

Summary

The exercise of power in the Middle Ages from the perspective of the French “chansons de geste” (rebellious barons cycle) and the later medieval prose

This thesis has been devoted to the analysis of the legal position of the monarch and ways of executing power across various levels of the feudal power ladder in medieval France, as portrayed in old-French works (“chansons de geste”) and the later medieval prose (“mises en prose”).

The thesis analyses six works belonging to the so called ‘cycle of rebellious barons’ : *Renaut de Montauban*, *la Chevalerie d’Ogier de Danemarche*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Doon de Mayence*, *Girart de Roussillon* and *Gormont et Isembart*, as well as – wherever possible – their narratives in prose. These texts were selected, as they illustrate the individual aspects of exercising power, presenting both the theoretical considerations and the practical problems encountered at that time.

The analysed works of literature have been juxtaposed against the medieval legal norms, philosophical texts and the evidence of practices pertaining to the problem of the execution of power in order to show the degree with which literature reflects the reality of the times that the works were created in and the way in which the authors perceive the problems of exercising power.

The thesis has been divided into two parts. The first part is dedicated to the instruments of power, i.e. those elements that in the middle ages made it easier to exercise control over other subjects.

The first chapter of the first part illustrates the influence of the “consilium” (the duty to give advice to the lords) and “auxilium” (the duty, which rested with each vassal, to provide military help), the two main elements of all feudal bonds, on the ability of the lords to exercise power. We show the historical evolution of the two concepts and then analyse their literary depictions.

The second chapter considers the personal (based on personal relationships) and the material (based on the granting of the fief by the lord) elements of the feudal bonds. We discover which of the elements is more important for the authors of the works and whether the

authors think that it is possible to exercise power without any financial remuneration of their subjects. We also analyse the ways in which fiefdom has been depicted. The last part of this chapter illustrates the acquisition of fiefdom by way of legal activities and its influence over the breadth of the power of the lords.

The third chapter of this part describes how the ability to administer justice guaranteed, according to the authors, the effectiveness of the exercise of power and to what extent a ruler was obliged to judge issues that touched their subjects. We also discuss the influence of the medieval ideal of the king-judge on the depictions of the king's fairness, as painted in literature. A part of the analysis was devoted to the issue of participation of the subjects in the administration of justice via the peer-courts.

The next chapter concentrates on the meaning of marriage in the exercise of control. This seems to be very important, as in the Middle Ages, marriages not only led to the increase of wealth but were also the means of building valuable alliances, able to resist the power of the lords. The old-French epic poems show this aspect, illustrating the aspirations of families to strengthen their position via beneficial marriage ties and the attempts of the rulers to limit these aspirations. One of the proofs of this is the ability to exert influence over the second marriage of the wife of a deceased vassal – a legal institution frequently portrayed in the analysed texts.

The last chapter of the first part is devoted to the rituals which, in a medieval society which was based to a large degree around symbols and gestures, became an important instrument in the exercise of power. We show the importance of the symbol of the separation from the ruler. We note that these types of depictions enabled the authors to implicitly illustrate the hierarchical relations between the protagonists. In addition, the works placed a heavy weight on shared feasts, the participation in which was a symbol of the good will of the participants. Honourable services, one of the traditional obligations of the vassals, were also very important and conveyed their superiority over their subjects. Another topic of our analysis is the ritualisation of the legal reality of the times and the importance of symbolic punishment in the evolution of the subject-ruler relationship.

The second part of this thesis concentrates on the limitations of power, as shown in the analysed literary works. At the start, we discuss time limitations, among others the ability to set the start and end of the power relationship. This chapter dissects the ceremonial feudal homage presented in the old-French epic works and the related sources. We also pay attention to the ritual of the awarding of knighthood. We mention the ways in which a feudal bond, in

theory life-long, could be broken and which the protagonists in the works do try to sever, mainly as a result of their conflicts with the lords.

The next chapter is devoted to the territorial boundaries of power. Our study of the texts allows us to put together a territory that, in the minds of the mediaeval authors, was regarded as French. We show how the authors of the works perceived the territory, which in theory should have been under the rule of the king, and how they depicted the reach of the monarchy's power, where a king needed to aim to increase his influence in order to rebuild the empire of the Carolingian epoch. We also discuss the internal boundaries of the king's power, to a large extent limited in the analysed works by the growing independence of nobility.

The next chapter concentrates on the conflict between the obligations arising from the feudal relationship and those arising from the family. The discussed works show the importance that was, in the medieval times, given to family solidarity and illustrate the dilemmas faced by the actors arising from having to choose between servitude to their rulers and the loyalty to their family. The work below lists the sources of these issues and the proposed ways of solving them. We also show how the medieval system of revenge limited the exercise of justice by the feudal rulers.

The last chapter of this part of the thesis emphasises the conflicts between the various types of feudal obligations and their influence over the limitation of power. At the centre of our analysis is the issue of the multitude of feudal obligations and the subsequent inability to discharge these obligations towards a vassal. The analysed works of literature prove that in the medieval times, a number of solutions to these problems were created, for example by working out the hierarchy of the feudal obligations. We also mention the issue of possible conflicts between feudal obligations to the rulers and those to the vassals.

The thesis shows that the exercise of power depicted in the old-French epics and the related works does not diverge from the medieval reality and that the challenges faced by the rulers were real problems, faced by anyone who wanted to influence the life of other