AN ASPECT OF THE SYMBOLISM OF THE POLITICAL POWER DURING THE MIDDLE AGES: THE ANOINTMENT

Raluca Minea[∗]

Abstract: The anointment is a ritual that offers a sacred dimension to the coronation. The specialists who have studied the two rituals of power investment, anointing and coronation, could not establish the pre-eminence of one over the other. It can be assumed, however, based on domestic documents and examples from history, that "the coronation represents a first stage, a gesture of which value was, in time, overshadowed by anointment"[1].

The moment in which the anointing appears can be linked to the context of a "crisis of legitimacy" when the Church agrees to act as an intercessor between the sovereign and divinity[2]. In the middle of the 9th century, coronation became, along with chrismation, a permanent component of the ecclesiastical procedures of consecration of a new sovereign.

Keywords: anointment, coronation, power, sovereign

The idea that a king becomes legitimate only if he is subjected to the ritual of anointing and coronation, can be a starting point for a broader research regarding the symbolism of the political power during the Middle Ages. France and the Romanian countries, representing two reference areas of Europe, respectively the West and the East, offer different evolutions and specific realities that can highlight similarities in their historical progress.

Even though geographically far-off, the West and the East are cultural spaces based on countless similarities stemming from both the Roman political legacy and the spiritual tradition of the Bible.

In the 6th century, Justinian establishes the relations between the Church and the Empire, making them a *symphony*, because together they led humanity on the paths of God, being "as two different bodies with complementary functions", he refers to the definitions adopted at the

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[∗] Assistant Professor, PhD, University of Arts "G.Enescu", Faculty of Visual Arts, Iasi, E-mail address: ralucaid@yahoo.com
[1] A. Pippidi, *Tradiţia politică bizantină în ţările române în sec. XVI-XVIII*, Ed. Corint, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 50.; Corina Nicolescu, *Le couronnement, „încoronaţia". Contribution à l'histoire du cérémonial roumain,* RESEE, XIV, 4, 1976, P. 647-663.
[2] Radu G. Păun, *Les fondements liturgiques du „constitutionnalisme" roumain entre le Seconde et la Troisième Rome (XVIe – XVIIIe siècles). Premières résultats*, în RRH, XXXVII, 1998, nr. 3–4, p. 188.

Chalcedon Council on the divine-human unity, thus implying – at a religious level- the collective pastoral care of the Church, and at temporal level – the personification of the people in the unique person of the prince[3].

Many historians have tried to establish what ritual has a greater importance: the anointing or the coronation. It is significant that the chroniclers Commynes[4] and Villehardouin[5] writing about Louis VII, the Latin king of Jerusalem, and Louis IX (The Holy) refer to coronation, not *consecration*[6], but also at the gesture that the Pope makes sometimes, he puts the crown on his own head also and he allows the bishops to perform the anointing.

The noun "sacred" (consecration) appears in France in the second half of the 12th century, but the verb "sacrer" (to consecrate) is identified in the vocabulary earlier, just as with "to anoint" that precedes the term "anointment" with more than half a century. Regarding the meanings of the term "sacred", the word is specifically French. For other nations of Europe (English, French) – the term "coronation" (or "anointment", respectively "die Kronung")[7].

The anointment tradition may have its origins in the Old Testament. In the text of book of Samuel I, Yahweh tells him that he would send a young man who he has to "anoint him leader of My people"[8]. It is important to find out the period during which the imperial anointing appeared in Byzantium in order to determine whether the first sovereigns of the Western Europe took the model from the Byzantines, an issue that has preoccupied Marc Bloch in his studies regarding coronation. The author states that the first document that reports this fact is clearly a description of the imperial anointment and coronation of Baldwin of Flanders, in 1204, held according to the Latin rite[9].

The royal anointment was marked by duality. On the one hand, the sovereign obtained the divine hallmark through anointing, and on the other hand, he seemed to receive the authority from the hands of priests. Inspired thinkers by this theocratic idea emphasized one aspect or another of this duality in their writings. Hincmar in the 9th century, Archbishop of Reims,

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[3] O. Clément, „L'Eglise orthodoxe", în J. Delumeau, *Le fait religieux*, Paris, Fayard, 1993, p. 172.

[4] Philippus Cominaeus, (1447 – 1511) was a writer and diplomat in the courts of Burgundy and France.

[5] Geoffrey of Villehardouin (in French: Geoffroi de Villehardouin) (1160–1212) was a knight and historian who participated in and chronicled the Fourth Crusade, apud Beryl Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages.* Thames and Hudson, 1974, p. 131.

[6] J.P. Roux, *Regele. Mituri şi simoluri,* Ed. Meridiane, Bucureşti, 1998, p. 288.

[7] Richard A. Jackson, Vivat Rex. Histoire des sacres et couronnements en France, Association des Publications près les Universités de Strasbourg, Editions Ophrys, Paris, 1984, p. 9.

[8] It's about Saul, the first king of the Jews.

[9] M. Bloch, *Regii taumaturgi. Studiu despre caracterul supranatural atribuit puterii regale, în special în Franţa şi în Anglia*, trad. De Val Panaitescu, Iaşi, 1997, 326-327.

friend and counsellor of Charles the Bald[10], Ratherius in the 10th century, Hugues de Saint-Victor and John of Salisbury in the late 12th century, Innocent III at the beginning of the 13th century, Egidio Colonna (Egidio Romano) in the 12th-14th centuries, who transmitted the argument of chrismation: "the one who receives the anointing is inferior to the one who gave it" or, according to the terms borrowed from Saint Paul, from his Epistle to the Hebrew: "And without all contradiction, that which is less is blessed by the better."[11]

The apologists of royalty invoked anointing and its virtues when they had to provide a piece of explanation to the people regarding their theory on the inviolable character of the princes. But contemporary historians do not have a clear interpretation of the origin of supernatural character that made the sovereigns thaumaturges in the Medieval West. Healing grace may be provided with the enthronement or together with anointing or be inherited by the virtue of succession order; the issue has not yet been clarified. The healing grace could have been received with the enthronement or together with anointing or it could have been inherited on the virtue of the succession order; the issue has not yet been clarified. Aeneas Piccolomini, an erudite of the 15th century[12] wrote about how the sovereign was perceived by the people: "The French deny that any man who was anointed with this oil can be a rue king, that is to say, the heavenly oil kept at Reims"[13]. The gestures and the symbols staged on this occasion gave the king a sacred dimension and that is why it is legitimate.

The royal anointment first came in the Western European countries: Spain, the Frankish kingdom, England, Celtic countries[14]. For Navarre and Scotland, the anointment was authorized by the Papal bull in 1257 and 1329 respectively.

Radu G. Păun observed that the anointment occurs in the moment of existence of a certain "crisis of legitimacy" and when the Church agrees to act as intercessor between sovereign and divinity[15]. The anointing as a gesture that completes the crowning, giving it a sacred dimension, has emerged in the context of the usurpation of the Merovingian throne by Pepin the Short in 750, from the need to legitimize the change of power by appealing to the authority of the Church rooted in the transcendent. Pepin

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[10] Norman F. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 1993, p. 186.
[11] The text *Ep. către Evrei,* VII, 7 is cited by Hugues de S. Victor and John of Salisbury, apud M. Bloch, *op. cit.,* p. 152.
[12] He is known as a historian. The work *Cosmography* collects information about the Romanian countries from Dominican and Franciscan monks.
[13] M. Bloch, *op. cit.,* p. 153.
[14] *Ibidem*, p. 318.
[15] Radu G. Păun, *Les fondements liturgiques du „constitutionnalisme" roumain entre le Seconde et la Troisième Rome (XVIe – XVIIIe siècles). Premières résultats*, în RRH, XXXVII, 1998, nr. 3–4, p. 188.

sent an embassy in 750 to the pope to obtain his consent to dethrone the Merovingians[16].

The first sovereign anointed was Louis the Pious, in 816 at Reims, when he received from Pope Stephen IV, in the same solemnity, both the consecration with holy oil and the crown. Subsequently, the anointing ritual seems to have been a part of the imperial coronation ceremony.

The first English prince about whom it can be stated that he had been anointed is Egbert, son of the king of Mercie, Offa, associated to the throne even during his father's life; the ceremony was held at the Council of Chelsea in 787, in the presence of pontifical emissaries[17]. The known texts do not use the word "anointment". As the chronicles state, Egbert was the "consecrated" king. The same term usually appointed the ordination of the bishop which in the Anglo-Saxon ritual involved the using of holy oil.

In the middle of the 9th century, crowning became, together with chrismation, a permanent component of the ecclesiastical procedures of consecration of a new king. From this period dates the oldest ordo[18], that of Charles the Bald[19], who on June 6, 848 received it from the Archbishop of Sens, Ganelon, the anointment, "the diadem" and the sceptre. Carol has been a king for a long time without being anointed; he received the royal crown in 838, from his father, Louis the Pious, without having held any ecclesiastical ceremony but he considered that anointment and the handing of the crown and sceptre by the hands of a priest, during a liturgy, were indispensable to his prestige, his descendants following his example[20].

Pedro III of Aragon[21] (1276-1285) was anointed by the Bishop of Ostia, but crowned by the pontiff sovereign. In the case of Stephen I of Hungary, the Pope gave him the title of king, sending him the crown and the anointing became the responsibility of local authorities (997)[22]. There are exceptions, Henry I of Germany, for example, who refused the "blessing of the pontiffs"[23].

The ritual of the royal anointing was perpetuated in Spain and England. Similarly, in terms of the states that resulted from the Carolingian empire. Anointing – with coronation – seems to have also been practiced in Italy, in Lorraine and even in the small kingdoms of Provence and Burgundy.

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[16] M. Carp, *Ritual și legitimitate monarhică în evul mediu*, Xenopoliana, X, 2002, „Instituții și practici sociale" *http://institutulxenopol.tripod.com/xenopoliana/pagini/8.htm.*

[17] M. Bloch, *op. cit*, p. 321.

[18] These orders were liturgical works, containing prayers and ceremonial gestures which accompanied the royal consecration.

[19] Marielle Hageman, *Between the Imperial and the Sacred: The gesture of Coronation in Carolingian and Ottonian Images*, in Medieval Communication, Utrecht, 2001, p. 149.

[20] M. Bloch, *op. cit*, p. 325.

[21] Monarch of Aragon, crowned in Zaragoza.

[22] M. Bloch, *op. cit*, p. 151.

[23] *Ibidem.*

But in Germany, Otto I was anointed and crowned with the accession to the throne in 936, and all his successors followed his example[24].

The practice of anointing was also adopted by the Polish royalty, whose recognition by Otto III, the secular leader of the Western Christianity, in the year 1000, preceded the coronation of Boleslav I the Archbishop of Gniezno (centre of the Metropolitan church in Poland)[25].

In France, there is a certain similarity between Jesus and the King, that was the subject of eulogy from the time of early Carolingian "because he is the anointed king, *rex Christus"*[26]. When the sovereign arrived at Reims, Dean surrendered, recalling the Biblical texts that justify his veneration by the people[27], explaining that he is welcomed with a song that glorifies Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*, because the anointing from the consecration ceremony is of divine origin. By the fact that he possesses the sacredness conferred by the religious act of anointing and coronation, an act celebrated and legitimized by the Church, seen as the "House of God" (Tm. 3, 15) and the "Body of Christ" Ef. (1: 22-23; 4)[28] the person of the king accedes to unicity, but God is One, his celestial perfection being found only in Jesus, man and God in the same time[29].

Anointing and coronation in Byzantium

In Eastern Europe, unlike the West, there was a closer fusion between the imperial and ecclesiastical authority. The Byzantine emperors respected the authority of the patriarch of Constantinople, who assumed certain sacral functions. The ritual of coronation in the Byzantine monarchy proves the strong tendency of fusion between secular and sacral in terms of authority. All texts which relate to the Byzantine legislation prove that the Byzantine emperors understood the legitimization of their authority also through divine will. Thus, the kingship institution and the ecclesiastical one were in a permanent relationship.

In Byzantium, the image of the Basileus inherits both the characteristics of the Roman "imperial" royalty and the customary practices of the oriental ceremony. In ancient Rome, the king's person is identified with the historical beginnings of the citadel. He possesses an authority of a magical-religious essence, enjoying the favours of the deity, mediating the relations between the Senate and the people[30].

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[24] *Ibidem,* p. 326.
[25] A. Ppippidi, *op. cit.,* p. 51.
[26] J.P. Roux, *op. cit*., p. 290.
[27] *Ibidem.*
[28] Dan Alexandru Popescu, *Suveranul divin şi simbolistica puterii politice în evul mediu*, rev. Transilvania, I/2008, p. 21.
[29] Idem, *Istoria Bizanţului. Studii sinteze de istorie bizantină,* Ed. Alma Mater, Sibiu, 2003, p. 20.
[30] D. A. Popescu, *Suveranul divin ...op.cit.*, p. 75.

The imperial cult introduced in Rome by Octavian Augustus, was imported from Byzantium by Constantine, surviving until the fall of Constantinople, persisting in the Orthodox countries in the Balkans up to the eve of the modern era.

The Imperator, venerated as August, is transformed into a monarch in a permanent relationship with God. The king obtains the holiness of the basilical space with a solemn worship service for the veneration of the sovereign by the people and kneeling in front of the proskynesis, this attitude was inherited after the Roman conquest of the Persian ritual[31].

The divine nature of the Basileus follows to be defined exclusively based on Christian valences. Christianity recovers itself, being based on its own traditions[32], symbols and formulas. The image of the leader finds a new model, the exceptional figure of Jesus Christ (the Basileus aimed to be a *mimethes Christou*), man-God, and ideal *Rex et Sacerdos*. In the Byzantine society, the result of the fusion of the classical Greco-Roman traditions, Christian and Oriental elements and the right to govern becomes legitimate by the virtue of deification of the leader; the king's portrait represents a real cult object for his vassals[33].

In ancient Rome, the coronation of the king was regarded as an apotheosis (deification). The concept of wise king who belongs to a distinct spiritual category, located between gods and men, has appeared since the Greek antiquity, but it is also present in the Jewish Old Testament. For the Christian world, the monarchy begins with Constantine and the ideas drawn from Scripture and the examples of the rulers of the people of God, such as Moses, Saul, David and Solomon lay at the basis of the theorization of the imperial cult.

In Byzantium, the imperial ceremony was very closely related to the Old Testament's symbols, figures and topics such as: providential selection, deliverance of the people and their leadership towards the "promise land", the victory over enemies. The votive theme also acquires biblical connotations: the emperor is, in this regard, a new David or a new king-mag[34]. These themes appear very early in the Byzantine imperial iconographic programs, at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and especially during Justinian, San Vitale in Ravenna.

The anointing of the Byzantine emperors was attested at the beginning of the 14th century, the rite persists until the end of the Empire[35]. Numerous texts, much earlier than the 14th century, use the terms

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[31] *Ibidem,* p. 76.

[32] Philippe Walter, *Mitologie creştină. Sărbători, ritualuri şi mituri din Evul Mediu*, trad. Rodica Dumitrescu şi Raluca Tulbure, Ed. Artemis, 2005.

[33] Alain Ducellier, *Bizantinii. Istorie şi cultură*, Ed. Teora, Bucureşti, 1997, p. 74-89.

[34] Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credinţelor şi ideilor religioase*, *III, De la Mahomed la epoca Reformelor*, translated by Cezar Baltag, Bucureşti, 1991, p. 91-92.

[35] M. Bloch, *op. cit.,* p. 327.

"anointment" and "to anoint" for the investiture of a king, but it is unknown if the meaning is literal or pure metaphorical. The first solution – in the literal sense - was adopted by W. Sickel, referring to a letter from the Patriarch Fotie to Emperor Basil I, the prelate reminds the king of his coronation in these terms: "anointing and laying of the monarchic hands". Basil I is crowned in 867, the date at which Pepin, the first of the Frankish kings, had already been anointed[36], so it cannot be said that the Western monarchies have taken Oriental habits.

To Sickel oppose several scholars who consider the expressions used in his letter to Fotie to be simple metaphors. One of them is Brightman[37], who considered the anointing was metaphorical. The famous book "About Ceremonies" about the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (945-59) contains a detailed description of the coronation, in which the anointment does not appear. The term appears in the writings of Emperor John VI Cantacuzenus, *Four history books*, in which the author, describing the coronation of Andronikos III Palaiologos, that took place in 1325, mentions the ritual of anointing[38].

Coronation at the Romanian people

In the Romanian countries, there was no proper dynastic doctrine, the succession to the throne was hereditary in line of male descent and generally in the order of the first born. A. Pippidi, in his work, "The Political Byzantine Tradition" wrote that «"Porfirogeneza" and even the legitimacy of birth did not play any role. Therefore, the right to rule, ensured in principle by the "princely offspring", in fact by choice, was not available but thankfully, his confirmation came from the church through the double act of coronation and anointing"[39]». In the West, in France, for instance, birth and anointing did not legitimize the King[40].

The coronation ceremony may have existed since the founding of the Romanian medieval states, since at that time there was already a tradition in Europe regarding the celebration of this event. There is no evidence, however, of the enthronement of Basarab I Muntenia (Ungrovlahia) and of Bogdan I in Moldavia or if that these rulers received the crown from Constantinople after the custom of international legitimization of a new autonomous state, practiced in Eastern Europe. Moreover, there are no testimonies regarding the enthronement ceremony in the first two centuries of

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[36] In 751.
[37] F. E. Brightman, „Byzantine imperial coronations" în *Journal of Theological Studies*, II (1901), p. 383.
[38] M. Bloch, *op. cit.,* p. 327.
[39] A. Pippidi, *Tradiţia politică bizantină în ţările române în sec. XVI-XVIII*, Ed. Corint, Bucureşti, 2001, p.50-53.
[40] D. Pissot, *Le cérémonial de la Cour de France, ou Description historique de ses grandes dignités, charges et titres d'honneur,* Paris, 1816, p. 2, *apud* A. Pippidi.

existence of the Romanian states. It is possible that Alexander the Good received the crown from the Emperor John VIII Palaeologus, but this was not an argument for the legitimization of his throne in Moldavia[41].

The first anointed Moldavian prince was probably Stephen the Great[42]. His accession to the throne after a long series of bloody usurpations, the prince of Moldavia begins his action to strengthen the central authority through a gesture that signifies the legitimization of power according to the imperial ritual, "meant to assure victory over the other contenders and also to raise the throne at the height of the Orthodox kings"[43].

"In the year 6965 (1457), April 12, Great Tuesday, came Stephen voivode, son of Bogdan voivode, against Aron voivode, the place called Hreasca, at Doljeşti, and conquered Stephen voivode, by the Grace of God, and took the sceptre of Moldova"[44]. The taking of the sceptre was only one phase in the process of legitimation of power. "The king does not truly become a crowned head but only after his investiture"[45]. Stephen became a full sovereign after his anointing by the Metropolitan Bishop of Moldavia. "He was anointed to reign by the Metropolitan Teoctist", writes Grigore Ureche[46]. The Metropolitan Teoctist, from whose hands he received the consecration, was able to legitimize him, just as in the case of the Byzantine patriarchs whose choice was made by the country's assembly – a close equivalent of the Senate[47].

The first known citation of the coronation prayer in Moldova appears in the *Chronicle* of Axinte Uricariul[48], being also linked to the description of the coronation of Stephen the Great "God our God, king of kings, and Lord of the men, who by Samuil the prophet by who you have chosen David your servant, and you anoint him king over the people of Israel. You hear our prayer yourself [...]. Make him worthy to anoint with the oil of joy. Dress him with power from above. Put on his head a crown with pricey jewel. [...] Give in his right hand the sceptre of salvation. Strengthen him on the seat of justice".

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[41] Elisabeta Negrău, *Cultul suveranului sud-est european şi cazul Ţării Româneşti,* Ed. Lumen, Iaşi, 2011, p. 115.
[42] *Cronicile slavo-române*, p. 14, 56, 70.
[43] A. Pippidi, *op. cit*., p. 51.
[44] *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV–XVI publicate de Ion Bogdan*, edition revised and supplemented by P. P. Panaitescu, Bucureşti, 1959, p. 15 (Letopiseţul anonim); (romanian translation of the chronicles of Putna).
[45] Jean-Paul Roux, *Regele. Mituri şi simboluri*, traducere şi note de Andrei Niculescu, Bucureşti, 1998, p. 174.
[46] Grigore Ureche, *Letopiseţul Ţării Moldovei,* 1457 (ed. P.P. Panaitescu, Bucureşti, 1955, p. 83).
[47] A. Pippidi, *op. cit*., p. 52.
[48] *Apud* Paul Mihail, I. Caproşu, „Despre ceremonialul domnesc", în AIIA „A.D. Xenopol" Iaşi, tom VIII (1971) p. 398.

Ștefăniță Vodă and Petru Rareș were also anointed at the time of the coronation in 1517 respectively in 1527. As seen in the chronicle of Macarie, Ștefăniță Vodă benefited from this ritual, "He was then of nine years old and he received the blessing of anointing from the hand of Theoctist, Reverend Metropolitan Kir, in the glorious citadel of Suceava" [49] . Metropolitan Theoctist II conferred, by the act of anointing, legitimacy and sacred protection to the nine year old child, ascended to the throne – a unique case in the history of Moldavia until then. It seems that the same Metropolitan has anointed Petru Rares[50].

The words of bishop Macarie are relevant regarding the personality of the Metropolitan: "he fell asleep into Lord, at old age, the one who anointed the princes and the teacher of Moldavia, Metropolitan kir Theoctist"[51].

The last anointing coincides with the visit of Moldavia of the patriarchs Ieremia II of Constantinopole and Ioachim V of Antiohia in the period in which Despot vodă was crowned "with a gold crown at Suceava, on Saint Gheorghe's day"[52]. In the chronicle of the Romanian from Camenița, there is information about a crowning of Despot on 15 august 1562, when he received the title of king!"[53]

In the Romanian country, for the act of anointing there are no firm proofs until the 16th century when the feudal political ideology was systematized, although the quality of "God's anointed" is stated even in the documents of Mihai I and Vlad Dracul, but they only have a metaphorical value with the meaning *chosen*[54].

According to Nicolae Iorga, this ceremonial attested in the time of Petru Cercel, of which there are reports according to which he was the first Wallachia prince ever anointed, date back to 1535, from the assigning of Radu Paisie as the Prince of the Romanian countries, who had received his investiture in a ceremony in the Ottoman Empire[55].

The Byzantine ritual is respected as far as the kneeling of the prince in front of the altar is concerned, in front of "the imperial gates", the prayers need to be "read" at the coronation of the Orthodox kings" or the role of the great Chamberlain (*cubicularius*)[56].

By the act of receiving the crown from the hands of a bishop (usually patriarch or metropolitan), the sovereign was entitled to believe that he had

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[49] *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV–XVI publicate de Ion Bogdan*, edition revised and supplemented by P. P. Panaitescu, București, 1959, p. 92.
[50] Liviu Pilat, *op. cit*, p. 148.
[51] *Cronicile slavo-române*, p. 95.
[52] *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. 2, p. XIV.
[53] H. Siruni, *Mărturii armenești despre România, extrase din cronica armenilor din Camenița*, I, s. III, t. XVI, 1936, p. 275.
[54] *Ibidem.*
[55] N. Iorga, *Bizanț după Bizanț*, p. 124, 153.
[56] D. Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei*, p. 153-157.

received the crown from God Himself. "May God crown you with the crown of glory and honour and May He receive you in the eternal kingdom," said the French archbishop, and the officiate continues: ""May you live in justice, mercy and piety to receive the crown from the eternal Our Lord Jesus Christ in the synod of the saints[57].

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[57] J.P. Roux, *Regele.Mituri şi simboluri*, traducere de Andrei Niculescu, Meridiane, Bucureşti, 1998, p. 289.

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