CHAPTER ONE

Medieval Germany: sources and historiography

To write a history of Germany from the Carolingian period to the mid-eleventh century is of course to beg the question of whether there was such a thing at the time. This book will try, among other things, to suggest some answers, but will not start by offering any. The difficulty should in any case not be exaggerated, any more than one would criticise the title of Sir Frank Stenton’s *Anglo-Saxon England* by saying that England only existed for – at most – only the last 150 years of the period covered. There is no theoretical difficulty in dealing with the origins and history of the east Frankish kingdom and of its successor, the Ottonian and Salian empire; whether these entities can properly be called Germany will emerge from the discussion. One should not in any case overemphasize the nation, either as a unit of historical being or as a unit of historical consciousness. The inhabitants of “Germany” in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries might on occasions see themselves as *Franci orientales* or Germans (i.e. not Italians or western Franks), but they might also in other contexts see themselves as Saxons (or members of some other ethnic grouping) or as Christians (i.e. not pagan Hungarians or Vikings), and there were other forms of group consciousness, some of which had far deeper roots in objective reality: free (i.e. not a slave), noble (i.e. not a nobody), clerical (i.e. not a layman). The reason why we generally write about and study the past on more or less national lines is not that the surviving remains of the past force themselves on our attention in this way, but rather that the political and social organization of scholarship has led them to be interpreted in this way. There is medieval German history because there have been and are modern German historians. An account of the sources for the history of the lands around the
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Rhine, the Elbe and the Danube will help to show what kinds of history can and cannot be written. But it cannot sensibly be separated from an account of the historians who have used these sources, which will show what kind of history has been written. For it is no longer true, if it ever was, that the historian reaches an understanding of the past primarily through a reading of the sources, undisturbed by knowledge of the secondary literature. After more than a hundred and fifty years of professional, academic history-writing there can be few areas of the past where such an attitude of intellectual virginity is sensible or even possible, and certainly the early middle ages are not among them. Here there is little which has not been chewed over thoroughly by several generations of historians, and to discuss the sources alone without looking at what has been made of them is not very helpful. We may, however, begin with the sources themselves.

Germany, or east Francia, had its own historians in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, men who recorded, sometimes in brief notes, sometimes in fuller and more continuous narrative, the doings of kings, nobles and bishops. Characteristic for the eighth and ninth centuries was the organization of such writings as annals, that is, recording the events of each year in a separate entry of anything from a shorthand sentence to several paragraphs in length. The history of the Frankish empire up to 830 was recorded in the so-called Royal Frankish Annals, a text which has evident connections with the Carolingian court but cannot be said to have been written at royal orders. The so-called Annals of Fulda had a similar function and status for the east Frankish kingdom up to 888. These were in reality written not in Fulda but by a Mainz cleric, who drew on earlier works, some now lost, for his account up to the end of the 860s, and then wrote contemporaneously with events from 869 to 887. From 882 to 901 a separate continuation was being written in Bavaria, perhaps in Regensburg. A Lotharingian monk, Regino of Prüm, wrote a disjointed world chronicle at the end of the ninth century, which is a valuable account of east Frankish affairs from about 880 until 908. After that there is a gap; substantial works of history were not produced again in eastern Francia until the 960s, when the wealth and fame of Otto I inspired a number of authors. Widukind, a monk of Corvey related to the Saxon royal house, wrote a history of the Saxons up to his own time; an Italian bishop, Liutprand of Cremona, composed several works which are particularly valuable for the information they give on Italian and Greek affairs; and the monk Adalbert of St Maximin, later to become the

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First archbishop of Magdeburg, wrote an annalistic continuation of Regino's chronicle which extended from 907 to 967. After that, historical writing became more plentiful. Annals were once again composed on a substantial scale — at Quedlinburg and Hersfeld, for example. Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg, writing in the first two decades of the eleventh century, wrote a chronicle which for the earlier period drew on Widukind's work but amplified it with other traditions and anecdotes; as he comes nearer his own time the work turns into what can only be described as the memoirs of a Saxon aristocrat, a source of value far beyond the mere information it provides about the flow of political events. Both Henry II and Conrad II had contemporary biographies, by Bishop Adalbold of Utrecht (most of whose work has been lost) and by the royal chaplain Wipo respectively, and their reigns and those of Henry III were fully covered by a number of annalists, notably Hermann the Lame, a monk of the Reichenauf, as well as anonymous writers in Altaich, Mainz, Bamberg, Hersfeld and elsewhere.

From the late tenth century onwards we also have the Gesta kept for many bishoprics and monasteries: sometimes brief, sometimes full accounts of their church and the bishops or abbots in charge. Besides such forms of writing which can obviously be seen as historical there also survive a large number of saints' lives and of collections of the miracles worked by saints at their shrines. This kind of literature is much more varied. Some saints' lives were very historical in their approach, and can be described simply as the biographies of holy men; others concentrated much more on the saints' holiness and virtues, and say little or nothing beyond conventional phrases about their heroes' biography or the world in which they lived. The information all these writers provide can be supplemented and in some cases corrected from that given by minor sets of annals, but the small number of really full historical writings provides a crucial skeleton for our understanding because they alone offer not only "facts" about who did what but also attempt to put them into some kind of coherent sequence. We shall see later what other kinds of evaluation such sources lend themselves to.

A quite different kind of source is that represented by charters, using the word loosely to refer to any kind of written record of a legal transaction made by or for one of the parties to it. Rulers issued charters (normally known as diplomas) to their followers, lay and ecclesiastical, to confirm the latter's title to possession or to grant privileges or property. These have survived in fair, though not in enormous numbers: we have about 170 genuine ones for the first
ruler of east Francia, Louis the German, and about 380 for the reign of the last ruler covered in this book, Henry III. These were solemn documents, often beginning with a preamble (arenga) setting out in terms of general principle the reasons for making the grant, proceeding to list the grants or titles, and ending with threats of penalty for those who should violate the conditions of the diploma. They generally finish with a dating clause, saying where and when they were issued, and with a reference to a confirmation by the royal seal. What are misleadingly known as private charters, meaning charters issued by anyone who was not a king, an emperor or a pope, followed more varied patterns. They were not in this period sealed, often not dated, and frequently had no arenga; what they did normally have was a list of witnesses to the transaction they recorded, and often their main purpose seems to have been to record the names of these witnesses so that these could testify to the transaction – the value of the private charter as testimony in itself was limited.

The context of charters and diplomata is law, but the sources available for the law in the period covered by this book are very patchy. The law of the church was extensively recorded: the older law, consisting of the canons of councils, the decrees issued by popes, and relevant and authoritative quotations from the church fathers, survived in collections, and it was added to regularly by church councils, which met in the late eighth and ninth centuries with great frequency and in the tenth and eleventh century not infrequently. The contribution of the popes to new church law was in this period insignificant. As far as secular law goes, there are codifications for the laws of all the major Germanic ethnic groupings – Bavarians, Alemanis, Saxons, Franks, Thuringians, Frisians. The codifications were, in the form we have them, almost all made in the eighth century, though they often record much older law. They are, however, far from complete (in the sense that there must have been law on all sorts of matters, in particular on property-holding and inheritance, which they hardly cover); and it is not easy to show that they were put to practical use, that Saxo-n law in the early eleventh century still had anything much to do with Lex Saxorum. The earlier Carolingian rulers issued orders which were a mixture of new legislation and administrative regulation, called capitularies, but as we shall see, there was virtually no capi tulariy legislation in the lands east of the Rhine. Legal texts are indispensable sources, but their gaps, their silences and their tendency to anachronism and fossilization make them very difficult to interpret.

Standing somewhere between charters and narrative sources are the surviving letters of the period. These resemble narrative sources in their range and their frequent references to specific events, but charters in their greater degree of objectivity; they were not normally intended to interpret the present or recent past to subsequent generations, as historical writing proper was. Perhaps 200 isolated letters have survived from the area and period with which we are concerned here. More valuable than such documents, which, because we have no reply and sometimes not even a certain indication of who sent or received them, are often contextless, is the much smaller number of letter collections. Only Einhard’s has survived from ninth-century east Francia; from the Ottonian and Salian Reich we have those associated with Ræder of Verona, Froumond of Tegernsee, Gerbert of Rheims, Petrus Damianus, Abbot Bern of the Reichenau and the cathedral school at Worms, to name the most important. Letters in letter collections usually help to explain one another’s content, so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts considered as a number of separate letters. Letters often shade off into treatises or pamphlets (as with Ræder and Damianus); letter form could be used for very different purposes, including dedicatory prefaces or theological tractates. By the nature of things letter writing was very much a minority, intellectual taste; there were “business” letters, but hardly any have survived. Other forms of literary activity, such as the writing of poetry (mostly in Latin, though there is a small corpus of vernacular poems from the ninth and tenth centuries), were still more minority activities.

It should not be supposed that the written word offers the only kind of source available for the reconstruction of the early medieval German past. Books and scripts can also be considered as artefacts, and in some cases as works of art as well. Most of the painting of the period survives in book illustrations; there is only a handful of surviving wall-paintings, and these are mostly incomplete, though we know that both the greater churches and the palaces of kings and bishops were decorated in this way; the church of St George on the Reichenau with its complete set of Ottonian wall-paintings gives an idea of how they might have looked. Crosses, cope and other liturgical objects, together with shrines and reliquaries, the containers used for preserving and honouring the relics of saints, formed a further opportunity for craftsmen to work in ivory and precious metals. A few churches have survived from this period, though almost all were either monastic churches or cathedrals and hence untypically large, and almost all have been heavily rebuilt in the
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following centuries. Comparatively few artefacts have survived outside this sacred context: virtually no secular buildings – for many royal palaces we do not even have a ground plan; and no implements apart from a few weapons and the fragments of pottery and other tools recovered by excavation. We owe most of our knowledge of what the world of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries looked like to manuscript paintings and drawings; and the relationship between such depictions and past reality is much more complex than that posed by photography.

The sources just listed and the kinds of information they offer have not all been treated with equal respect from the beginnings of the scientific study of history in the late eighteenth century. The emphasis of nineteenth-century medieval scholarship lay on getting the facts right and making the sources available in order to do so. The opening of archives and the major state libraries in the nineteenth century made a flood of new source-material available, and much of the attention of nineteenth-century scholars was devoted to sifting and ordering this and fitting it into the context of what was already known. The edition of texts was given a powerful impulse from classical philology: Karl Lachmann and others in the first half of the nineteenth century developed techniques for working back as reliably as possible from a large number of surviving manuscripts of a text, some of which might be many copies removed from the original and all of which would inevitably contain copyists' errors, to recover the author's original text. In the process manuscripts which were mere copies of other manuscripts could be discarded for the purposes of textual reconstruction. These methods were applied – not always wholeheartedly – to the edition of the texts for above all the narrative history of the middle ages: annals, chronicles, saints' lives. A related technique was applied to the content of these texts: later writers who merely copied or abridged earlier annals or chroniclers were discarded as having no independent value when it came to weighing up evidence. There were also new developments in the treatment of charters (private records of property transactions) and of royal diplomata (documents issued by rulers which granted privileges or confirmed possessions). These documents had legal force and so were unusually subject to forgery and interpolation in the middle ages and afterwards (later forgeries often having the purpose of supporting bogus genealogies rather than legal claims). The new methods made it possible to determine whether or not such a document was genuine, and if it was not, the extent to which it had made use of genuine material. It was

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characteristic of nineteenth-century German scholarship that the results of this work should have been summarized in scholarly guides, by Wattenbach and Pothen for the narrative sources, by Brelau and others for the diplomatic ones. By the time of the outbreak of the First World War the narrative sources for German medieval history in the early and high middle ages had largely been edited; editions of the royal charters were well on the way to completion, and other sources such as letters, private charters, saints' lives and necrologies were also being worked through. Not only had these sources been edited, the individual scholar could make use of comprehensive guides to them and to summaries of them, such as the Regesta Imperii (a calendar of royal movements and actions which became the model for numerous Regesta for bishops and secular princes published by regional record societies) or the Jahrbücher der deutschen Geschichte ("Annals of German History"), which re-constructed as accurately and in as much detail as possible the histoire événementielle of the Reich from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries.²

It is one thing to edit and analyse sources; it is another to make use of them to write history. The conceptual apparatus used for the writing of the political and ecclesiastical history of the middle ages was thin. Although Ranke's maxim that "each age is equally close to God" – meaning that it should be studied from the standpoint of its own beliefs and priorities and not from ours – was in theory a widely accepted premise, there was also a tendency – often unconscious – to posit a timeless homo politicus, with unchanging forms of action: the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries were populated in such writing by "statesmen" practising far-sighted "policies", but also aware of realities and capable of Realpolitik, even of Machiavellianism in order to achieve their aims. Anachronisms of this kind are of course common enough today, but they were far more common, and much less likely to be questioned, in the nineteenth century. Besides this, much historical writing of the nineteenth century was implicitly or explicitly political in its premises and intentions. The movement

² Darmstadt, are the latest editions of Wattenbach's original guide which was first published in 1898. A. Pothen, Bibliotheca Historica Medii Aevi, 2 vols, Berlin 1896, is also being reworked by an international team.
2. Guides to these and their contents can be found in many places, for example in Prose 1985 and Hlawitschka 1986.
towards German unification had been, at least in its early stages, one dominated more by intellectuals than by politicians; not for nothing was the constitutional assembly in Frankfurt in 1848 known as a "professors' club", and a number of prominent historians of the nineteenth century, including such men as Waiz and Mommsen, had a secondary role as politician, though none was of the first rank. The period covered in this book was one of great interest; the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries were, after all, the period in which Germany had seemingly been united under powerful rulers who exercised de facto if not de jure hegemony in Europe. The Kaiserzeit was an inspiration for the present, as can still be seen today in Henry III's palace at Goslar, restored at the time of the founding of the new German empire. Historical wall-paintings depict significant scenes in medieval German history; the climax is provided by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa blinking from his cave in the Kyffhäuser at the new Emperor William I and his court and assuring himself that all is well. The Kaiserzeit was also the period in which the "retarded national development" of Germany, the German Sonderweg ("special development", mostly with negative overtones), might be said to have begun, and there was considerable debate about whether the medieval emperors ought to have used so much of their resources on conquering and holding Italy rather than on a policy of expansion eastwards. Confessional differences also played a role; the Goslar wall-paintings include a number of the most famous scenes in the relations between emperors and popes, and when Bismarck said in the course of the conflict with the Catholic church that "we will not go to Canossa" (referring to the submission of Henry IV to Gregory VII in 1077) the allusion was clear to all.

Much of the development of nineteenth-century German historical writing was thus determined by the political history of the period, by the circumstances of German unification and by the nature of the polycentric policy which the new unified state only partially replaced. The decentralized nature of pre-1871 Germany meant that there were far more universities than in Great Britain or France. Many of the smaller states had their own universities or universities, and history was established early as an academic discipline. There were at least twenty professors of medieval history by 1900. There was a comparable spread of archives and archivists, and of societies for the publication of historical records which had state backing; in English terms, it is as if every county record society of the nineteenth century had had royal patronage and money to go with it. It was a difference of kind as well as of degree. Landesgeschichte cannot be translated as "local" or even "regional" history, because a German Land was not simply a geographical unit but a historically evolved territory, evoking consciousness and loyalties. But in spite of this seeming decentralization, professors and other academics with permanent posts, such as the directors of archives and of major libraries, were and saw themselves as state officials, bound by a special kind of loyalty to the state which went beyond that demanded from ordinary citizens or subjects. One should neither oversimplify such connections, nor project the present back unchanged into the past; the role played by professors of history under, say, William II (especially during the First World War) was perhaps comparable to that played by professors in eastern Europe more recently, but it was certainly not identical. Nevertheless, both the institutional position of historians and the traditions of historical studies predisposed them to write the history of the state, history from the top, and in doing so to echo contemporary political fashions: it is no accident that the great era of writing about medieval politics as Machtpolitik, power politics, coincided with a similar exaltation of power in the dominant political rhetoric of the decades before 1918, nor that the unlovedness and disorientation of the Weimar republic should have been reflected in frustration and in a loss of the old certainties in the historical writing of the 1920s.

Even in the nineteenth century political history was not the only academically legitimate form of study of the past. Constitutional history, though it had started out in the hands of historians (Waiz' great eight-volume survey of German constitutional history, the model for Stubbs' constitutional history of England, was written by one of the most distinguished medievalists of the century), showed a strong tendency to be dominated by legal historians. Legal history was and in some places still is, though less prominently, an obligatory part of the curriculum for lawyers, and much effort was devoted to showing continuity and continuous development in "German" legal practice from the period of the barbarian invasions up to the codifications of the end of the nineteenth century. The legal texts of our period were often analysed and dissected using the legal conceptual apparatus of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century discovery that most European languages are descended from a common ancestor (Indo-Germanic) and that the Germanic languages themselves have a common ancestor within this line of descent played a role in the reconstruction of a common "Germanic" past; we have here, as with Lachmann's editorial method or the new techniques of critical source analysis, the idea of recovering
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information about "ancestors" by examining "descendants". The surviving remnants of law and legal practice in the first millennium were taken as fragments of a proto-Germanic legal system and constitution. Much of this reconstruction was then taken as having existed even in places and at times where there was little or no direct evidence for it. The methodology of legal history also heavily dominated the study of social and economic history. For example, there was much more of a tendency in Germany than in England or France to consider the records of estate management, both the *polyptiques* of the early middle ages and the *Urbar* (customals) of the high middle ages, as records of legal obligations than as sources for the study of an economic unit. Social and economic history were also largely the preserve of *Landesgeschichte*; there were of course general surveys, but a work like Dopisch's classic study of economic development in the Carolingian era remained unusual in its generality. Attempts to link political history with social, economic and cultural developments were few, and were not well received. In particular Karl Lamprecht's *Deutsche Geschichte* was subject on its appearance in 1891-2 to a barrage of criticism. This was directed at Lamprecht's allegedly careless and unscholarly use of sources but its warmth was fuelled by dislike and distrust of his aims, which were to relate the political and constitutional developments of the period to socio-economic change ("superstructure" to "basis", perhaps, though Lamprecht was hardly a Marxist, and Marx and Engels had little effect on academic historical writing until after 1945). The resistance to Lamprecht showed an underlying attitude which was to outlast all changes of regime and intellectual climate; there have been few impulses from the *Annales* school (which itself owed something to Lamprecht) in German medieval studies (it took over forty years for Bloch's *Société féodale* to be translated into German, for example), and though medievalists have in the last two generations been very much concerned with the study of consciousness, this is rather different from the study of *mentalités*.

The German collapse of 1918, the failed revolution which followed and the social disruption caused by the inflation of 1922-3 did not lead to the kind of conscious reflection on the past and on the historian's role in mediating between it and the present found after 1945, and such changes as did take place were unconscious. The period from 1920 to 1940 saw a boom in *Landesgeschichte* and a move away from the history of the Reich. Even in this economically troubled period institutes for the study of regional history were set up, for example at Bonn, Marburg and Freiburg. *Landesgeschichte* also came to acquire a theoretical framework and justification: in particular, it was argued, the previous tendency of constitutional historians to take evidence from widely different parts of the Reich and build a systematic picture from it was methodologically unsound. Instead, a much more intensive study of regional differences was required; only then would a comparative constitutional history be possible. It has still hardly been realized, though the intensive study of institutions on a regional basis has been going on now for three generations. The argument was related to a further criticism of traditional constitutional history, namely that this was based too much on liberal views of the bourgeois state as formulated in the nineteenth century, too systematized, and above all not sufficiently attentive to the elements of popular action and of leadership in the medieval past. Two highly influential studies which appeared at the end of the 1930s set out in a programmatic fashion to do this: Otto Brunner's study of the development of territorial lordship in late medieval Austria, and Walter Schlesinger's work on the tension between public office and private lordship in Thuringia in the early and high middle ages.3 There were evidently connections between their lines of approach and the currently dominant ideology, but these were not simply ones of cause and effect, and this was typical of the relationship between National Socialism and the historians. The professoriate of 1933 was a fairly representative cross-section of the educated bourgeoisie. Most of its members were politically of the right and hence even where they were not members of the party shared many views held by the NSDAP, which was within the ideological mainstream of right-wing politics in the 1920s; on the other hand, many felt repelled by the vulgarity and crudity of Nazi ideas and Nazi rhetoric (on history as on other things), and their socialization as academics was an additional barrier to their acting as simple propagators of a new "Germanic" view of the middle ages. Though the hegemony exercised in Europe by the Ottonian and Salian emperors was glorified in public lectures and the German eastward colonization continued to be praised as bringing development and civilization to previously backward regions, these views and attitudes were hardly invented in the 1930s. Attempts to see Charles the Great (or, for that matter, Otto I, unfavourably compared with his supposedly more "Germanic" father Henry I by some NSDAP ideologues) as a betrayer and corruptor of German

purity were publicly repudiated. Moreover, many of the developments in medieval historical studies which were to take off properly in the 1950s and 1960s can already be found in work of the late 1920s and 1930s, which saw the beginnings of a reaction against "straight" political history, conceived of as the projection of contemporary notions of power politics into the distant past. This reaction was found in quite different quarters. Percy Ernst Schramm began from the late 1920s to work on the ceremonial and public aspects of rulership: on the way rulers had themselves depicted in coins and paintings; on the liturgical texts used during the coronation of rulers; on the objects such as crowns, sceptres, swords and other still more unusual things which were used to represent and make concrete abstract notions such as kingship and the kingdom. At about the same time Ernst Kantorowicz published his biography of the Emperor Frederick II, inspired by the highly elitist circle around the poet Stefan Georg. Methodologically this was noteworthy for the way in which it took seriously the rhetoric of rulership used by Frederick's chancery and evaluated this to see how the ruler and his circle perceived themselves. This led at the time to attacks on the work for "mythologizing" history, but in retrospect Kantorowicz seems simply part of the new wave; at much the same time Schramm was doing a similar re-evaluation of Otto III. There was also a new interest in religious practice and experience, conceived of as something more than the study of religious institutions.

Perhaps the most important long-run development in German medieval historical writing since the Second World War has been the removal of the study of history from the political arena - at least in West Germany. This was not a deliberate decision. Medievalists played little part in the post-war debates on historical theory, and were on the whole far less disposed than their modernist colleagues to reflect on the traditional assumptions of their craft. Nor was there any great purge of medievalists from the universities of Germany and Austria after 1945; a few who had exposed themselves particularly prominently on behalf of the former regime lost their posts, but even for many of these this did not last long. Nor did depoliticization occur immediately. The historical writing of the 1950s on the middle ages saw a sharp drop in the use of words like "German" and "Germanic", but this was compensated for to some extent by an increased use of words like "Western" and "West". The unkind interpretation put on this by some medievalists in the GDR, namely that their colleagues in the FRG, after preaching German expansion in the 1910s, revenge in the 1920s and the Germanic virtues in the 1930s, had now simply turned their hand to expounding the new ideology of NATO and the Cold War, was untenable in this crude form, but it was not without a grain of truth. Abendland in the 1950s was a shorthand which when expanded included the two Cs which in different ways stood in opposition to communism: Catholicism and capitalism. The numerous conferences and public lectures devoted to the thousandth anniversary of Otto I's imperial coronation in 1962 may serve as a kind of chemical indicator for the depoliticization of historical studies, since Otto I was par excellence a potential inspiration for rollback and containment. As it turned out, the overtones of contemporary political concerns were still there, but they were fading. Another indicator was the subject and form of historical exhibitions. One in 1956 was entitled "The emergence of Western culture in the Rhine and Ruhr region"; in 1965 a great exhibition was devoted to Charles the Great in Aachen, history here being pressed into the service of the emergent European ideal. Since then there has been a number of major historical exhibitions devoted to medieval history in Germany, but none has taken for its occasion one of the dates which an older generation of historians might have seen as critical or significant. The centenaries of 1973 (death of Otto I), 1977 (Canossa) and 1987 (deposition of Charles the Fat) passed without public commemoration, while major exhibitions devoted to the Stauffen (1777) and the Salians (1990) apparently had their dates chosen deliberately so as not to commemorate and hence emphasize any particular event.

The most characteristic feature of this new depoliticized historical writing has been an emphasis on the consciousness of groups and individuals, on how they saw themselves and others. This can be seen in much of the work done on rulers; in the work of the so-called "Friburg school" on nobles and monks; and in the revival of interest in the work of medieval historians and hagiographers. We have already seen how the representative side of rulership was a matter of interest as early as the 1920s; this work was continued after the war, and new kinds of source were tapped to fuel it. It was soon realized, for instance, that seemingly quite formal parts of royal diplomas could be made to reveal the attitudes of the kings who issued them: the titles given them at the beginning or in the dating clauses at the end showed what they saw themselves as ruling over, while the arengas or preambles to diplomata, often dismissed as empty rhetoric, could be taken seriously as material on attitudes and hence in a sense on "policy". An arenga is as near as we get to an explicit justification by a ruler for a particular action, the grant of a privilege.
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Nothing could be more revealing of the dominance of "consciousness" as a central theme of German medievalists than the developments in the study of the nobility and of a particular kind of source which has not been mentioned so far, the *libri memoriales* or confraternity-books, books kept in monasteries to contain the names of monks in other religious communities and of kings and aristocrats, for all of whom prayers were said. These do not survive in great numbers – for the Carolingian era we have only five or less complete specimens – but they make up for their scarcity by the sheer bulk of information they offer in the form of long lists of names. The original impulse in the 1950s for the more intensive study of these sources, which had long been known about but little used, by the "Freiburg school" of Gerd Tellenbach and his pupils and their pupils, was a genealogical one; the observation that names entered in groups were often those of a widespread kindred gave rise to the hope that the otherwise sparse and conflicting information about the genealogies of the eighth to the eleventh centuries could be filled out, and family trees put on a new footing. This turned out to be at best a half-truth; further study showed that no particular group entry could be taken to be based purely on kinship without other supporting evidence. The genealogical interest receded into the background, and from the late 1960s *libri memoriales* were taken to be and studied primarily as evidence of consciousness. The self-assessment of a monastic community was revealed by the other communities with which associations of confraternity existed: tell me whom you pray for and I will tell you what kind of monasticism you favour. The self-assessment of individual aristocrats and of rulers showed itself in the company they kept in group entries: these showed not so much genealogy in a biological sense as the consciousness of family and group.

Consciousness as a key to understanding of the past is seen, finally, in the way historians and hagiographers have been studied. The list given earlier treated the writers of the eighth to the eleventh centuries as if they were in the first instance a source of "facts", of information about wars, peace treaties, rebellions, invasions and the other stuff of medieval politics. Of course they are that, and it is a function whose importance should not be underestimated. But their writings tell us other things about the world in which they wrote. Nineteenth-century scholars had examined these historians largely in order to be able to correct for their "bias", their prejudices and partisanship, and to check their originality in order to eliminate the information they merely copied from others. More recently it has been realized that their "bias", to use a crude word for the complex phenomenon of a historian's mental world and its horizons, is a worthwhile object of study in itself. We know what Otto I thought only from the very imperfect process of arguing backwards from what he is known to have done; but we know what Widukind thought because we have a written record of his thoughts in his *History of the Saxons*. Knowing what Regino and Widukind and Thietmar thought is one step towards understanding how Arnulf of Carinthia or Otto I or Hermann Billung or the anonymous armed followings of Hugo of Lootharingia or Liudolf of Suabia thought. The terminology they use reflects their unspoken assumptions and those of their class. The study of medieval historians in this way has been a speciality of German historians since the Second World War, and virtually all the major historical writers of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries have been explored using this methodology in greater or lesser detail.

One of the drawbacks about an emphasis on consciousness is that we cannot always clearly distinguish between consciousnesses. Charles the Great and Otto III, after all, neither composed their own diplomas and coronation ordines nor illuminated their own manuscripts, let alone wrote their own annals. At best we are dealing, so far as the political elite of the period is concerned, with group consciousnesses. There is, however, more concrete evidence for the exercise of power by rulers and others, most clearly visible for rulers. The work done on this also owes much to another trend whose beginnings we saw in the 1920s and 1930s, the emphasis on Germany's regional diversity. The basic working assumption here is that royal power and influence were not evenly spread throughout the kingdom, nor were they even intended to be; they varied considerably in time and space, and the measure of this is where kings went, how they supported themselves, and for whom they issued diplomas. Kings' itineraries can be reconstructed from narrative sources and more accurately from the dating-claims of diplomas, which usually mention the place where and day when a diploma was issued. We can thus see where kings went frequently, rarely or not at all; knowledge of the roads used and of standard practice enables us to fill in the otherwise large gaps, – essential since for about 90 percent of the reigns of the rulers we are dealing with

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4. Beumann 1950 was the first major study along these lines, as it happens devoted to Widukind.
we do not know precisely where they were on a given day. The recipients of diplomata and the distances they were prepared to travel in order to get them are also revealing: did Suabians go to Saxony to get diplomata from Otto I, or did they wait until he came to them, or at any rate to the mid Rhine? A knowledge of who got grants, and of who persuaded rulers to make them, provides information on who was in and who was out of favour. Essential also for an understanding of itinerant kingship is a knowledge of where the rulers stayed (their palaces and those of their magnates, especially ecclesiastical ones), and of how they fed themselves and their entourages (the location and administration of important complexes of royal estates and rights). The entourages themselves, especially the royal clerics, are also a matter for prosopographical study: which men served the king or travelled with him, and with whom were they connected? This way of studying the rulers of the early and early high middle ages presupposes that there were few or no constants, little in the way of an abstract “state” with institutions. The state, such as it was, was revealed in the shifting patterns of behaviour of rulers. Their itineraries and entourages are a guide to their “policies” and intentions.

These emphases in recent scholarship are inevitably reflected in the pages that follow, and so also (I hope to a lesser extent) are the gaps and silences in the current concerns of German medievalists. These lie primarily in two areas. The first is a perhaps excessive unwillingness to generalize about the institutional basis of the “state” (because the baby of constitutional history has been thrown out with the bathwater of an ahistorical systematization). There are signs that this is coming to an end: there has been a revived interest recently in considering the Ottonian Reich as a state (though not, of course, as a primitive and imperfect version of a modern state). The second gap lies in a certainly excessive reaction against the implications of the work of two great German thinkers, Freud and Marx, both of whom in different ways insisted on the idea that there might be other reasons for men’s actions than the ones they gave themselves. To see “consciousness” — meaning people’s explicit and implicit statements about what they saw themselves as doing — as the principal if not the only proper object of historical study means to push to one side consideration of the “unconscious” springs of thought and action, whether these be taken to be the direct impact of social and economic circumstances or that of the psyche. It may be that this one-sidedness, drawn from a long German tradition but perhaps reinforced by the ideological confrontation in Europe in the last forty years, will also come to an end. As yet there are fewer signs of this.

5. Müller-Merens 1980 provides a state-of-the-art account of the methodology and a historiographical account of its development.