* (2011). Cf. also the global overview by *Duindam*, *Dynasties* (2016); another call for questioning and historicising this term has been brought forward by *Afanasjev/Banerjee*, *Invention* (2022); cf. the other contributions to this global Special Issue. As an introduction cf. also *Bartlett*, *Blood Royal* (2020).

25 *Widder/Heinemeyer*, *Gefährdete Dynastien* (2018), 4 (own translation).

structure.²⁶ The results of these research tendencies illustrate that exceptions were more often the rule than it might appear at first glance. Such dynamics of ruling configurations can be observed particularly well in phases of transition, as will be elaborated in the next section.

Change – Approaches to the Diversity of Transitory Phases

Change is possibly one of the fundamental categories of historical research. Processes and transformations are fundamental to our work. In this sense, the mere attempt to grasp change on a conceptual level may be surprising.²⁷ However, in keeping with the orientation of historical research towards Cultural Sciences, it is important to question attributions and perceptions: How much change is needed to speak of a caesura? How much alterity of different time periods is required to distinguish between epochs? How disruptive must change be in order to be understood as a “crisis” or “rupture”? Reinhard Koselleck understood “Krise” as “Ausdruck einer neuen Zeiterfahrung, Faktor und Indikator eines epochalen Umbruchs”, which is particularly applied by historians “um Epochen oder Strukturen damit zu kennzeichnen.” However, the term is also characterized by enormous diversity of meaning and low analytical precision: “‘Krise’ ist sowohl anschlussfähig wie anschlussbedürftig, sinnpräzisierung aber auch sinnsuchend.”²⁸

26 Influential for this trend were among others *Duggan* (Ed.), *Queens* (1997); *Woodacre*, *Queenship* (2013); *Zey* (Ed.), *Frauen* (2015); *Earenfight*, *Queenship* (2013), cf. also the overview by *id.*, *Queenship* (2016). A global survey has been sketched by *Woodacre* (Ed.), *Companion* (2018). Female rulers are now also increasingly being taken into account in popular overviews, e. g. *Duindam*, *Dynasties* (2016), 89–107 and *Bartlett*, *Blood Royal* (2020), 124–154; as a case study, cf. the empirically saturated work of *Roebert*, *Königin* (2020). In addition, two volumes of the Bonn publication series “Macht und Herrschaft” are dedicated to gender dimensions: *Becher/Fischelmanns/Gahbler* (Eds.), *Macht* (2021) and *Stieldorf* (Ed.), *Geschlecht* (2021); cf. also *Signori/Zey* (Eds.), *Female Regancy* (2023); see also the commentary from Christine Reinle in this volume.

27 Cf. for the more recent “Change Studies”, e. g. *Kainulainen/Puurtinen/Chinn*, *Historians* (2019).

28 *Koselleck*, *Krise* (1982), 449 and 617; for the history of the concept and the “Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe”, see *Kollmeier*, *Begriffsgeschichte* (2012). *Koselleck* had already studied the concept pair “Krise” and “Kritik” in his Heidelberg dissertation, in which he deals with the Bourgeois revolution of the late 18th century and thus somewhat elevates the state of condensed crisis-proneness to a characteristic of modernity, see *Mergel*, *Einleitung* (2012), 11–13. This may be justified if one elevates the continuous perception of crises to a characteristic of an epoch, but in the face of concrete situations of upheaval, the concept of crisis is quite applicable to the Middle Ages and the pre-modern period, see *Rüdiger*, *Ende* (2012); *Patzold*, *Bedrohte Ordnungen* (2014), as well as the classic work by *Seibt*, *Begriff* (1984). The perception of a general “crisis of the late Middle Ages” has been critically questioned since that time. For Eastern Europe, on the other hand, scholars even spoke of a simultaneous “heyday”, partly because classic crisis phenomena such as the plague showed very different courses, see *Löwener* (Ed.), *Blüte* (2004).

Thus, change is a historical continuum, but moments of acceleration and densification of changes can be identified, both by contemporaries and retrospectively. Or, as Thomas Mergel puts it: “Erst in der Beschleunigung der Krise erscheint so das Davor und das Danach als ein ruhiges Fahrwasser.”²⁹

In the context of rulership, such transitional phases offer an extremely suitable starting point for analysing configurations,³⁰ as they lead to intensified negotiation processes and thus allow for the identification of both continuities and discontinuities as well as contingencies.³¹ In these transitional phases, regional elites were provided with significant room for manoeuvre,³² which they used to pursue their own as well as different collective and regional interests. This often led to a complete reorganization of the relationship between elites and rulers.

In view of an increasingly dynamic and process-oriented understanding of rulership, it is therefore only consistent that these transitional phases have recently received more attention by scholars. For a long time, the most important conceptual impulses came rather from the field of modern history.³³ In recent years, however, the Collaborative Research Centre 923 “Bedrohte Ordnungen” (2011–2023) has produced significant contributions in a cross-epoch perspective.³⁴ The interdisciplinary

²⁹ Mergel, *Einleitung* (2012), 15.

³⁰ Dartmann/Flüchter/Oesterle, *Eliten* (2015), 45; Willoweit, *Staatsbildung* (1995), 24. More than 30 years ago, Althoff, *Königsherrschaft* (1989), 265 wrote: “Wer Bedingungen beschreiben will, unter denen Königsherrschaft im Mittelalter stand, tut gut daran, Konfliktsituationen zu analysieren. Sowohl die Ursachen für Konflikte als auch die Formen, in denen sie geführt und in denen sie beigelegt wurden, lassen Möglichkeiten und Grenzen königlicher Herrschaft erkennen.”

³¹ On the concept of contingency in Medieval Studies, cf. Becker/Scheller/Schneider (Eds.), *Ungewissheit* (2016).

³² Cf. Auge, *Handlungsspielräume* (2009); *id./Büsing* (Eds.), *Vertrag* (2012).

³³ Cf. programmatically: Schnabel-Schüle/Gestrich (Eds.), *Fremde Herrscher* (2006), who proposed “to establish changes of rulership as a category of comparative European History” (own translation). Schnabel-Schüle, *Herrschaftswechsel* (2006), 20; while the concept was still mainly described in terms of processual developments, Olschewski, *Herrschaftswechsel* (2009), 23 defined it in his dissertation (also written in Trier) as follows: “Herrschaftswechsel meint nicht allein Herrscherwechsel, das heißt die Sukzession eines erbberechtigten Familienmitglieds, sondern zielt auf sozio-politische Umbrüche, die sich im Zuge von Dynastiewechseln beziehungsweise Regimewechseln (Herrschaftsformwechseln) einstellen konnten.”; cf. also: Hoeres/Owzar/Schröder (Eds.), *Herrschaftsverlust* (2013).

³⁴ As a minimum consensus of the interdisciplinary discussion within the SFB, “Ordnung” was understood as “Gefüge von Elementen (...), die in einem bestimmten Verhältnis zueinander stehen und soziale Gruppen oder ganze Gesellschaften strukturieren.” It is threatened “wenn Akteure zu der Überzeugung gelangen, dass Handlungsoptionen unsicher werden, Verhaltenserwartungen und Routinen in Frage stehen und sie sich jetzt oder in naher Zukunft wahrscheinlich nicht mehr aufeinander verlassen können.”, Frie/Meier, *Bedrohte Ordnungen* (2014), 2 and 4, cf. also Frie/Kohl/Meier, *Dynamics* (2018).

research group on the concept of Resilience in Trier, established in 2016, should also be mentioned in this context.³⁵

Under these changed conditions, phenomena such as the “Interregnum”, which had been largely neglected in the state-oriented Medieval Studies of the 19th and early 20th centuries, are now receiving increased attention by scholars. In a volume edited by Norbert Kersken and Stefan Tebruck³⁶ which gathers the proceedings of a conference in Marburg in 2016, Interregna were honoured as “politische Zwischenräume” (“political intermediate spaces”) that offer a “manifold laboratory for the study of contested ruling periods”. In these phases “competing powers as well as conflicts, chances and impulses for longer-term transformations of political structures.” could be observed.³⁷ Many contributions in this volume then deconstruct the seemingly clear category of the “Interregnum”,³⁸ which is why Stefan Tebruck proposes a typology of forms of “prekäre Herrschaft” (“precarious rulership”) in his summary, which includes dynastic changes, changes of rulers, throne vacancy, papal transition, schisms, disputed successions to the throne, and representative regency.³⁹

One of these types, the change of *rulers* (“*Herrscherwechsel*”), has recently been the subject of a study on the Scandinavian kingdoms by Charlotte Rock. She understands this to include “all changes of power at the top of kingdoms, even those that are excluded from similar and often synonymously used terms such as succession, coronation, or deposition.” She distinguishes this term from changes of *rulership* (“*Herrschaftswechsel*”), which, in contrast to changes of rulers, was always followed by a change of the overall political system.⁴⁰

The categories mentioned by Rock have been the focus of recent publications. The volume “Making and breaking the rules” from 2008 approached the phenomenon of royal succession with a selection of European case studies from the 11th until the 16th century.⁴¹ Furthermore, a conference of the Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für Mittelalterliche Geschichte, whose proceedings were published in 2017,⁴² was dedicated to this topic with a focus on the the Early and High Middle Ages. Andreas Büttner described the “Weg zur Krone” i. e. coronations in German-speaking regions in the 14th

35 Cf. Clemens, *Resilienz* (2020); Endreß/id./Rampp (Eds.), *Strategies* (2020); the research group around Markus A. Denzel approaches the concept of Resilience from the perspective of economic history, see for example Denzel/Schötz/Töpel (Eds.), *Industriemetropole* (2022).

36 Kersken/Tebruck (Eds.), *Interregna* (2020).

37 Zotz, *Interregna* (2020), 22 and 24 (own translation).

38 Cf. Jaros, Review of Kersken/Tebruck (Eds.), *Interregna* (2022).

39 Tebruck, *Interregna* (2020), 273.

40 Rock, *Herrscherwechsel* (2016), 3 with note 11 (own translation).

41 Lachaud/Penman (Ed.), *Making and breaking the rules* (2008).

42 Becher (Ed.), *Thronfolge* (2017); cf. also with a focus on Western and Central Europe in the Early and High Middle Ages: Kasten (Ed.), *Herrscher- und Fürstentestamente* (2008) as well as id., *Königs-söhne* (1997); Rodrigues/Santos Silva/Spangler (Eds.), *Dynastic Change* (2019) have recently studied aspects of dynastic legitimacy from the perspective of Gender Studies.

and 15th centuries, in great detail.⁴³ On the phenomenon of deposed kings, we should also mention Ernst Schubert's voluminous studies for the German Middle Ages⁴⁴ as well as Cathleen Sarti's work on Scandinavia and the British Isles.⁴⁵

Among these studies of forms of power transitions, the latest contributions to the topic of "conquests" almost constitute their own highly productive sub-genre. The volume edited by Markus Meumann and Jörg Rogge on the relationship between civil authority and military occupation rule has received great attention since its publication in 2006.⁴⁶ Within this volume, a contribution by Ernst-Dieter Hehl differentiates between occupation and conquest in the High Middle Ages, in which the former means a "temporary and geographically partial transfer of rule" while the latter aims at "lasting acquisition of cohesive political entities, not of parts."⁴⁷ For the Late Middle Ages, Jörg Rogge emphasizes that due to limited military and economic resources, military occupation in the proper sense remained the exception.⁴⁸ This finding leads Hermann Kamp in the introduction of a recently published volume on conquests to the diagnosis that at first glance the Middle Ages were a relatively conquest-free era.⁴⁹ Upon closer examination, however, a whole series of constitutive conquest processes could be identified, which the contributions gathered in his volume examine in a comparative perspective with regard to causes, actors involved, course of events, and legitimization strategies. The volume edited by Christian Hesse, Regula Schmid, and Roland Gerber on the conquest of the Aargau in 1415 in European perspective is also strongly process-oriented. The editors trace three phases of conquest, which are also reflected in the sections of the book: (1) Conquest and Occupation, (2) Rule and Administration, and (3) Legitimation and Aftermath.⁵⁰

Similarly to the previously discussed shift in perspective from "rulers" to the "ruled", Rike Szill, in a volume co-edited with Andreas Bihrer, argues for a stronger focus on the "conquered, their coping concepts and strategies as well as the recognition of claims to authority in interaction with their conquerors."⁵¹

While the vast majority of these contributions focus on specific types of transitions, the goal of the present volume was to compare a broad spectrum of transitive phases. This will be discussed in more detail in the last section of this introduction.

43 Büttner, Weg (2012), cf. also his introductory overview: *id.*, Königsherrschaft (2018); a comparative perspective on the Early and High Middle Ages can be found in Weiler, Paths (2021).

44 Schubert, Königsabsetzung (2005); cf. the appraisal in Schneidmüller, Vor dem Staat (2008), 180–182; see also Rexroth, König (2005).

45 Sarti, Deposing Monarchs (2022).

46 Meumann/Rogge (Eds.), Res publica (2006).

47 Hehl, Eroberung (2006), 49 (own translation).

48 Rogge, Theorie (2006), 127.

49 Kamp, Formen (2022), 10.

50 Hesse, Eroberung (2017), 12.

51 Szill, Eroberte (2022), 11 (own translation).

Before that, however, the geographical scope of investigation will be defined more closely.

Europe – Borderlands and Diversity of an Imagined Unity

Since the 1990s, numerous studies have dealt with the concept of Europe. On the one hand, they analysed its historical relevance, and on the other hand, its classification as a category of historical research.⁵² While these studies cannot be extensively recapitulated here, it should be noted that, starting with the influential writings of Enea Silvio Piccolomini around the middle of the 15th century, the term “Europe” has described both a geographical and a value-related unity, usually centred on Latin Christianity. The history of the 20th century – with active participation from Medieval Studies – led to a narrowing of “Europe” to the heart of the Carolingian Empire in Central and Western Europe.⁵³ As a consequence, wide-angled conceptions of Europe often labelled the eastern and northern parts of the continent as parts of “New Europe” or a “Younger Europe.”⁵⁴ In contrast, the medieval history of the Iberian Peninsula or Scandinavia did not receive similar definitional attention,⁵⁵ which was closely related to the specifics of the imperial and ideological history of Eastern Europe.⁵⁶ In such a narrow narrative, these “peripheral” areas of Europe usually appeared as spaces where the achievements of the centre arrived only sporadically and with a time delay – often through violent

52 Cf. extensively on medieval conceptions of Europe: *Oschema*, Bilder (2013) or the shorter English version: *id.*, Europe (2023); older as well as more recent concepts of a European history are discussed in: *Borgolte*, Europäische Geschichte (2004).

53 *Herbers*, Europa (2007), 29 and *Raffensperger*, Kingdom (2022), 327; on Piccolomini *ibid.*, 21 and *Oschema*, Bilder (2013), 261 f.

54 Cf. *Herbers*, Europa (2007), 31 f.; particularly influential in German Medieval Studies were Peter Moraw’s conceptions of differences in development throughout Europe, cf. *Moraw*, Entwicklungsunterschiede (1995).

55 On the Iberian Peninsula cf. *Herbers*, Europa (2007), 33 f.; *id.*, Peripherie (2006); Northern Europe appeared in the context of a conception of Eastern Europe, albeit with a focus on the Baltic Sea region, cf. *Zernack*, Osteuropa (1977), 51–59; images of the self and of others, though in the context of an allegedly linear Christianisation, were treated by *Foerster*, Vergleich (2009); for a new and more dynamical contextualisation cf.: *Ingesman/Lindkvist*, Norden (2001); *Höhn*, Pluralismus (2019); further important impulses are being given by a research group based in Tromsø, Norway: “Creating the New North”, https://en.uit.no/forskning/forskningsgrupper/gruppe?p_document_id=344565 (accessed: 31.01.2023).

56 From amongst the wealth of literature on the political connotation of the various concepts of space for the Eastern parts of the European continent cf. *Lemberg*, Entstehung (1985); *Jaworski*, Ostmitteleuropa (1992); Bömelburg, Geschichte (2007) *Müller*, Central Europa (2010); specifically for Medieval Studies cf. *Borgolte*, Ostmitteleuropa (2003); for a critical reappraisal of the German “Ostforschung”, the Historikertag 1996 has been of much significance, cf. *Mühle*, Ostforschung (1997).

expansion by conquest or mission, as in Robert Bartlett's popular and influential narrative.⁵⁷ However, since the 1990s, there have been increasing voices advocating for a pluralist understanding of Europe. In this context, the term "Latin Europe" emerged, describing the regions in which the Roman Church, with the Latin language as a *lingua franca*, represented the dominant – albeit not the only – ecclesiastical institution.⁵⁸ The term should be understood as an auxiliary construct which, depending on the questions, "always needs to be reconstructed anew and broken down into further internal spaces".⁵⁹ It is exactly this understanding of Europe that the studies of the DFG Priority Programme 1173 "Integration and Disintegration of Civilisations in the European Middle Ages" (2005–2011) were dedicated to.⁶⁰ Other cultural areas, such as the Byzantine Orthodox or Muslim spheres of influence, cannot be strictly separated from the concept of Latin Europe. On the contrary, the overlaps and interconnections between these seemingly different spaces have to be taken into view in their own right.⁶¹ Such a perspective corresponds to the perception of contemporaries as well. Even in the late Middle Ages, Europe was generally not perceived as a unity but consisted of the diversity of its parts. Enea Silvio Piccolomini saw this as well, albeit he emphasized the Christian unity of Europe in the face of the Ottoman expansion. Moreover, imperial or papal claims to universal rule were by no means confined to the European continent, and the Euro-Mediterranean world had been part of the horizon of experience for many mobile groups and individuals since the Crusades at least. Europe was connected to Asia and Africa in various ways. Therefore, the late medieval history of the continent might be better represented through a combination of internal and external perspectives.⁶²

Different ideas about Europe exist today until today. In academic discourse, the term "Europe" is still associated with different concepts. The present volume stands in the tradition of pluralist concepts of Europe and is intended to contribute towards a better understanding of its border areas. These are not seen as "mere islands of difference on the fringes of Europe"⁶³ nor reduced to their status as *frontier societies*.⁶⁴

57 Bartlett, *Making* (1994); questioned by *Borgolte*, *Europa* (2002), 237–239. This pattern is also followed by *Mitterauer*, *Europa* (2004), who doesn't provide a conceptual problematisation of his concept of "Europe"; cf. *Herbers*, *Europa* (2007), 36.

58 Cf. *Schmidt*, *Kirche* (1999), esp. 26; *Herbers*, *Heilige* (2007), 103 pointedly called this space "Papsteuropa". *Schieffer*, *Wachstumsphasen* (2006), 591 differentiates between a "papstchristlichen" Europe and a "griechisch-orthodoxen Hemisphäre".

59 *Herbers*, *Europa* (2007), 37 (own translation).

60 Cf. for example *Borgolte et al.* (Eds.), *Integration* (2011).

61 This approach was also central to *Borgolte*'s extensive overview of European history: *Borgolte*, *Christen* (2006); cf. also *id.*, *Europa* (2002), 356 f.

62 Cf. *Schneidmüller*, *Grenzerfahrung* (2011), 21–24, 77; *Borgolte*, *Welten* (2022).

63 *Borgolte*, *Ostmitteleuropa* (2003), 19 (own translation).

64 Cf. *Janeczke*, *Frontiers* (2011) with the other contributions to this volume; *Abulafia/Berend* (Eds.), *Frontiers* (2002); for a long time, the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula were considered "classic" examples of *frontier societies*, cf. *Burns*, *Significance* (1989); *id.* *Crusader Kingdom* (1967).

Rather, they should be considered as areas featuring unique qualities, in which – depending on the phenomena or groups of people studied – entanglement with Central Europe forms only one of many frames of reference.⁶⁵ This approach has also been of central importance for the Leipzig DFG-funded project: in the *northern case study*, Stefan Magnussen focused on the Kingdom of Norway during the phase of establishment of the so-called Kalmar Union.⁶⁶ In international discourse, the idea still dominates that Norway was a largely passive junior partner within this union. Magnussen's approach was therefore to explore the scope for action of the Norwegian elites and to locate them within their wider geographical horizon of action. In the *eastern case study*, Sven Jaros examined the transformations and negotiation processes that accompanied the gradual integration of the former Rus'ian principality of Halych-Volhynia into the Kingdom of Poland.⁶⁷ For this purpose, he compiled the first entire corpus of charters of the various rulers and their representatives for the region. Forming the main source base, they were subsequently analysed and interpreted via modern Diplomatic Methods⁶⁸ in connection with concepts from Historical Praxeology. In the *southern case study*, Marie Ulrike Jaros examined one of the most prominent changes of rulership in the Middle Ages. After Charles I of Anjou had conquered the Kingdom of Sicily on the battlefield, it was necessary to establish and consolidate his rule over the new realm.⁶⁹ While venturing on this field, her main focus lay on the "old" and "new" noble elites and officials in various regions of the regnum. In the *western case study*, Eric Böhme studied the subjugation of eastern al-Andalus by James I of Aragon.⁷⁰ In contrast to the often-dominant Christian perspective, he analysed the transformation of the former *taifas* in the east of the Iberian Peninsula explicitly from the perspective of the Muslim communities. From the beginning, the aim of the DFG project was to place the border regions of Latin Europe represented in the four case studies within a larger, pan-European context.⁷¹ This aim was also reflected

65 Cf. in this sense *Selart/Thumser* (Eds.), *Livland* (2017); from this perspective, religious and cultural heterogeneity appears to be rather the rule than the exception throughout European history, for the Euro-Mediterranean region cf. *Jaspert*, *Minderheiten* (2011), 41.

66 Cf. *Grohse/Magnussen*, *Earldom* (2023).

67 Cf. esp. *Jaros*, *Iterationen* (2021) as well as: *id.*, *Against Tartari* (2024).

68 Cf. *Huschner*, *Diplomatik* (2009); *id.*, *Einleitung* (2017), and *Jaros*, *Iterationen* (2021), 13–17 with further literature.

69 Cf. *Jaros*, *Widerstand* (2023); *id.*, *Ruota* (in print).

70 Cf. *Böhme*, *Vom Šarq al-Andalus* (2023). This case study forms part of a comparative analysis with Norman Sicily: Böhme, *Handlungsmacht* (2023), currently prepared for publication. Cf. some first results: *id.*, *Conquered* (in print).

71 With this aim, the project group took part in the German-French Summer University "Perceptions et représentations des frontières et des espaces frontaliers au Moyen Âge et à l'époque moderne (IXe–XVIIIe siècles)", held in May 2019 at the German Historical Institute in Paris, cf. *Albrecht*, *Wahrnehmung* (2019). Two sections organized by members of the project group at the "International Medieval Congress" in Leeds in 2019 were committed to this goal as well.

in the conception of the concluding conference in September 2021, on which this volume is based. The structure and objectives of this volume remain to be discussed in the last part of our introduction.

Structure and Main Questions of the Volume

The overview over the academic discussion on various types of changes of rulership has already revealed that the modern distinction between a regulated succession through a change in *ruler*, and a socio-political break through a change of *rulership*⁷² can hardly be sustained for European premodernity. This period of investigation virtually requires questioning rigid categories and attributions such as “normal” and “regular”. For example, Ingrid Würth emphasizes that the famous interregna in the Holy Roman Empire were actually not periods without rulers, but the respective rulers were recognized as illegitimate from the retrospective.⁷³ Cathleen Sarti also questions the classification of “normal” and “extraordinary” changes in the history of Northern Europe, given the fact that approximately thirty percent of all changes between 1300 and 1700 were accompanied by forced deposition.⁷⁴ On the other hand, many studies on processes of conquest show to what extent the phase immediately following a change of power was still characterized by continuities.⁷⁵ The main aim of the various thematic sections of this volume is to look behind the facade of such seemingly clear-cut categories and to work out the processuality and conflict-laden negotiations in a wide range of changes of rulership. For this purpose, five sections were formed:

1. “Regular” Succession I: Intra-dynastic Succession;
2. “Regular” Succession II: Dynastic Changes and Dynastic Unions;
3. Forced Succession I: Deposition/Deselection/Overthrow (from within);
4. Forced Succession II: Conquest (from outside);
5. “Failed” Succession: Subsequent Loss of Power and/or Further Changes of Rulership.

Based on the case studies, it becomes apparent that a seemingly “regular”⁷⁶ change of rulership – such as from father to son – could be just as critical and in need of negotiation as a change in or the deposition of a dynasty. An extensive recapitulation of the contributions is omitted here, as on the one hand all contributions have an abstract and on the other hand the individual sections as well as the entire volume are sum-

⁷² See above; in this sense also *Olschewski*, *Herrschaftswechsel* (2009), 23.

⁷³ *Würth*, *Königtum* (2020).

⁷⁴ *Sarti*, *Deposition* (2019), 581.

⁷⁵ *Kamp*, *Formen* (2022), 17; *Hesse*, *Eroberung* (2017), 9.

⁷⁶ Here, the meaning of “regular” is being used according to the Duden definition of “regular”, which states that the adjective describes an object or process that conforms to certain rules, orders, specifications or regulations, cf. <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/regulaer> (accessed: 18.09.2023).

marized by commentaries which offer many starting points for further comparative discussions.

Given the diverse range of case studies for changes of rulership, it seemed appropriate to provide the contributors with a basic conceptual framework to facilitate discussion of general phenomena. This framework is essentially based on the current scholarly debates outlined above. Each contribution touches on at least two of the following three topics: The first set of questions dealt with the **role of the dynasty**: What function(s) did queens, heiresses and heirs fulfil during the change of rulership? What role did collateral branches or illegitimate descendants play? Did a kind of “dynastic policy” exist and how did it manifest itself?

The second thematic complex focused on questions of **continuities and discontinuities of power configurations**: How did the structure or position of the ecclesiastical and secular actors of the realm change? To what extent did they influence negotiations on the change of rulership? What specific parameters can be used to identify changes? Were central offices replaced or new ones created, were resources redistributed? Were there political structures that remained unaffected by the change of rulership? What role did configurations of so-called “composite monarchies” in general or political unions play in particular?

The third and final thematic complex dealt with **resources and strategies for legitimization**: How did the various actors justify the change of rulership? Were there competing interests and claimants that were disregarded? How was the change of rulership secured before and after its completion? In terms of a crisis concept that focuses on the perception of contemporaries as well as subsequent generations, the question arises as to how the changes of rulership were perceived at different points in time.

In keeping with the Leipzig DFG project, the contributions depict a pluralistic Europe that extends from the Canary Islands to the Grand Duchies of Lithuania and Moscow, from Norway to Sicily and into the Aegean. Given this breadth, it made sense to use the established term “monarchical rule” coined by Wolfgang Drews and others as a terminological framework⁷⁷ in order to include non-royal rule, such as in Lithuania, al-Andalus or the Eastern Roman-Byzantine Empire.⁷⁸ In order to grasp this broad and transcultural range of polities linguistically adequate, the term “elites”⁷⁹ is fre-

⁷⁷ Flüchter, *Einleitung* (2015), 26.

⁷⁸ For the early Middle Ages, the “Agnatic seniority” that was applied in many parts of Eastern Europe could still be seen as a counter-concept to monarchy which oriented towards a single ruler. However, during the periods covered here, this principle only persisted as a tradition even in the Grand Duchies of Lithuania and Moscow, see Zotz, Typ (2005), as well as the contributions of Sergey Polekhov and Christian Lübke in this volume.

⁷⁹ Dartmann/Flüchter/Oesterle, *Eliten* (2015), 33–45; the concept of “elites” is also popular for Central European contexts, a distinction frequently being made between power or political elites, administrative or functional elites, as well as academic elites, cf. Hesse, *Elitenbildung* (2006), 264 f. Magnussen, Burgen (2019), 38 f. and 205–286 recently used the concept of elites for studying castles. See also Reinhard (Ed.), *Power Elites* (1996).

quently given preference over the term “nobility”.⁸⁰ This makes it possible to more accurately describe the actors involved in negotiation processes, including the members of indigenous Canarian tribes, Lithuanian boyars, or other non-noble actors such as urban bourgeoisie. Although the section titles each take the situation at the top of the politics as their starting point, the focus of most of the contributions is on the elites. Processes shaped by social and geographic mobility played an important role in the context of changes of rulership. From the perspective of the elites, the contributions examine the opportunities for upward mobility, as well as the risks associated with these changes of rulership. Migration processes caused by changes of rulership⁸¹ are also considered, with particular attention given to the sustainability of such processes of relocation.

This volume covers the phenomenon of late medieval changes of rulership by no means exhaustively. We are aware of the gaps in our conception, which we see as starting points for future research: for example, we consciously excluded the level of princely rule⁸² as well as that of ecclesiastical rule⁸³ in order to facilitate comparability of the contributions according to the criteria mentioned above.

Besides comprising the proceedings of the final conference of our DFG project, this volume also documents the transitional phases in the academic biographies of its editors. As the dating line below indicates, almost all of them have moved to different places and positions after the productive years in Leipzig. One of the most enjoyable elements of looking back on such an endeavour is expressing gratitude to those involved, with the hope that the “Veil of Memory” has not already obscured certain events. First and foremost, we would like to thank all the individuals and institutions involved in organizing the conference: the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig provided us with a befitting venue and competent support from Antonia Engelhardt and Veit Valdaig. The success of the conference itself rested on the shoulders of Monika Jäger, Louis Klaas, Andreas Klimm, Lisa Merkel, Deven Peach, Maximilian Schwarzkopf, and Rike Szill. Our research project benefited from the endorsement of our cooperation partners Richard Holt, Nikolas Jaspert, and Christian Lübke. Over the course of the years we received support in various ways from Robert Friedrich, Sebastian Gensicke, Anne Greule, Kerstin Heintz, John Hinderer, Sarah Jacob, Pierre Köckert, Sebastian Kolditz, Felix Meier, Cornelia Neustadt, Anja Radon,

⁸⁰ Cf. *Auge/Spieß*, Adel (2013); *Fouquet*, Nicht-Adel (2001).

⁸¹ Cf. on the phenomenon of social mobility: Ertl (Ed.), *Mobilität* (2020); on migrations during the medieval period see *Borgolte* (Ed.), *Migrationen* (2014).

⁸² Cf. *Nolte*, Fürst (2000); *Rogge*, Herrschaftsweitergabe (2002) as well as *Widder/Heinemeyer*, *Gefährdete Dynastien* (2018), 3 n. 10 with further references. The fall conference of 2021 of the “Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte” was dedicated to the topic “Adliges und fürstliches Erben im hohen Mittelalter (1150–1250). Recht – Praktiken – Aushandlungen”.

⁸³ Cf. *Saczyńska-Vercamer*, *Rulership* (2022) *Weinfurter* (Ed.), *Herrschaft* (2012); *Schimmelpfennig*, *Kirchenstaat* (2006).

Martin Riebel, Sebastian Roebert, Rebecca Schönfeld, and Alexander Sembdner. While editing this volume, Maximilian Schwarzkopf and Caroline Böhme committed themselves to the manuscript far beyond the tasks agreed upon. The conference and the publication of its proceedings would not have been possible without the support of the DFG and the association “Freunde und Förderer der Universität Leipzig e.V.” through friendly intercession of Manfred Rudersdorf. We would also like to thank Michael Borgolte, Barbara Schlieben, and Benjamin Scheller for including this volume in the series “Europa im Mittelalter”. Furthermore, we would like to thank all the archives and libraries, that are listed in the List of Illustrations for providing us with the necessary files and the permissions of reproducing the respective illustrations. Finally, we are grateful to Elisabeth Kempf, Eva Locher, Laura Burlon, and Anne Stroka from De Gruyter for their always obliging assistance in preparing the manuscript for publication.

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