CHAPTER SIX

The kingdom of the Franks and Saxons: Otto I and Otto II

OTTO I: THE EARLY YEARS

At first sight Otto I’s accession, especially as depicted in loving detail by Widukind of Corvey, seems a remarkable tribute to his father’s success in consolidating royal power. After his election by the Franks and Saxons, Otto proceeded to Aachen, where on August 7, 936 he received the commendation of the dukes, counts and leading nobles of the kingdom, dressed in Frankish ceremonial garments and seated on a throne. These “made him thus to their king after their custom.”

1 After this he was crowned and anointed king by Archbishop Hildebert of Mainz, assisted by Wichfrid of Cologne. The coronation was followed by a ceremonial banquet, at which Eberhard of Franconia, Arnulf of Bavaria, Hermann of Susaia and Gilbert of Lotharingia assumed the roles of court officials and ministered to the king. Much of this contrasted sharply with the rituals – or lack of them – used at Henry’s accession, and was a clear assertion of Frankish tradition and continuity. Most noteworthy in this respect was the fact that Otto received royal unction where his father had refused it, but there were other changes as well. The kingdom to which Otto succeeded was still a Frankish one, and this was emphasized by Otto’s clothing. The choice of Aachen, Charles the Great’s favoured residence, demonstrated not only Otto’s control over Lotharingia but also the legitimacy of his rule, as good as that of Otto’s rival in west Francia, the Carolingian Louis IV, who had just become king after thirteen years of rule by non-Carolingians.

1. Widukind II 1, p. 64.

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The clearly defined role of the church in the king-making rituals was also much more generally Frankish than specifically east Frankish. Yet there were other elements as well. As in 919, the use of the correct royal insignia for the coronation and the designation by the previous king were matters to be stressed, whereas neither had been of much importance in Frankish king-making. The ritual banquet also had no Frankish counterpart that we know of; the nearest parallel is the famous incident in 973 when the Anglo-Saxon King Edgar was rowed by eight other kings on the River Dee. In both cases what was demonstrated was overlordship as much as lordship: Otto was here seen to be more than just first among equals.

Nevertheless, although constitutional historians have generally seen the ceremony as emphasizing the nature of the dukedoms as an office, the way in which the dukes were able to appear as symbolically representing their peoples probably did their own political and constitutional position within their dukedoms little harm.

Otto’s succession has also been seen as representing the triumph of a new principle, that of the indivisibility of the kingdom. The Carolingians had divided and subdivided their kingdoms among their sons, whereas Henry I did not attempt to provide separate kingdoms for his younger sons Henry and Brun or for his son by his first marriage, Thankmar. It is certainly true that the kingdom was not divided in 936 (or later), but it is doubtful whether this should be taken as the conscious acceptance of a new principle. It is not clear what could have been divided in 936. A division of Henry’s wealth among his sons did indeed take place – both Henry and Thankmar got lands and treasure, according to Widukind. But for a division of the kingdom both the royal resources and aristocratic consent were lacking. We know that there was some disagreement in 936 about whether Otto or his younger brother Henry should succeed Henry I: Flobordo reports it, and Widukind’s account can be read between the lines as showing that Henry was kept in Saxony under house arrest during the coronation. 2 But all were agreed that only one of the two could do so. This might not have been the case later, but as things turned out, 936 was the last occasion in the tenth and eleventh centuries when a German king had more than one son to pass on his kingdom to. In 973, 983 and 1039 there was only one surviving son, while in 1002 and 1024 there were no direct male heirs at all, so that indivisibility triumphed in practice as much as in principle (though a

2. Flobordo, ed. Lauer, 64; Widukind II 1, p. 67.

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division may have been contemplated in 1002; see below, p. 187). The contrast with the ninth century can be overstressed. The Carolingians, especially in east Francia, had in the later ninth century already moved away from a simple division of their kingdoms, and the kingdoms could no longer just be carved up to satisfy the dynasty. Otto’s accession represents rather a transition towards indivisibility, for both the revolts of the late 930s and the political settlement which was worked out in the 940s were very much concerned with the division of power and resources among members of the royal family; what happened in the end was a division of everything except the royal title, with Henry getting a position in Bavaria otherwise hardly distinguishable from kingship. This was perhaps the most appropriate solution for a kingdom which was still very much a conglomeration or federation under a hegemonial overlord, as the ceremony at Aachen clearly demonstrated.

Otto’s coronation was followed almost immediately by a civil war, though such a term perhaps implies a partisan view of what happened. The great political crisis of 937–941 is commonly seen as a single episode, and there has been a tendency in recent scholarship to interpret it as opposition to a new, autocratic style of kingship practised by Otto I in contrast to the more collegiate methods of his father. There is some good evidence for this view: Otto’s use of inaction at the coronation ceremony; the sharp disappearance of “friendships” between the king and his leading men as recorded in the narrative sources and libri memorials; his refusal in 939 (and later in 953) to accept pata, settlements negotiated by intermediaries between him and his opponents. All these things suggest a new view of kingship, one which set a greater gap between the king and even the greatest of his leading men than that which had existed in Henry’s time. Yet it is hardly possible to see the revolts of 937–41 as having been consciously directed against a new style of government. Otto’s views, so far as we can ascertain them with certainty, probably contributed to the deterioration in the political atmosphere, but so did the fact that he was a new king: the start of a reign was always a difficult time. Otto was also a great deal younger than many of his magnates, particularly Eberhard of Franconia, who was of his father’s generation. The weakness of his position compared with that of his father was shown in the behaviour of the peoples to the east. The Bohemians refused tribute after Henry’s death, and could not be forced to pay it; there were difficulties in keeping control over the Abodrites and Elbe Slavs, who also more than once withheld tribute payments; and two Magyar attacks on Franconia and Saxony had to

be driven back in 938. Such things imposed great stresses on the relations between leading men and their followings. The revolts of 937–41 can be disentangled without difficulty into a number of disputes which were only intermittently and loosely connected with one another. There were disagreements about power and inheritance between Otto I and his brothers Henry and Thurbalm. This coincided with other feuds within Saxon aristocratic families, for example the Billungs, some of which were inflamed by decisions taken by Otto himself. At the same time old quarrels between Ottonians and Conradines over land and rights in the Wesergebirge and in Thuringia were revived. Outside Saxony there were the still unresolved issues of whether Lotharingia was to belong to east Francia or west Francia or perhaps to become an independent principality, and whether the coronation of Otto I had altered the status of Bavaria and perhaps also of Suabia as these had come to be defined under Henry I. All this made for an extremely dangerous mixture.

The Bavarian revolt which started everything off was dealt with surprisingly quickly. Arnulf had accepted Otto as king in 936; after the former’s death on July 14 937 his son and designated successor Eberhard defied Otto in some way – Widukind says that Arnulf’s sons refused to obey a royal order to accompany the king (regis iussu contemptum ire in comitatum) which may mean doing military service or may mean appearing before Otto and perhaps commending himself. Otto invaded Bavaria twice in 938. The first expedition was a failure, but after the second one he was able to send Eberhard into exile and install Berthold, Arnulf’s brother, as duke. It was an episode which marked the beginning of the end of Bavaria’s independence, though the process was not really completed until the accession of the Bavarian line of the Ottonians in 1002. There were no more separate Bavarian church councils; in theory at least the duke no longer appointed to bishoprics (though ducal influence over the Bavarian church remained considerable). As early as 938 we are told that Otto appointed the new archbishop of Salzburg, Herold – though he was probably a Liutpolding and the appointment part of Otto’s arrangement with those Liutpoldings willing to come to terms. The virtual independence enjoyed by Arnulf in respect of rulers and peoples beyond the borders was also curtailed, though again this was a process rather than an event, and Otto I’s brother Henry was from 948 to continue the Liutpolding tradition of interest in the kingdom of Italy. Considering how powerful Arnulf’s position had seemed, Otto’s intervention was remarkably painless. From then on until the end of
the crisis in 941 Bavaria was not involved in the fighting in the north; Berthold and his relatives did not try to take advantage of the Saxon quarrels to redefine the relationship between duchy and king as established in 938.

The Saxon revolt of 938 may have been triggered off by Otto's initial failure in Bavaria, though there was no shortage of grievances to fuel it. The revolt was led by Otto's half-brother Thankmar, Wichmann Billung and Eberhard of Franconia. Thankmar and Wichmann were dissatisfied with Otto's disposition of offices after coming to power. On the death of Count Siegfried of Merseburg, whom Widukind calls "second after the king", 4 Thankmar expected to be given his march (they were cousins through their mothers), but Otto gave it to Siegfried's brother Gero instead. Wichmann had been slighted by Otto's having conferred the military command in northern Saxony on his younger brother Hermann Billung. Eberhard seems to have felt that he was being squeezed out of power. His grievance began when a Saxon vassel of his, Bruning, refused to commend himself (on the grounds that it was not for the Saxons to become the men of lords from other peoples—a sign at the least of growing Saxon self-confidence, though Bruning may well have been encouraged in his attitude by Otto or his brother Henry). Eberhard, who had a substantial following in Saxony itself, attacked Bruning and was promptly condemned, along with his followers, by a royal court. The revolt of 938 fizzled out after Thankmar had been killed; both Wichmann and Eberhard made peace with Otto, Eberhard being sent into exile for a time. In the following year the revolt broke out again, this time under Otto's brother Henry (who the previous year had sided with Otto) together with Eberhard of Franconia and Gilbert of Lotharingia. The opposition was defeated in two battles at Birten and Andernach, but it was very close-run indeed, and at one point in his account Widukind describes Otto abandoned by all his followers "with no further hope of rule for the Saxons." 5 The conflict had spread to include Louis IV of west Francia, who allied with the opposition, and Hugo, duke in Francia (i.e. the Seine basin) and Louis's chief opponent, who allied himself with Otto. At Andernach both Eberhard and Gilbert were killed, and this broke the opposition and provided Otto with a breathing-space; he was able to appoint his brother Henry as duke of Lotharingia. Henry, however, was not able to establish himself in Lotharingia, and by 940 was back in Saxony. Here there were additional problems: the Slav peoples to the east had refused

4. Widukind II 1, p. 67.
5. Widukind II 24, p. 87.

6. Widukind II 20, pp. 84-5.
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and Theophanu, and later with Conrad II’s wife Gisela, but more generally of the position which could be occupied by aristocratic widows within a kindred in east Frankish, especially in Saxon society. Fourth, though Otto punished some of the lesser followers of his rebellious brother and leading men, hardly any were “executed for treason”, and Ottonian historiography went out of its way to explain and justify the few exceptions. Temporary exile and confiscation of lands were the worst fate normally awaiting a rebel, if he should survive the chances of warfare. Already here, in the most serious crisis of the Reich before the second half of the eleventh century, we can see that sense of community among the political elite which prevented rivalries and feuds, however vigorously pursued, from being taken to extremes.

If the reign up to 941 had threatened to put an end to Ottonian (or at least Otto’s) kingship, the following decade saw quite different developments. Eberhard’s death in 939 prevented a fully fledged dukedom from emerging in Franconia. The Conradines did not lose all of their lands there, and some members of the family appear later in the century with a title of duke which appears to have been ad personam. But there was no longer any question of Franconia’s going the same way as Bavaria and Suabia. Elsewhere the duchies were not suppressed, but they were gradually filled by members of the royal family. Lotharingia went after a brief interlude to the Franconian count Conrad in 944, who in 947 married Otto I’s daughter Liutgard. In Bavaria Berthold died at the end of 947 and was succeeded by Otto’s brother Henry; in Suabia Otto’s son Liudolf, already designated Otto’s successor in 946, became duke on Hermann’s death in 949. Both Henry and Liudolf married the daughters of their predecessors. They were appointed by Otto, but they ruled in a sense also by hereditary right. Their rule (and Conrad’s as well) also served to spread the presence and indeed the charisma of the ruling family more widely, and to ease the pressures and competition for resources within the family. It was more of a family settlement than an institutional extension of Ottonian rule, and so perhaps differs from the Carolingian practice of making kings’ sons rule in sub-kingsdoms. Conrad, Henry and Liudolf were in effect sub-kings, but they were not able to any great extent to take with them other prominent members of the Franco-Saxon aristocratic coalition on which Ottonian power was based to establish in their new territories. Even the opportunities provided by the condemnations and forfeitures of the late 930s could not be used to set up a new Franco-Saxon imperial aristocracy.

SONS AND BROTHERS, 952–68

The last major rebellion of the reign, which broke out in 953, was, like those before it, a family affair: it was headed by Otto’s son Liudolf of Suabia and his son-in-law Conrad of Lotharingia. The rebellion was – at least according to Otto’s opponents – directed not so much against Otto as against his brother Henry, and it does indeed seem that the rebels did not intend to kill or depose Otto. The starting-point was the sense of injury felt by both Liudolf and Conrad the Red after the Italian campaign of 951–2 (below, p. 169). Liudolf saw his position as designated successor threatened by Otto’s marriage to Adelheid of Italy, while Conrad, who had sorted out Italian affairs and come to terms with King Berengar after Otto’s hurried return to Saxony in early 952, was slighted by Otto’s initial refusal either to receive Berengar or to accept unaltered the settlement which Conrad had made. Both claimed to be concerned at the influence which Henry of Bavaria had with Otto and Adelheid – Henry had argued against settling with Berengar, and had had his power extended by the grant of the north-east Italian marches of Verona and Aquileia.

The first sign of revolt came in 953 when Otto wished to celebrate Easter at Aachen (in Conrad’s duchy) and found nothing prepared for him. Otto went instead to Mainz, where Archbishop Frederick tried to mediate between the king and his son and son-in-law. Otto at first agreed to the settlement arranged by Frederick (whose content we do not know) but then repudiated it on the grounds that it had been made under duress; Frederick was accused of favouring the opposition and in effect forced to join it. Gradually the rebellion attracted other supporters. In Bavaria the surviving Liutpoldings under Arnulf, count palatine of Bavaria and brother of the deposed Eberhard, tried to recover the position they had lost in 938, while in Saxony Wichmann the Younger, son of the Wichmann Billung who had rebelled in 938, revived the feud his father had had with Hermann Billung. Otto made things worse by offending old allies in Saxony and Thuringia, and it seemed for a time as if the rebels would have the upper hand. Otto besieged Mainz unsuccessfully, while Henry was driven out of Bavaria and his treasure-hoard in Regensburg captured by Liudolf. However, it proved to be difficult to sustain a revolt directed not against the king but against his brother – Conrad of Lotharingia drew back from giving battle to loyalist forces under Otto’s youngest brother Brun, appointed archbishop of Cologne in 953. The reappearance of the Magyars in
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through dukes drawn from the royal family and to have turned to the episcopate instead. Otto’s brother Brun, archbishop of Cologne from 953 and “archduke” in Lotharingia from 954, was on this view both pilot project and prototype for future developments. So long as Brun lived, it is argued, his entourage provided the new royalist candidates for bishoprics, while after his death in 965 Otto and his successors, reviving Frankish tradition, used the royal chapel as a mixture of école normale supérieure and military college, in which future bishops were selected and trained. There is a little in this view, but it is by no means the whole story. Brun does indeed appear as rex et sacerdos in Ruoget’s biography,7 in other words as a high priest exercising secular power, but it is as well to remember that Brun’s position in Lotharingia (and as regent during Otto’s second Italian expedition) was not simply that of a bishop, but of a king’s brother. His secular position in Lotharingia was a novelty, and criticized as such by his colleague and half-brother William of Maine, but it was hardly typical for the mid tenth century. It was not until the early eleventh century that grants of secular jurisdiction to bishoprics was to become common, and then only at the level of counties, not of duchies. Brun was no prototype. His “court” was indeed a nursery for future bishops, and included such figures as the future archbishops Gero of Cologne and Egbert of Trier, but here he was essentially simply doing for his clerical following what his relatives Henry and Liudolf tried to do for their secular ones.

As for Otto’s control of elections, it is in any case only from the mid 950s on that the sources become plentiful enough for us to be informed regularly about episcopal elections: the Lotharingian gesta episcoporum start to fill out and Thietmar of Merseburg’s reminiscences swell from a trickle to a flood as he comes to the generation which was still alive when he was young. The increase in royal control over episcopal appointments after 953–4 may very well be in part an optical illusion. To the extent that it was not – and we might well expect Otto’s enhanced prestige after the defeat of the rebels and of the Magyars to have been reflected in greater influence over episcopal appointments – Otto can hardly have realistically expected to control the lay nobility through the episcopate or to use bishops as a counterweight to dukes. We should bear in mind the analysis offered by Widukind, who for all his classicizing rhetoric had a firm grip of the barbarian realities of Ottonian politics, of the attitude of the Bavarian episcopate during the brief period in 953–4 when

Luitold and the Liutpoldings controlled much of Bavaria: the bishops were able neither to support nor to oppose the king openly if they wished to preserve their sees. It is in any case a very moot point whether this kind of rationalistic interpretation, such as the idea of a “policy” of using bishops against the lay nobility, can give us any real insight into tenth century behaviour, even if we consider it as an ex post facto summary of the thought behind actions rather than as a conscious guide to action. The complexity of episcopal behaviour can be seen in a figure like Ulrich of Augsburg. He and his kindred were among the few in Swabia who were loyal to Otto during the uprising of 953–4, and he led the defence of his city against the Magyars in 955 which enabled Otto and his army to close with the invaders. On the face of it this was a loyal bishop mindful of his secular responsibilities. Yet his biographer makes it clear that he was not interested primarily in these things, but rather in his pastoral responsibilities and indeed in the salvation of his own soul. Later in his episcopate he asked for an assistant to run the secular side of the diocese. Nor did his loyalty to Otto preclude local ties; his successor Henry was unable to dislodge Ulrich’s kindred from their well-established positions as vassals of the bishopric, as the Life unwittingly makes clear.

It is not even clear that we can say that Otto turned away from using dukes drawn from his own family after 953. In Lotharingia brother Brun replaced brother-in-law Conrad; in Bavaria nephew Henry succeeded brother Henry. Luitold was sent off to Italy in 956 to deal with Berengar II, much as Arnulf of Carinthia’s dispossessed sons Zwendi and Ratold had been given Lotharingia and Italy in 895 and 896 respectively (see above, p. 126). If the 950s were a turning-point, this is rather in the sense that from then on there was always a shortage of male Ottonians (a tradition inherited by the Salian dynasty which ruled from 1024). Between 955 and 957 Otto’s son-in-law Conrad (and Conrad’s wife Liutgard), his only adult son Luitold, and his only surviving brother who was not an ecclesiastic (Henry of Bavaria) all died, as did two of the three sons born to Adelheid. On the whole this made Otto’s own position more secure, since there were scarcely alternatives available around whom opposition could crystallize. This security can be seen in the fact that Otto felt able to have his son Otto II elected at an assembly at Worms and crowned king at Aachen in the summer of 961, and even to have him crowned co-emperor at the end of 967, though he took care not to give his son any kind of independent position even after he had come of age at the end of the 960s. Otto could even afford to spend nearly ten of the last twelve years of his reign south of the Alps. In order to do so he relied heavily on other members of his family: his mother Mathilda, his brother Brun, his illegitimate son William, archbishop of Mainz.

It is also misleading to see the uprising of 953–4 as one by dukes against the king. In Bavaria the uprising had been directed against the Ottonian duke; in Lotharingia Conrad the Red hardly had the nobility of the land united behind him. Only in Swabia does Luitold—who was not just a duke but a king’s son and designated successor—seem to have most of the regional nobility behind him, and even here not all of it, as Ulrich of Augsburg’s kindred demonstrate. If the lesson of the 950s was that the dukes were still a danger to royal power it was lost on Otto, for the men who replaced the Ottonian ducal circle were in general directly descended from or closely related to the “native” ducal houses. The Burchard who became duke of Swabia in 954 after Luitold had lost office was almost certainly a Hunsrück, perhaps a son, certainly a close relative of the Burchard II killed in 926. In Bavaria, Henry was succeeded by his son Henry, who was by birth both Liutpolding and Ottonian. The son was only four years old at the time, and there was a “regency” under his mother Judith, again a clear acknowledgement of the claims of heredity. The seeming exception to this general continuity was Lotharingia. Here Brun continued as overlord (archidux in Ruoget’s phrase, by analogy with his office of archiepiscopus), but in both upper and lower Lotharingia margraves are found, who soon came to take the title of duke (rather as in Saxony the Billungs evolved from margraves to dukes in the course of the tenth century): Frederick in upper Lotharingia, Godfrey in lower Lotharingia. These two were related by marriage to the Ottonian dynasty. To consolidate the position, Reginar III, the son of the Gilbert killed in 939, had his lands confiscated and was sent into exile. Yet the men who got Reginar’s lands were Gerard and Matfrid, the current representatives of a family which had been rivals of the Reginarids for primacy in Lotharingia at least since Zwendi’s reign at the end of the 890s. In Saxony, where the Ottonians were their own

8. Widukind III 27, p. 117.
10. Vita Brunonis, loc. cit.; Widukind I 31, p. 44, speaks of Brun as “high priest and great duke”.

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dukes and the dux, when one is mentioned, was a military leader, Hermann Billung continued in office, while the division of Gero's super-march among several successors — for a time as many as six — on his death in 965 probably reflected not so much a policy of divide and conquer as Gero's immense success in enlarging his march, coupled with Otto's desire not to repeat the mistakes of 936-7 and make several enemies while pleasing only one appointee.

The uprising of 953-4 did not mark the end of all opposition to Otto I, but it was the last general uprising involving a large proportion of the leading men of the kingdom; for the next hundred years there would be only more localized and smaller-scale opposition confined to a single kindred or region. We hear little of opposition to Otto I in the last fifteen years of his reign in the regions furthest away from his rule: Lotharingia, Suabia, Bavaria. Even nearer home there was comparatively little. The most serious threat was presented by Wichmann Billung, who had not been included in the general settlement of 954. He went east beyond the marches and was able to establish a formidable position in the 960s among the Slav peoples, one strong enough to enable him to take tribute from Miesco of Poland. His opposition was directed at least as much against his uncle Hermann as against Otto I, and for a time he was reconciled and allowed to return from exile and enjoy his wife's estates, before being outmanoeuvred and driven once again into opposition by Hermann during Otto's second Italian expedition. He went back into exile, where he died on a further campaign against Miesco. Hermann Billung himself was not loyal beyond all question; he had himself received with royal honours in Magdeburg in 968 by the new archbishop, Adalbert. This has been interpreted as a symbolic public criticism of Otto's long absence in southern Italy, but it can also be seen as an early and prominent display of the almost royal status enjoyed by the Billungs in northern Saxony. Otto, who had been obviously reluctant to move against Wichmann Billung, was equally gentle in his dealings with Hermann; it was Adalbert who was forced to make heavy amend for his transgression.

THE EASTERN FRONTIER

On August 10 955 an army of Franks, Bavarians, Suabians and Bohemians under Otto I defeated a Magyar raiding army at the battle of the Lechfeld, south of Augsburg. In the rout that followed most of the remnants of the Magyar army were wiped out; the captured leaders were executed. The Saxons, apart from members of the Ottonian royal family, played little part in the victory at the Lech, for Saxony was itself threatened by a Slav offensive and the Saxons had to stay at home to meet the threat. About the same time as the Magyar defeat a Saxony army was defeated by the Slavs, and it was not until the victory of a Saxon army under Otto I over the Abodriti and their allies and tributaries at the Reichstod on October 16 that the issue was decided. Otto thus achieved his greatest victory with an army drawn from the rest of his kingdom rather than from his own home territory, a sign of his overall power and authority. The defeat of the Magyars was celebrated in Ottonian historiography and mentioned by Pope John XII as one of the reasons for crowning Otto emperor. Yet, as Marc Bloch pointed out, the Magyars had long before the battle of the Lech ceased to be a serious threat to western Europe, and their raids had become increasingly infrequent. Saxony was not touched after the Magyar defeat of 938, while the Bavarians had not only defeated the Magyars in home matches in 943 and 948, but had carried warfare into Magyar territory in 950 and, according to Flodoard of Rheims, enforced tributary status on the Magyars.

The Magyar raid of 954-5 looks traditional enough. It repeated a pattern already familiar from the early tenth century: no sooner is there unrest or civil war in a kingdom than well-informed Magyars appear looking for loot. Yet it can also be seen as a desperate last gamble, an attempt, by reviving a style of action already becoming less practicable with the gradual abandoning of the Magyars' previous nomadism, to unfreeze a situation already strongly favouring the Ottonians. What the battle of the Lech did was to confirm a tendency which had been there since Henry I's campaigns of 928-9 at the latest: it was to be the Saxons and not the Magyars who would exercise hegemony (including in particular tribute-taking) over the Slav peoples and principalities of central and eastern Europe; Slav auxiliaries fought on both sides at the Lechfeld. The east Frankish Carolingians had had to vie with Moravians and Bulgarians before yielding primacy to the Magyars during the first third of the tenth century. Later on Poland under Miesco I and still more under Boleslav Chrobry was to become a serious rival, while

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867 a substantial Saxon contingent had to remain at home while Otto was campaigning in southern Italy, and had to make peace with the
slav Redari against Otto I's express orders, because the Danes were
threatening an invasion and there were not enough troops to fight on
two fronts. The policy with a long-term future was therefore
absorption and Christianization, exactly as the Franks had dealt with
the Saxons themselves not quite two centuries earlier.

Christianization was on the agenda from early in the reign.
Shortly after his accession Otto I had founded a new monastery at
Magdeburg. This was staffed by monks drawn from the newly
reformed monastery of St Maximin, Trier, and one of its principal
patrons was Mauritius, an important saint very much associated with
mission. It was endowed on an increasingly lavish scale - so much so
that it has been supposed that Otto intended it from the start to be
what in 968 it became, namely the nucleus of the foundation
endowment of the new archbishopric of Magdeburg, though this is
not very likely to have been his plan in 937. From the mid 940s Otto
seems to have envisaged a considerable extension of the church in the
regions under his control, but even a ruler of his prestige was subject
to the constraints of canon law. He needed papal approval for the
creation of new dioceses, and in practice he needed a reasonable
degree of consent among the existing bishops of his kingdom as
well. In particular the archbishops of Mainz and of Hamburg-
Bremen both had claims and missionary traditions going back to the
Saxon and Danish missions of the eighth and ninth centuries, and
their holders were unwilling to give these up, while the bishops of
Halberstadt and Würzburg were likely to lose both prestige and
revenue (in the form of tithes) in the event of new bishoprics being
erected. The result of this was that Otto had to carry out his
intentions piecemeal, with numerous revisions of plan.

The first such changes came about in the 940s: Halberstadt's lands
and rights of tithe in the Elbe marches were slowly transferred
(with compensation) to Otto's new monastic foundation at Mag-
deburg. In 947-8 three Danish bishoprics were founded, at Aarhus,
Ribe and Schleswig, and subjected to the archbishop of Hamburg-
Bremen; the latter's papal privileges were renewed at around this
time and his missionary responsibilities confined to Denmark and
Scandinavia (up till then they had included Slavs as well). The
foundation of the new bishoprics of Brandenburg and Havelberg,
already mentioned, was also part of this process of reorganization:
the two new bishoprics were subjected to the archbishop of Mainz
and were responsible for the central part of the lands lying between

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the Elbe and the Oder. The northern section was entrusted to a
bishopric at Oldenburg, whose foundation extended over the period
from 968 to 972; unlike the other two it was made subject to
Hamburg-Bremen. Otto's intentions for his own heartland are
harder to make out, and it is probable that definite plans had to wait
for the submission of Bohemia and the defeat of the Magyars. After
the victory on the Lechfeld Otto tried to get approval from Pope
Agapetus II for a proposal to transfer the bishopric of Halberstadt to
Magdeburg and turn it into an archbishopric. William of Mainz
protested both on his own account and on behalf of his suffragan
Bernard of Halberstadt, and the project came to nothing. Seven years
later Otto was able to secure a privilege from Pope John XII setting
up an archbishopric at Magdeburg, but this too – though the
archbishopric envisaged was still in a sense subject to Mainz – proved
impossible to realize, now mainly because Bernard of Halberstadt
would not give his consent. Only after the deaths of William and
Bernard in early 968 could their successors Hatto and Hildiward be
persuaded to agree to the new archbishopric (John XIII had already
consented at the synod held in Ravenna in 967) and to the foundation
of bishoprics at Merseburg, Meißen and Zeitz. Brandenburg and
Havelberg were also added to the province of Magdeburg as
suffragans. Other foundations are more obscure and difficult to date
precisely. A bishopric was set up at Prague, perhaps in 973, perhaps
in 976, which was subject to the archbishopric of Mainz; at the end
of the 960s a bishopric was also established at Posen, in Mieszko's
territory, though its status and early history are unclear, and in
particular we do not know what role Otto I played in setting it up.

On the face of it these foundations had much in common with the
foundations of the Saxon bishoprics in the eighth and early ninth
centuries. Yet there were also important differences. There were
some disputes about which province Saxony was to fall under –
hence the division of the Saxon bishoprics between the archbishops
of Cologne and of Mainz – but these were not of major importance.
The Saxon bishoprics were part of a concerted missionary effort,
into which the Frankish church also poured other resources:
manuscripts, monks, priests, relics. There is less evidence for this in
the tenth century. The new foundations remained comparatively
poor (except for Magdeburg) and received little support from their
wealthier neighbours to the west; Otto had achieved his house
archbishopric, but the Saxons had to pay for it themselves. By
contrast with the Saxon bishoprics, whose dioceses do not seem to
have corresponded to internal political or ethnic divisions in Saxony,

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some at least of the new bishoprics were clearly intended to cover a
specific ethnic grouping: Prague for the Bohemians, Oldenburg for
the Wagrians (the northern neighbours of the Abodrites), Havelberg
for the Hevelli, Merseburg for the Sorbs, Meißen for the Misnii. The
intention behind the foundations was clearly among other things a
missionary one, but the efforts put into converting the newly
conquered Slavs varied. The missionaries could rely on a reasonable
basis in the schools of the Saxon bishoprics, both old and new. There
is good evidence for German clerics having taken the trouble to learn
to speak Slavic languages – Boso, a monk from Regensburg and a
royal opellanu, and Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg, for example.
What was lacking was numerous power. There was no wheeling in
of saints' relics on a large scale to make up for the loss of heathen
shrines and deities, as there had been in ninth-century Saxony. Relics
– those of Virus and Mauritius in particular – played an important
role, but they were kept in centres of concentration like Corvey
and Magdeburg, or used as gifts to win over rulers (Henry or Otto I sent
Virus relics to the dukes of Bohemia, while the rulers of Poland and
perhaps of Hungary got copies of the Holy Lance, associated with
Mauritius, at the end of the century). They were not spread around
the countryside to assist in the process of conversion. Conversion
meant in the first instance political submission and the obligation to
pay tribute; it cannot easily be distinguished from conquest.

Conquest and domination were a major aim not only of the Saxon
rulers but of their followers, who shared in both the work and the
profits – in particular of Hermann Billung and of Gero, the men
appointed at the beginning of Otto's reign. Other Saxon nobles also
played a part along the frontier, and some were occasionally given
the title of margrave, but these two, and in particular Gero, were
clearly the leaders of the Saxon thrust eastwards. After the defeat of
the Magyars and the victory at the Recknitz in 955, the pressure on
the Slavs increased. There were campaigns by the whole Saxon host
in 957, 959 and 960, while during Otto's absence in Italy Gero was
able to make the Lusitzi as well as Mieszko of Poland pay tribute. In
965 Harald Bluetooth of Denmark agreed to accept Christianity. The
parallel is not with the east Frankish treatment of the Slavs on their
frontier but with the Frankish conquest of Saxony. The fact that
Mieszko of Poland moved clearly into view in the Saxon sources in
the 960s shows this very well; just as the Frankish conquests east of
the Rhine brought them up against the peoples beyond, the Danes
and Avars, so the Saxon successes against Abodrites and other
smaller peoples in the 940s and 950s expanded their horizons to
include peoples further east. Where east Frankish parallels do hold good is in the position of the margraves. Otto himself was not wholly inactive in these campaigns, but he left much of the campaigning to Hermann, Gero and others, just as the Lindolfsings had been largely responsible for their part of the Slav frontier in the ninth century with only occasional interruptions by royal expeditions.

Though Saxon domination still had strong tributary elements, we can see the beginnings of a more intensive style of lordship. Slav "families" begin to be donated in large numbers in royal and private charters; it is the transition from tribute-paying peoples to census-paying peasants. Burgwards were set up from the 940s in the Sorbic territories and a little later on among the Hevelli and around Brandenburg as well. These were a form of territorial organization with precedents both in the Frankish empire and among the Slavs: a fortification (Burg) with perhaps ten or twenty settlements dependent on it (ward, a district; compare the modern English word "ward" and its Anglo-Saxon equivalents). The fortification was a place of refuge in time of attack (by other Slavs, by rebels, possibly by Magyars), but it was also tax-point, church, perhaps also court: the basis for a new style of domination. The Slavs were well aware of the change, and they did not like it; but the effective reaction was not to come until 983.

HEGEMONY: FRANCE, BURGUNDY AND ITALY

From the beginning of Otto's reign the strength of the external position which had been built up by Henry I was very evident. To the west and south-west the hegemony of the east Frankish kingdom could be extended even during the initial crisis. In Burgundy, Rudolf II had died in 937; in 939 Otto made a quick expedition to the kingdom to rescue the young king Conrad from his enemies, including Hugo of Arles, king of Italy. He brought him to his court, and thus both saved his kingship and consolidated the tradition of east Frankish overlordship over Burgundy already begun under Arnulf and Henry I. Also reminiscent of Arnulf were Otto's shifting alliances with the leading men of the west Frankish kingdom. At first, and especially during the succession crisis, Otto had tended to
during which the duke of Lotharingia—first Conrad, then Brun—was responsible for the exercise of Ottonian hegemony in west Francia. The deaths of Louis IV in 954 and Hugo the Great in 956 made this all the easier, as the Ottonian widows Gerberga and Hadwig could act as regents for their minor sons Lothar and Hugo and relied on Brun’s assistance to do this. The assistance was not confined to good advice: Brun intervened in west Francia with an army in 958, and before that he and the Carolingians had combined forces to break the power of the Reginarids in Lotharingia. The way in which Brun was able to hold assemblies in Cologne to deal with Lotharingian and west Frankish affairs was reminiscent of the Ottonians’ practice towards the south German duchies: meetings with the magnates of the region were held at a place just outside (Worms for Suabia) or just inside (Regensburg for Bavaria, though Regensburg was the traditional political centre of Bavaria). Verona and Constance would later come to have a similar function on occasions for Italy, as would Basle for Burgundy. In spite of this, one cannot talk of an incorporation of west Francia into the Ottonian empire, or even a lasting entry into the Ottonian sphere of influence. The hegemonial control of the period from 940 to 965 could not in the last resort be institutionalized; it depended on marriage ties and other personal connections. These found their last expression in Lothar’s marriage to Otto’s stepdaughter Emma in 965, but this was followed by the deaths of Brun in 965 and Gerberga in 969, and with these the west Frankish kings began a slow process of emancipation from Ottonian control which was to be accelerated by the Capetians after 987. Already by 967 a diploma of Lothar’s was expressing implicit criticism of Otto’s recent actions in Rome: it praised the Emperor Constantine for having withdrawn from the city and thus freed the papacy from further troubling by royal authority.

Otto’s hegemonial position, his conscious revival of Frankish traditions in his kingship, and his good relations with Pope Agapetus II all pointed to an increased interest in the lands south of the Alps. For the last years of Henry I’s reign and the early years of Otto’s we have only fragmentary hints at such an interest. We have already seen that Widukind’s attribution to Henry I of an intention to go to Rome need not be interpreted as meaning that Henry wanted to have himself crowned emperor. Otherwise we know only that Hugo of Arles, king of Italy from 924 on, is said by Liutprand to have enjoyed Henry I’s amicitia, a relationship comparable to that between Henry and Arnulf of Bavaria or the rulers of west Francia. The implication in one source that Otto went to Italy in 941 is probably an error, but in that year Berengar of Ivrea, a margrave with claims to the Italian throne, and his wife Willa did seek protection at Otto’s court. It was from there that Berengar was able to prepare his successful return to Italy in 945. Following the deaths of the kings Hugo in 948 and Lothar in 950 he became sole ruler. Italian opposition to Berengar now focused on and was led by Adelheid, sister of Conrad of Burgundy, who was Lothar’s widow and as such able to confer something of a legitimate claim to rule in Italy on her new husband, should she marry again (compare the roles of dukes’ widows in the duchies of Suabia and Bavaria). Adelheid, threatened and for a time imprisoned by Berengar, together with her supporters appealed to Otto for help; this was probably coupled with an offer of marriage and of the kingdom. Otto had his own reasons for responding: Berengar had, after all, been his follower, and by acting independently of him in this way had provoked reprisals. In September 951 a powerful German army moved south towards Italy. It had been immediately preceded by smaller expeditions under Henry of Bavaria, who captured Aquileia, and Liudolf of Suabia, who—no least because of Henry’s intervention—achieved nothing and had to recross the Alps to join his father. Whether these events were the last flickerings of the independent “foreign policy” pursued by the south German dukes under Henry I, as they have sometimes been interpreted, or part of a concerted assault by the Ottonian family on the kingdom of Italy, cannot now be decided; probably they were both. Otto’s take-over was smooth. At Pavia in September 951 he took possession of the kingdom by receiving the commendation of its magnates and by marrying Adelheid; Berengar adopted the tactic (not a new one for an Italian king confronted with a rival from north of the Alps) of taking refuge in the Alps and waiting for his opponent to go home. Liutprand of Cremona remarked in a famous aphorism that the Italians always preferred to have two kings so that they could control the one through fear of the other. In the game of tenth-century Italian politics, summoning Otto was not intended to be markedly different from the other requests which had gone to rulers north of the Alps in the previous half-century, to Louis of Provence, Rudolf II of Burgundy, Hugo of Arles himself as well as to Arnulf of Bavaria and

14. Schieffer in Schieffer 1976: 684-5; but note that in that year Otto’s foundation at Magdeburg received a papal privilege, which implies contact between Otto’s court and Rome.
15. Liutprand, Antapodenesi 1.37, p. 27.
Germany in the early middle ages

Berengar of Ivrea. Otto was a formidable figure north of the Alps, but his resources were far from unlimited. Tentative approaches to Pope Agapetus II about an imperial coronation were met with a firm refusal, for much the same reasons as had moved Agapetus’s immediate predecessors to deny such a coronation to Otto’s predecessor Hugo. Neither the pope nor the Roman aristocratic factions behind them, led by Alberic, “prince of the Romans”, were interested in a potential overlord for the city. One of the effects of the politics of the first half of the tenth century was the restoration more or less of the state of affairs which had led to the Carolingian interventions of 755-6 and 774; the ruler of northern Italy threatened rather than controlled papal rule in central and southern Italy. Unlike some of his Carolingian predecessors, Otto was evidently not able in 951 to think of enforcing a coronation. Perhaps the revolt of 953 was already casting its shadow, but it is more likely that Otto’s followers did not want to contemplate being away from their home base for too long. Whatever the reason, Otto set off for Saxony with his new bride in February 952, leaving his son-in-law, Conrad the Red, to complete the subjugation of the kingdom. Conrad did this by coming to terms with Berengar, and although the latter accepted Otto’s overlordship at Augsburg in the summer of 952 this was in effect nullified by Otto’s other preoccupations: the uprising of 953-4 and the Magyar and Slav campaigns of 955. Nominally a sub-king, Berengar, after the short-lived intervention by Liudolf in 956-7, was able to behave as if he were the unchallenged king of northern Italy, and to continue the Drang nach Süden already initiated by his rival and predecessor Hugo. In 959 it was no longer an Italian aristocratic party but Pope John XII who appealed to Otto to rescue the papacy from Berengar’s tyranny, much as Stephan II had done in 754 and Hadrian I in 773.

This time Otto prepared his ground thoroughly before setting out from Germany in the late summer of 961. Besides making sure that the size of the army would be adequate, he had had his young son Otto crowned and acknowledged as his successor, and something like a regency was established under the two Ottonian archbishops of Mainz and Cologne. The German army arrived at Rome at the end of January 962; Otto was crowned emperor on February 2, and in return confirmed the Carolingian “donations” to the papacy in a solemn privilege, the Ottonianum, on February 13. In a noteworthy imitation of Byzantine practice, a specially luxurious copy of the privilege was drawn up on purple-coloured parchment in gold letters. Otto then turned to deal with Berengar, and soon also

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with the pope, John XII, who had invited him to Italy and crowned him but then repented. Berengar and his wife were captured easily; like Desiderius nearly two centuries earlier they were taken into exile north of the Alps. John XII, who had allied with Berengar’s son Adalbert, presented more difficulties; he was deposed by a Roman synod in December 963, and a candidate acceptable to Otto and supported by some Romans, Leo VIII, elected in his place. Leo was driven out of Rome by an uprising inspired by John XII, and after John’s death the Romans elected a new pope of their own, Benedict V, contrary to the arrangements Otto had made and had confirmed by oath after John’s defection. Before Otto returned to Germany in July 964 he was able to impose his candidate. Benedict V was deposed and sent into exile at Hamburg. The reputation for holiness he enjoyed in Saxony after his death was an implicit criticism of Otto’s action, which went further than any Carolingian had dared to go.

Until comparatively recently it could be debated whether the Italian and imperial involvement of the Ottonians was a Good Thing or whether it hindered German development, but this question, whose answers were heavily influenced by the contemporary debate about the nature and purpose of a unified Germany, no longer seems very interesting. To ask what the imperial coronation meant at the time is more profitable, but it is a question which cannot have a single answer. Even contemporaries debated the subject, though the debate is known to us now more through inference and allusion than through direct statement. Widukind of Corvey and Ruotger, author of the Life of Otto’s brother Brun, mistrusted the idea of an emperorship which was Roman in nature and conferred by the pope, not least because this would threaten the slightly uneasy compromise of consciousness which had been reached among many of the Ottonian elite, namely that the imperial people of the new empire were the Franks and the Saxons. It was possible to argue that Otto’s rule was already imperial – either because of the hegemonial authority he had exercised for nearly two decades in Europe or because he was a king over many peoples (imperator Romanorum, rex gentium). It was even possible to borrow from antiquity and argue that imperator was essentially a military title and had thus already been conferred on Otto by the acclamations of his victorious army on the Lechfeld. As in 800 the title expressed Otto’s role as protector of the papacy and the city of Rome against its enemies; but in spite of

the Carolingians it is questionable whether one should see Otto as filling an office which had existed at least in principle continuously since the time of Charles the Great, even if it had been vacant since the death of Berengar I in 924. As in 800, the imperial coronation was an event charged with a symbolism whose meaning would have to be worked out afterwards. The difference lay in the fact that 800 had occurred and could be remembered, and Charles the Great was probably more important in the minds of the participants than those rulers in between who had called themselves emperor — though as long as there were real live Carolingians around in west Francia, the Ottonians were somewhat cautious even about Charles the Great, and it was not until after 987 that Otto III and his successors could really begin to emphasize Charles as a predecessor. Otto’s chancery at least was certain that Otto was not a Roman emperor: his title in diplomas issued after 962 was imperator augustus, with a very small number of exceptions which are probably not significant.

It is easier to say what the coronation did and did not do than to say what it meant. It did not, either then or later, imply more than the vogue of supremacy over other rulers, either in eastern or in western Europe. The title of emperor reflected Otto’s hegemonial position, but it did nothing for it. It gave Otto no new powers on his home ground, and by raising the question of the nature of his polity (Saxon? Frankish? Roman?) may even have created difficulties. Some German historians have stressed the importance of the title for the Christian mission to the Slavs (a similar connection has been suggested for the Carolingian imperial title); but Otto I had been able to concern himself with mission long before 962, and can scarcely be said to have increased his efforts after that date. Even the project of an archbishopric at Magdeburg was not brought much nearer. John XII issued a privilege for the new foundation a few days after Otto’s coronation, but Otto’s newly won title did not enable him to capitalize on it (see p. 164). His rule over Italy depended on conquest and his marriage with Adelheid, not on his being emperor, while his rule over Rome depended, as did that of his successors, very largely on his being there with an army. The title did imply a responsibility for the papacy, and this was perhaps its most important aspect; Otto and his successors acted fairly consistently to protect the papacy, though often very heavy-handedly. Otto himself almost certainly had no intention of acting instrumentally, as has sometimes been suggested, of trying to control the papacy in order to give himself additional power over his own episcopate. The popes did not have that kind of power in the tenth century, and nor did Otto’s supposed reliance on the episcopate require them to do so. Otto’s action in coming to Rome was in a sense altruistic; it would probably not have survived modern techniques of cost-benefit analysis. Yet these considerations were foreign to the tenth century. Quite apart from the essentially unknowable question of how far Otto’s piety compelled him to act as he did, there were attitudes which we can reconstruct with more certainty. Otto, as a highly successful member of a comparatively new ruling house, owed himself imperial coronation. This imperative was felt strongly enough at the end of the eighth century by Charles the Great and the circle around him; the existence of Charles’s precedent made the pressures on Otto still stronger. To ask what Otto got from the imperial title is also to ask whether he could have refused it or ignored the appeal for help from John and the Romans, and the answer to that is almost certainly no.

The most obvious and immediate consequences of the title, once Roman affairs had been sorted out, were that Otto’s relations with Byzantium became much more intensive, and that he acquired with the imperial title an interest in southern Italy. This had Carolingian precedents, notably in the reigns of Charles the Great and Louis II of Italy. Moreover John XII, whose position in Rome and central Italy had been in effect never taken over by Otto, had had both contacts with Byzantium and an interest in southern Italian affairs. It was the weakening of his position following his unsuccessful expedition against Capua in 959 which had given the impulse to John and the Romans to appeal to Otto I. Byzantium had before 962 been slowly coming into view on the Ottonian horizon (and vice versa). Byzantine embassies had visited Otto in 945 and 949, for the first time in east Francia since the early years of Conrad I’s reign, while in the 950s the Byzantines had been interested in winning Otto’s help (and that of the Abbasid caliphs in Spain) for their planned attack against the Fatimids in Egypt, as well as in an Ottonian bride for the future emperor Romanus Lecapenus. Otto’s coronation thus took place in a context of rather greater familiarity than Charles’s had done in 800, and the very fact of Charles’s coronation meant that the Byzantines had learned to live with rivals to their emperorship. Yet we do not know what the immediate Byzantine reaction was; the coronation coincided in any case more or less with the accession of a new Byzantine emperor, Nicephorus Phocas.

Otto’s activities in southern Italy from 966 on were aimed primarily at securing recognition from Byzantium (again, there is a parallel with the Franco-Byzantine war along the Adriatic coast
between 802 and 812). The details of the campaigns of 966 to 972 need not concern us here. Both the Lombard and the Carolingian conquests of Italy had stopped slightly more than half-way down the peninsula, leaving a ragged edge before the firmly Byzantine south. The Arab invasion of Sicily in the second half of the ninth century meant that the south was no longer firmly Byzantine and contributed to a further fragmentation of the zone between Byzantine Calabria and the papal patrimony in central Italy: by the 960s there were principalities in Benevento, Capua and Salerno, and while Sicily was firmly Muslim, the Arabs' attempts to set up bridgeheads on the mainland had all been driven back. Byzantine concern for and control over the area varied. Otto's coronation occurred at a time when the emperor Nicephorus Phocas was taking a renewed interest in it, and it looked for a time as if it might come to open warfare between the two empires. Otto's campaigns, together with a change of ruler in Byzantium in 969, produced a temporary rapprochement between eastern and western empire. Byzantine recognition of Otto's empire was expressed in the marriage between the young Otto II and the Byzantine princess Theophanu in 972, even if Theophanu had not been born in the purple and hence did not carry quite the same status in Byzantine eyes as the princes who had been originally asked for. Otto could return north in 972 leaving reasonably stable conditions in both Lombardy and Rome, and on the southern frontier.

THE END OF EXPANSION, 968–83

By the late 960s the new empire seemed to have been re-established on Frankish lines, with a European hegemony based on prestige and authority and backed in the last instance by military power based on tribute-taking. Otto dominated Europe as Louis the German and Arnulf had done. The young Otto II had been crowned as co-emperor by John XIII in Rome at Christmas 967 - the last western emperor to be crowned in his father's lifetime, as Louis the Pious, Lothar I and Louis II had been. The foundation of the new ecclesiastical province of Magdeburg, finally set in motion by the joint synod held by emperor and pope at Ravenna in April 967, not only emancipated the Ottonians from the Rhinish archbishoprics but also placed them firmly in the Frankish tradition as missionary rulers. Otto's control over the church was seen not just here but also in the increasing importance of the royal chapel (though see above, p. 157). There was seemingly little internal opposition left: the death of Wichmann Billung had removed the most serious threat among the Saxon nobility, while the successes of the decade between 955 and 965 (together with a thinning of the ranks) meant that there was enough to go round the surviving male members of the Ottonian family to satisfy all. There was at least the possibility that a new supra-regional aristocracy might be able to emerge, one perhaps not so dominated by Saxons as its predecessor had been by Franks, but having much the same sort of function: linking scattered regions by ties of office and property-holding. Beyond the borders, the continuation and consolidation of the Ottonians' hegemonic position seemed assured: claims had been staked in southern Italy, even if for the time being there was a rapprochement with Byzantium; the kings of west Francia and Burgundy were little more than sub-kings; the kings and dukes to the north and east, in Denmark, Poland and Bohemia, and the kinglets between Poland and Saxony were bound by tribute and other ties to the Saxon empire. All these things were reflected in the great assembly held in Quedlinburg at Easter 973, still remembered forty years later as the apotheosis of Otto I's reign by Thietmar of Merseburg, who entered in his own hand in his chronicle a list of those present: "the dukes Miesco [of Poland] and Boleslav [of Bohemia], and legates from the Greeks, the Beneventans, Magyars, Bulgars, Danes and Slavs", to which should be added the Fatimid and English ambassadors who arrived in the same year.

Otto II had long been king when his father died on May 7 973; Widukind, in the closing sentences of his Res gestae Saxonicarum, describes how the assembled notables once more commended themselves and promised fidelity and aid against all his enemies. This did not come free; nearly a sixth of all the diplomata Otto II issued in his ten years as sole ruler were drawn up in the first six months of his reign. Nor did it last; there were enough enemies of the regime at home and abroad who had waited until the arrival of the new king. As in Otto I's reign, the occasion for the uprising was a feud within the Ottonian house itself. The starting-point was the death of Burchard of Suabia; Otto II appointed Otto, the son of Liudolf of Suabia, and thus affronted Henry of Bavaria, who might have expected to control Suabia through his sister Hadwig.

17. Thietmar II 31, p. 76.