



# The Saxon Expeditions against the Wends and the Foundation of Magdeburg during Otto I's Reign

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## Abstract

*During the Middle Ages, rulers from different regions in Europe aspired to an idea of imperial hegemony over a territory. On the other hand, there were rulers who deliberately refused to be elected as emperors, although their reign showed some characteristics of imperial rule. This essay asks for the reasons why some rulers such as Otto I strove for an imperial agenda and how the expeditions of his margraves across Elbe were legitimized by contemporary writers. According to the idea of universal expansion including both Christians and pagans from all over the world, the Ottonian kingdom became an empire, an intrinsically Christian one, however, which followed the Carolingian model.*

## Rezumat

*În Evul Mediu, conducătorii din diferite regiuni din Europa au aspirat la o idee de hegemonie imperială asupra unui teritoriu. Pe de altă parte, au existat conducători care au refuzat în mod deliberat să fie aleși în calitate de împărați, deși domnia lor arăta unele caracteristici ale conducerii imperiale. Acest eseu cercetează motivele pentru care unii conducători, cum ar fi Otto I, s-au străduit să promoveze o agendă imperială și modul în care expedițiile margrafilor săi dincolo de Elba au fost legitimate de scriitori contemporani. Conform ideii de expansiune universală, ce integra creștini și păgâni din întreaga lume, regatul Ottonian a devenit un imperiu, unul intrinsec creștin, care a urmat modelul carolingian.*

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## Introduction

From the seventh century onwards the exonyms *Wendi* in Latin and *Wenden* in German had been used by the Germanic peoples to refer to speakers of Western Slavic languages, who lived in a vast territory from Holstein in the north to Carinthia in the south. The Wends were located mainly on the eastern cultural and political border of the Carolingian Empire. We know that some Latin authors who wrote about the Wendish Crusade of 1147 (Helmold of Bosau, Arnold of Lübeck, Vincent of Prague, Vincent of

Cracow, Saxo Grammaticus, Otto of Freising or the author of the *Annales Palidenses*) used the terms *Slavi* or *Sclavi*. However, the Wends maintained different cultural characteristics from the eastern and southern Slavs and therefore in this paper we will use the term *Wends*.<sup>1</sup>

The chronicler Adam of Bremen who lived in the eleventh century mentioned the following Wendish tribes: Wilzi or Lutici (between the Warnow and the Oder, up to the Peene), Obotrites or Reregi (between the Bay of Wismar and Lake Schwerin, in Mecklenburg), Sorbs (Upper Saxony, in Lusatia; between the Elbe and Saale), Wagri (Wagria, Holstein), Warnabi or Warnavi (on the Warnow), Polabians (between the Trave and Elbe; around Ratzeburg), Circipani or Zerezepani (between the Recknitz and the Peene), Kicini or Kissini (on the Peene), Redari (right bank of the Peene, around Demmin and Mecklenburg), Rani or Rugians (Rügen), Hevelli or Stodorans (on the Havel), Leubuzzi (on the Oder) and Pomeranians (in Pomerania, between the Oder and the Vistula).<sup>2</sup>

The missionary tradition among some of these tribes like the Obotrites and Polabians is closely linked with the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen. The archdiocese was also responsible for the conversion to Christianity of other northern people such as the Scandinavians. However, its importance diminished after the founding of Magdeburg.<sup>3</sup> The city was mentioned for the first time in the Capitulary of Thionville, issued by Charlemagne in 805. There, *Magadoburg* appears as a fortified customs post

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief analysis of the linguistic interactions between Germans and Wends in the second half of the tenth century, see Mihai Dragnea, "Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Between Germans and Wends in the Second Half of the Tenth Century", *Journal of the Institute of Latvian History*, 2 (110) (2019), forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> *Adami gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. J. M. Lappenberg, MGH SRG (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1876), I. 1; II. 18-19; III. 19, 21; IV. 13, 18.

<sup>3</sup> For the medieval history of Magdeburg, see Ludger Körntgen, "Otto der Große und Magdeburg. Das Heilige Reich und das neue Europa", *PanEuropa Deutschland*, 29 (2) (2006): 18-21; H. Gringmuth-Dallmer, "Magdeburg in ottonischer und staufischer Zeit", in *Der Magdeburger Dom: ottonische Gründung und staufischer Neubau*, ed. E. Ullmann (Leipzig: Seemann, 1989), 52-61; Dietrich Claude, *Geschichte des Erzbistums Magdeburg bis in das 12. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1972); B. Schwineköper, "Die Anfänge Magdeburgs", in *Studien zu den Anfängen des europäischen Städtewesens* (Lindau-Constance: Thorbecke, 1958), 389-450; Albert Brackmann, *Magdeburg als Hauptstadt des deutschen Ostens im früheren Mittelalter* (Leipzig: Schmidt & Günther, 1937).

located on Elbe at the Wendish border. Its purpose was to control the arms trade. Within this system were also few other customs posts such as Bardwick, Schesel and Halzstat.<sup>4</sup>

The Ottonian realm is often described by the historians as a polity “without a state”. It was emphasized that the Ottonians did not have a developed legal system or a bureaucratic apparatus.<sup>5</sup> However, Ottonian authority was exercised in centers such as Magdeburg, Quedlinburg and Werla. Magdeburg was considered an imperial city (*urbs regia*), which reminds one of Charlemagne’s residence, Aachen. The eastern limits of the province of Magdeburg were defined according to the political and geographical context of the time. In the tenth century, the Elbe was for the Saxons what the Rhine was in the ninth century for Carolingians, namely a natural border and the main east-west trade-route of Germany into the Wendish territories. For both the Franks and the Saxons, the control of the two rivers also ensures control over the Wends. This could not be maintained as long as the Wends were not culturally assimilated by adherence to Christianity. The chronicler Widukind of Corvey, a well-informed observer of contemporary affairs, stated that the conversion of the Wends was made possible only after they were conquered by Margrave Gero, who was assigned by Otto I to govern them within a vast territory known as *marca Geronis*.<sup>6</sup> Founding churches and bishoprics was not just a matter of politics and authority, but also an act of piety. Since the king’s right to make war on pagans and other Christians was unquestioned, religious centers like Magdeburg and Quedlinburg were established not by some clergy, but by the Ottonian nobility. Until the construction of St. Maurice’s abbey in Magdeburg in 937, abbeys like Fulda, Regensburg or Corvey were responsible for missionary activity across the Elbe.

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<sup>4</sup> A facsimile of the manuscript was published in *Capitularia regum Francorum*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH L, sectio 2 (Hanover, 1883), I, no. 44, ch. 7, 122-126, here 123. Magdeburg was also mentioned in the anonymous chronicle written in 805 at the Catalan abbey of Moissac.

<sup>5</sup> In this sense, see the work of Gerd Althoff, *Die Ottonen: Königsherrschaft ohne Staat* (Stuttgart: Kohlhanmer, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Widukind of Corvey, *Rerum gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres*, ed. P. Hirsch, MGH SRG, 60 (Hanover, 1935), II, 20.

### Otto's interest beyond the kingdom's eastern borders

The founder of the Ottonian dynasty was Henry the Fowler (Henry I), a descendant of Charlemagne through his mother, Hedwiga.<sup>7</sup> As Duke of Saxony (912-936) and King of Germany (919-936), Henry concentrated his power on Saxony and Thuringia. He did not conceive his reign in a centralized way, but rather in the form of a union in which the stem duchies maintained their autonomy. Henry did not act as a sovereign, but rather as a moral ruler who was formally equal to other German dukes (*primus inter pares*). During his reign, he waged several campaigns in the east, which brought in significant revenues. Early in 929, the joint forces of Henry and Duke Arnulf of Bavaria reached Prague in a sudden attack. The expedition forced Wenceslaus, the Duke of Bohemia, to resume the payment of a tribute first imposed by the East Frankish king Arnulf of Carinthia in 895.<sup>8</sup> After Wenceslaus's submission, Henry started several campaigns into the adjacent lands of the Wends, homeland of Wenceslaus's mother. These were due to the fact that in the meantime, the Redarians from Mecklenburg had organized a raid in the border town of Walsleben. Following the raid, the city was destroyed and the entire population was killed. The raid led to a general uprising of the Obotrites. The coalition was crushed by Henry at Lenzen, a fortified city that served as the basis for the Obotrite raids into the Saxon territory.<sup>9</sup> The chronicler Adam of Bremen tells us that following the defeat at Lenzen, "the Bohemians, the Sorbs, and other Wends, promised to Henry the payment of the tribute, and to God that they would become Christians".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Henry was, through his mother Hedwiga, the grandson of Ludwig II's daughter. Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), 305.

<sup>8</sup> Eleanor Duckett, *Death and Life in the Tenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 48.

<sup>9</sup> For more details regarding the Battle of Lenzen, see David S. Bachrach, *Warfare in Tenth-Century Germany* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2014), 198-205.

<sup>10</sup> *Itemque Behemos et Sorabos ab aliis regibus domitos, et ceteros Sclavorum populos uno grandi praelio ita percussit, ut residui, qui fere pauci remanserant, et regi tributum et Deo christianitatem ultro promitterent.* Adam of Bremen, I, 58.

However, a change in style of rulership occurred between Henry I and his son, Otto I. These changes were gradual and are related to the various ways the two interacted with their *familiares*.<sup>11</sup> Otto's idea of kingship, its role and how it should be represented on earth, involved a reset of the ties with the Saxon magnates as well as the clergy. Historians stated that the first Ottonians had a plan of expansion which aimed at extending the eastern borders. Thus a vast territory between Elbe, Oder, and Neisse would have been incorporated into the Ottonian state. Its inhabitants, the Wends, were converted and integrated into Latin Christianity. In this case we are dealing with both a territorial and religious expansion, as a result of the symbiosis between secular and ecclesiastical interests. Regarding the religious component, the conversion of the Wends during the second half of the tenth century was possible due to the founding by Otto I of the Magdeburg archdiocese and the suffragan dioceses, the model being Charlemagne's integration of the Saxons into the Frankish ecclesiastical organization. Unlike the Franks' ones, the Saxons' achievements were modest. If the Frankish armies stayed longer in Saxony, the Saxon contingents led by margraves did not camp for too long and in significant numbers across the Elbe. The Wendish revolt of 983 ended the Christianization process. In the north-east, the dioceses of Brandenburg and Havelberg were abandoned until the twelfth century. The Ottonians retained their domination only in south-eastern Germany. In the policy of the last Ottonians, the recovery of the lost territories was not a priority. Emperor Otto III (996-1002) consolidated his position against the Hungarians and Poles. Because he made alliance with the pagan Lutici against the Christian Poles, Henry II was criticized by the missionary bishop Bruno of Querfurt. The bishop rebuked the emperor saying that he did not wish to conquer the Lutici and bring them to Christianity, "as the Gospel commands".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Otto I's *familiares* could be members of the *familia regis* or counsellors. Their influence in the territory can be determined according to how close they were to the king.

<sup>12</sup> Bruno of Querfurt, "Epistola ad Henricum regem", in *The Letter of Bruno of Querfurt to King Henry II: On His Alliance with the Pagans*, trans. W. L. North, ed. H. Karwasieńska, MPH, new series, t.IV:3 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1973), 97-106, here 101.

Indeed, it is difficult to prove the existence of a so-called expansionist Ottonian policy in the east. The subjugation and integration of populations are notions characteristic of pre-modern and modern war, and their transfer in the medieval period is problematic. Political communication between the king and the dukes, margraves, counts, influential clerics, and other social communities was governed by unwritten sets of rules of symbolic behavior, traditionally called the *Spielregeln*.<sup>13</sup> The decentralized structure of the Ottonians' governing apparatus made almost impossible the existence of a systematic plan for the administration of the new subject territories. Such measures would have required massive involvement from the Saxon magnates and ecclesiastical authorities. Among their duties was also the collection of revenues (tribute and tithe). Apart from the two taxes, there are no clear indications that the Ottonians intended to extend their political domination in the east. Another argument is the military independence of the Saxon margraves, who could have organized expeditions against the Wends without the king's consent. A common reason was the refusal to pay the tribute and the tithe and the armed revolts against the ecclesiastical authorities. The Saxon margraves could wage war not only against the Wends, but also against other neighbours such as Poland. In 972 there was a massive clash between the Polish troops and the detachments of Odo I, Margrave of Lusatia, who attacked Mieszko's dominions. Following this attack, the Saxon contingents were defeated in the vicinity of a locality called *Cidini* (Cedynia) by Thietmar of Merseburg.<sup>14</sup> Worried by the defeat of his vassal, Otto summoned Mieszko in 973 to Quedlinburg to appear in court in order to solve the dispute. The primary sources do not mention any territorial changes. We only know that in order to keep peace with his *amicus*, Mieszko had to send his son as a hostage to the Emperor's court.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For further details about the Ottonians' governing apparatus, see the work of Gerd Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter: Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, MGH SRG, ed. R. Holtzmann, n.s. ix (Berlin, 1935), II, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Andrzej Pleszczyński, *Poland as an Ally of the Holy Ottonian Empire in Europe Around the Year 1000*, ed. Przemysław Urbańczyk (Warsaw: DiG, 2001), 414.

If the Ottonians have wanted an expansion to the east, as originally thought, why are there no indications in this regard? Expeditions like that in Italy, where armed forces from all over the kingdom participated, did not take place beyond the Elbe. The only expedition to the east was against Poland, conducted by Henry II. Those who had an interest in organizing military campaigns against the Wends were the Saxon magnates, especially those living along the eastern borders. The few Ottonian expeditions against the Wends were in fact led by the Saxon margraves, possessors of remarkable military potential.

From a careful reading of the contemporary narrative texts we find out that the dominant form of warfare consisted of sieges conducted by large Saxon armies. We know that in October 955, after the annihilation of the Hungarians on the Lechfeld, Otto I initiated a campaign against the Obotrites led by *princeps* Stoinef. Yet we also know that the campaign did not aim at a territorial conquest, but rather was a punitive one. The two Billung brothers, Wichmann the Younger (killed later by Mieszko I) and Ekbert the One-Eyed), instigated the Obotrites to organize a rebellion against Otto I. The king sought to defend his legitimacy, which also contested by the Franconian duke Eberhard and the Swabian duke Liudolf, not only in Germany, but also across the Elbe. However, after the defeat, Stoinef was willing to pay the tribute he owed. A similar offer may have been made to Mieszko I.<sup>16</sup> The Saxon chronicler Widukind gives us details about the negotiation between the Saxons and the Obotrite prince, which ultimately failed. Following the campaign, the large Obotrite army (*ingens exercitus*) was defeated on the river Recknitz by the pro-Ottonian Saxon *milites*, and their territory was devastated. Prince Stoinef and hundreds of other prisoners were beheaded.<sup>17</sup> The peace between the Saxons and the Obotrites lasted until 983, when several Saxon contingents led by margraves and the archbishop of Magdeburg tried to suppress the Obotrite

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<sup>16</sup> Gerd Althoff, "Saxony and the Elbe Slavs in the Tenth Century", in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. Timothy Reuter, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267-292, here 282.

<sup>17</sup> Widukind of Corvey, III, 53-55.

revolt and avoid losing the territory conquered in 955.<sup>18</sup> Without any political agreements, in parallel, an anti-Saxon bloc emerged, which grouped together the Wends, the Czechs, and the Bavarians.<sup>19</sup>

Otto was not only a king, but also the Duke of Saxony. This meant that as a king he could delegate the Saxon ducal title to one of his vassal counts. The military command was perhaps the most important of the ducal attributes. Small numbers of heavily armed and mounted warriors (*milites armati; Panzerreiter*) could be commanded by both secular and ecclesiastical magnates.<sup>20</sup> German bishops became pillars of the Ottonian monarchy, acquiring more rights outside the ecclesiastical sphere. Thus spiritual aspirations and pastoral duties came from their role as administrators of the dioceses. For instance, beyond the ecclesiastical attributions, the Saxon bishops could have control of some military personnel. Regarding the military function, they shared similar attributes with the counts, but were subordinated to the duke and margrave. Towards the end of the tenth century, German bishops built fortifications for defence, acting as both spiritual and temporal lords. The fortifications played a crucial role in both offensive and defensive campaigns carried out by the first Ottonian kings with the assistance of the Saxon armies.

In 936, when he had ascended the throne, Otto appointed Count Hermann a margrave (*princeps militiae*), granting him the Saxon march north of the Elbe where the Obotrites lived (Billung March). In this situation, a *princeps militiae* was a leader of the Saxon military vassals, equal to a duke. In king's absence, Hermann was not only the commander of the army, but also an administrator (*procurator regis*) and revenue-collector of Saxony and the Billung March. He was never called a *dux* by the primary sources. Hermann's position was strengthened only after Otto was

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<sup>18</sup> Wolfgang Brüske, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Lutizenbundes: Deutsch-wendische Beziehungen des 10-12. Jahrhunderts*, 2nd ed. (Köln: Böhlau, 1983), 36.

<sup>19</sup> Pleszczyński 2001, 415.

<sup>20</sup> For a study of Ottonian warfare in Widukind's eyes, see David S. Bachrach, "Early Ottonian Warfare: The Perspective from Corvey", *Journal of Military History*, 75 (2011): 393-410, here 395.

crowned as emperor in Rome. His son Bernard inherited and strengthened his position and managed to be recognized as duke of Saxony.<sup>21</sup>

Consistent information about the properties held by the Saxon nobles in the Wendish territory comes from the founding diplomas of some suffragan dioceses of Magdeburg. At the founding of Havelberg and Brandenburg, Otto transferred certain privileges to the new churches, which were under the jurisdiction of the two dioceses. It is possible that most of the privileges were granted to the archdiocese of Magdeburg. According to Thietmar of Merseburg, Archbishop Giselher of Magdeburg (981-1004), who succeeded Adalbert, received from King Henry II a county (*comitatus*) and a benefice (*beneficium*) on the river Mulde,<sup>22</sup> most likely in a former Wendish territory conquered by Henry I in 929. In 958 and 961, Otto added to Hermann Billung's possessions some properties along the lower Unstrut as well as Asendorf, Dornstedt, and Lobitzch.<sup>23</sup> This confirms that Otto had a full range of privileges, which he granted according to his interests. In 965, Otto granted Magdeburg one-tenth of the silver paid as tribute by the five Wendish tribes (Ucrani, Receni, Riedere, Tolensani, Zirzipani) *ad publicum nostrae maiestatis fiscum*. The five tribes were to play an important role in the revolt against the Ottonian rule in 983.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Pope Benedict VII (974-983) offered Giselher a special status compared with the other German archbishops. Thus the cathedral chapter in Magdeburg was organized on the model of the College of Cardinals in Rome and the liturgy performed in the cathedral was correlated with the pontifical one. In this sense, the city on the Elbe mirrored Rome, as did the Aachen of Charlemagne. Through the architectural development of

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<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Arnold, *Princes and Territories in Medieval Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90.

<sup>22</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, IV, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Bachrach, 2014, 31-32, 90.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Lotter, "The Crusading Idea and the Conquest of the Region East of the Elbe", in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, eds. Robert Bartlett, Angus MacKay (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 271.

Magdeburg cathedral, Otto evoked Charlemagne and his success in the fight against the pagans.<sup>25</sup>

### **Magdeburg as a metropolitan see for all Slavs**

Since its foundation, Magdeburg was regarded as a missionary center. Its missionary legitimacy was related to the conversion of eastern neighbors. In 948 two bishoprics were founded, Brandenburg (east of Elbe) and Havelberg (at the confluence between the Elbe and the Havel), from which the missionary activity in the Wilzi (Lutici) territory was coordinated.<sup>26</sup> Some twenty years later, another three bishoprics were created in southern Lusatia: Merseburg (on the Saale), Zeitz (on the White Elster), and Meissen (on the Elbe), responsible for converting the Sorbs.<sup>27</sup> In 968/969, Magdeburg was set up with jurisdiction over the five bishoprics.<sup>28</sup>

The missionary idea was applied not only to the Wends, but also to other Slavs that would have liked to accept Christianity through the missionaries from Magdeburg. In 959, Princess Olga of Kiev asked Otto I to send some clergy to Kiev to preach the Gospel.<sup>29</sup> The German delegation arrived in Kiev in 961 or 962, and was led by the Benedictine monk

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<sup>25</sup> For a short history of Magdeburg cathedral, see Ernst Schubert, "Imperiale Spolien im Magdeburger Dom", in *Herrschaftsrepräsentation im ottonischen Sachsen*, eds. Gerd Althoff, Ernst Schubert (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1998), 9-32.

<sup>26</sup> For a short history of Havelberg diocese, see Fred Ruchhöft, "Eine Analyse der Stiftungsurkunde des Bistums Havelberg aufgrund archäologischer und territorialgeschichtlicher Quellen", *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 52 (2) (2003): 159-190.

<sup>27</sup> For more details regarding the Sorbian paganism and the conversion of the Sorbs, see Matthias Hardt, "Gentilreligion und christliche Mission bei den Sorben (10.-12. Jahrhundert)", in *Dying Gods. Religious Beliefs in Northern and Eastern Europe in the time of Christianisation*, eds. Christiane Ruhmann, Vera Brieske (Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung, 5 (Hannover: BWH GmbH, 2015)), 263-268.

<sup>28</sup> Mihai Dragnea, *Misiune și cruciadă în teritoriul venzilor (secolul al XII-lea)* (București: Etnologică, 2019), 88.

<sup>29</sup> However, Olga accepted Christianity from the Byzantines. For more details about Olga's baptism as well as Vladimir I, see Mihai Dragnea, "Imaginea cneaghinei Olga în Cronica lui Nestor", *Romanoslavica*, 50 (1) (2015): 45-53; idem, "Rusia Kieveană în timpul dinastiei Rurikizilor (sec. IX-XIII)" in *Stat și societate în Europa medievală (secolele XI-XIV)*, eds. C. Neagoe, C. Popescu (București: Ars Docendi, 2013), 141-171.

Adalbert, the first archbishop of Magdeburg (968-981).<sup>30</sup> The outcome of the mission was a tragic one. All Adalbert's companions were slain by the pagans, becoming martyrs. The only one who managed to escape was Adalbert. For this reason, the archbishop's image was strongly linked to the conversion of the pagans.<sup>31</sup>

The announcement of the founding of Magdeburg as an ecclesiastical province was not received with great interest either by the papacy or by Poland. In 968, two years after the conversion of the Polish duke Mieszko I (960-992), the diocese of Poznań was founded. The first bishop of the diocese was Jordan, whose goal was to convert the Poles. In an attempt to secure political independence from the Ottonians, Mieszko passed his domains under the formal sovereignty of the papacy, declaring himself a vassal of St. Peter.<sup>32</sup> Pope John XIII thwarted any intention of Otto to subordinate the diocese of Poznań to that of Magdeburg. This was possible, since Poland was not part of Germany and Mieszko was not the vassal of Otto I. While conquering Lusatia, the Saxon margrave Gero extended his supremacy over Mieszko, who, after being defeated by Gero in 963, became Otto's friend and an important ally (*amicus imperatoris*).<sup>33</sup> The Piasts proved to be valuable allies of the Saxon margraves in their long and exhausting wars against the Wends, whom often they failed to force to pay tribute. During the Piasts, Poland was a duchy (*ducatus*). Only in some cases do the Piasts bear the title of *rex*, thus ruling a *regnum* (Bolesław I,

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<sup>30</sup> Jukka Korpela, *Prince, Saint, and Apostle: Prince Vladimir Sojatoslavič of Kiev, His Posthumous Life, and the Religious Legitimization of the Russian Great Power* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001), 57-58.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Blough, "The Lance of St Maurice as a component of the early Ottonian campaign against paganism", *Early Medieval Europe*, 24 (2016): 360; Albert Brackmann, "Die Ostpolitik Ottos des Grossen", *Historische Zeitschrift*, 134 (1926): 242-256, here 246-247.

<sup>32</sup> Charlotte Warnke, "Ursachen und Voraussetzungen der Schenkung Polens an den heiligen Petrus", in *Europa Slavica—Europa Orientalis, Festschrift für Herbert Ludat zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Klaus-Detlev Grothusen, Klaus Zernack (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1980), 127-177; Darius Güttner-Sporzyński, "Poland and the Papacy Before the Second Crusade", in *La Papauté et les croisades / The Papacy and the Crusades: actes du VII<sup>e</sup> congrès de La Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East / Proceedings for the VII<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Society for the Crusades and the Latin East*, ed. Michel Balard (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 255.

<sup>33</sup> Darius von Güttner Sporzynski, *Poland, Holy War, and the Piast Monarchy, 1100-1230* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), Appendix 2, 231-234. For more details about the political alliances between the Piasts and the Ottonians, see Pleszczynski 2001, 409-425.

Mieszko II, Bolesław II, Przemysł II).<sup>34</sup> In certain situations, Mieszko was forced to pay a tribute, due to the possession of some territories claimed by the Saxon margraves and dukes.<sup>35</sup>

After Mieszko's conversion, the Piast dynasty became the defender of the Church (*defensio ecclesiae*) in the Baltic region, recognizing the authority of the papacy.<sup>36</sup> As they were appointed by God, the Piasts had as objectives the conversion of their subjects and other pagan populations in the Baltic region and the development of the Church's institution through the founding of abbeys and monasteries. On the other hand, the papacy accepted the authority of the Polish dukes for the ruled territory, and recognized the sacred character of the dynasty. Thus, by divine will, the Piasts became “natural princes” of Poland (*domini naturales*).<sup>37</sup>

Regarding the symbolism and attributes of the Piast dynasty, we may assume that the model of inspiration was the Ottonian monarchy. Although formally the diocese of Poznań was subordinate to the papacy, the Polish clergy performed vital functions in the state, which made it directly dependent on the Polish dukes. The clergy promoted the interests of the dynasty, which, according to the anonymous author of the *Deeds of*

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<sup>34</sup> Grischa Vercamer, “Imperiale Konzepte in der mittelalterlichen Historiographie Polens vom 12. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert”, in *Transcultural Approaches to the Concept of Imperial Rule in the Middle Ages*, eds. C. Scholl, T. R. Gebhardt, Jan Clauß (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 322; Miłosz Sosnowski, “Bolesław Chrobry i Karol Wielki - legitymizacja między kultem a imitacją”, *Historia Slavorum Occidentis*, 11 (2) (2016): 147-160.

<sup>35</sup> David A. Warner, “Saints, Pagans, War, and Rulership”, in *Medieval Germany in Plenitude of power: the doctrines and exercise of authority in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Robert Louis Benson*, ed. Robert C. Figueira (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 24; A. P. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom: An Introduction to the Medieval History of the Slavs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 117-118.

<sup>36</sup> For the characteristics of sacral kingship of the Piast dynasty and the relationship with Rome, see Radosław Kotecki, “The idea of 'defensio ecclesiae' and its resonance in earlier medieval Poland (X/XIth-XIIIth century)”, *Roczniki Historii Kościoła*, 4 (2012): 51-84.

<sup>37</sup> Gallus Anonymus, *Gesta Principum Polonorum*, eds. Frank Schaer, Paul W. Knoll, Frank Schaer (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003), I, 19, p. 80. The term appears even later at Vincent of Kraków. *Magistri Vincentii dicti Kadłubek Chronica Polonorum*, MPH, new series, ed. Marian Plezia (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1994), I, 1, p. 5.

the Princes of the Poles, known as Gallus Anonymus, became the interests of the Church they belonged to.<sup>38</sup>

The point at which the plans of the Piast dynasty and of the Church converged was the expansion of Christianity on two dimensions: spiritual and territorial. As for the relationship between the two powers – secular and ecclesiastical – and the missionary character as a result of their collaboration, we can highlight the proximity to the Ottonian model. Poland of the Piasts can be seen as a copy of the Ottonian state, obviously, on a small scale.<sup>39</sup> We believe that the papacy did not approve of with the power relationship with the Ottonians, since Pope John XIII did not accept the subordination of the diocese of Poznań to the archdiocese of Magdeburg. By this action, the papacy somehow forced the Ottonians to accept the existence of a neighbouring independent state. In other words, the pope encouraged the Polish dukes to escape from the political influence of the Ottonians. Furthermore, we are witnessing the attempt to overcome the status of *amicus imperatoris* held by Mieszko I. This should not be a surprise since Mieszko's political significance as an ally was so valuable for Otto I. What we notice is that even after Christianity, the leaders of the various peoples within the Baltic region were not treated equally by Christian authors.

### Sacralization of Ottonian warfare

In Rome, Otto I was crowned as emperor by Pope John XII (February 12, 962).<sup>40</sup> The coronation took place after the king intervened in Italian politics.

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<sup>38</sup> Alan V. Murray (ed.), *The Crusades. An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 498.

<sup>39</sup> For further details regarding the origins of the Polish state within the geopolitical context of the second half of the tenth century, see Przemysław Urbańczyk, "Piast Lands in the 10th Century – Imitatio or refutatio imperii?", in *Das lange 10. Jahrhundert – struktureller Wandel zwischen Zentralisierung und Fragmentierung, äußerem Druck und innerer Krise*, eds. Christine Kleinjung, Stefan Albrecht (Mainz: RGZM, 2014), 71-83.

<sup>40</sup> Adalbert and Liutprand from Cremona gives us a brief description of the event. To these accounts is added a more complete testimony of the coronation *ordo*. For more details, see David Warner, "The Representation of Empire: Otto I at Ravenna", in *Representations of Power in Medieval Germany*, eds. Björn Weiler, Simon MacLean (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 130. Helmut Beumann considers that the coronation would have taken place earlier than 962. Helmut Beumann, *Die Ottonen* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000), 90-91.

Once again a pope had conferred the Roman imperial title on a king, even if it was a Saxon king of the Eastern Franks. After the coronation, Otto called for a synod, which was accepted by the pope. It is very likely that Otto saw in the synod a suitable place to present his imperial agenda, by associating the coronation with the military success against the Hungarians. We may consider that Otto, as a defender of the Church, wanted to convert the Wends, who were to be integrated into his *imperium Christianum*. A first measure would have been the subordination of all Wendish suffragan dioceses to Magdeburg. This is confirmed by Adam of Bremen, who stated that the whole Wendish territory as far as the river Peene was subject to the archbishopric of Magdeburg.<sup>41</sup>

Otto's coronation was closely linked to the foundation of Magdeburg, an imperial city and at the same time an ecclesiastical province. The conversion of the Wends through Magdeburg took place after the military campaign of 963 across the Elbe. The campaign involved two Saxon margraves from the Wendish border, Gero and Hermann Billung. The connection between the two and Otto dates from the beginning of his reign and formed the vital political context for the missionary activity of the Magdeburg clergy. Following the campaign of 963, Gero occupied the region of Lusatia and brought Mieszko I of Poland under royal authority, as Herman Billung brought the two Wendish princes Selibur and Mstivoj.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the conversion was considered both a military consequence, and the result of preaching.

Historians emphasized that Otto I wanted to extend his domination over the pagan Wends. An expansion across the Elbe would have taken place on two fronts: military conquest and cultural assimilation.<sup>43</sup> However it is difficult to confirm the existence of a systematic plan for the conversion

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<sup>41</sup> *Magedburgensi archiepiscopatus subiecta est tota Sclavonia usque Penem fluvium. Adami gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, II, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting, "The Church of Magdeburg: Its Trade and its Town in the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries", in *Church and City 1000–1500*, eds. D. Abulafia, M. J. Franklin, M. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 132-133; Brackmann 1937, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Althoff 1999, 278; Claude 1972, 129-150; R. Holtzmann, "Otto der Große und Magdeburg", in *Aufsätze zur deutschen Geschichte im Mittelalter*, ed. R. Holtzmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), 1-33, here 3.

of the Wends elaborated and coordinated by the clergy of Magdeburg. This does not mean that there were no sporadic attempts at conversion in the context of the tributary relations between the Saxons and the Wends. The conversion would thus have been resulted from military campaigns that forced the Wendish leaders to pay tribute, and not from the divine will exercised through preaching. We believe that the Ottonians were aware of the need to sanctify wars with the eastern neighbors. The clergy were aware of this as well, and linked the necessity of conversion to tributary relations and political dominance. In this sense, the Ottonian symbolism regarding the pagans should be analyzed. The hereditary symbol of the Ottonian dynasty was the Lance of St. Maurice. When he selected his second son Otto as his successor, Henry I gave him both the lance that he had and the kingdom by hereditary right. The seals of the two are related in type to those of their Franconian predecessors, both including a representation of a lance.<sup>44</sup> Gallus Anonymus, who wrote in the early twelfth century, tells us that after he came to reign, Otto III gave King Bolesław I of Poland not only the diadem, but also a few relics like that of the nails from Christ's cross, and a copy of the lance of St. Maurice. In return, Bolesław gave him an arm of the martyr St. Adalbert, which had recently been deposited in Gniezno cathedral.<sup>45</sup> The Aquitanian chronicler Adémar de Chabannes mentioned that the emperor founded basilicas and monasteries commemorating St. Adalbert both in Aachen and in Rome.<sup>46</sup>

The lance of Maurice was also a symbol of the resistance of the Theban legion in front of the pagans at Agaunum. The cult of St. Maurice played an essential role in mobilizing the armies that fought against the Wends and Hungarians. Otto held the holy lance at the Battle of Lechfeld when he defeated the Hungarians. According to both Widukind of Corvey and Thietmar, the holy lance was the guarantee of victory for Otto against

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<sup>44</sup> It was emphasized that before the Investiture Controversy there is no evidence to connect the holy lance with the cult of St. Maurice. Therefore the importance of the lance lies in its connection with the royal family. For more details about the significance of the holy lance for the Ottonian lineage, see Howard L. Adelson, "The Holy Lance and the Hereditary German Monarchy", *The Art Bulletin*, 48 (2) (1966): 177-192.

<sup>45</sup> Gallus Anonymus, I, 6, pp. 36-37.

<sup>46</sup> Adémar de Chabannes, *Chronique*, ed. Jules Chavanon (Paris, 1897), III, 31, pp. 153-154.

the pagan Hungarians.<sup>47</sup> This is why during the Middle Ages, St. Maurice was often venerated in the missionary context, for his fight against the heathen and martyrdom in the name of the Christian faith. Therefore we consider that Otto I's devotion to Maurice was linked to the Saxon expeditions across the Elbe. The necessity of converting the Wends also involved a military component, who was supported by the Saxon magnates and the ecclesiastical authorities. In the name of the emperor, who acted as a defender of the Christian faith, Saxon margraves had the legal and moral right to wage war against all the enemies of the Church.

Any attempt to convert the Wends must be understood through the tributary relations with their leaders. The beneficiaries of the tribute paid by the Wends were the Ottonians, the Saxon nobility and the ecclesiastical authorities. The main interest was to obtain tribute from the Wendish leaders. For Ottonians and Saxon merchants, it was tribute that demonstrated the fidelity of the Wends, even if they were pagans or apostates. On the other hand, for the Church the Wends' political status depended on maintaining Christianity and paying tithes. In several cases, external warfare secured a considerable part of the first Ottonians' income. This often took the shape of booty, slaves and tribute. From the Wends, we can assume that the main sources of income were the tribute and the tithe. If the tribute from the Wendish leaders had been a significant part of the Ottonians' income, surely in the Wendish territories there would have been a permanent presence of the Saxon armies. For the Ottonians and their Saxon vassals like the margraves and counts, the tributary relations with the Wendish leaders were sufficiently advantageous. In addition to paying the tribute, the Wends also offered military support in various regional conflicts. The lack of a permanent military presence and the hesitation in suppressing the Wendish revolts like that in 983 confirm the Ottonians' lack of interest in maintaining Christianity across the Elbe. The payment of the tribute was not affected by conversion. For the Saxon nobility it mattered less if the Wends followed the Christian rituals. The Wends were perceived as Christians as long as they paid the tribute and the tithe. The tribute could have come from some Wendish Christian leaders, who would have

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<sup>47</sup> Widukind of Corvey, III, 46; Thietmar of Merseburg, II, 10.

ruled over a majority or partially pagan population. In this case, the ecclesiastical authorities would have lost the tithe and could not have exercised their religious duties. It is possible that the tribute was collected by the clergy in the suffragan dioceses, or by laymen acting for the Church (Saxons and Wends). Therefore a revolt against them would have meant the interruption of payment of the tribute. The situation is confirmed by the primary sources, which sometimes do not indicate a coordination of military and ecclesiastical activity, but rather a clash of the two forces. It is very likely that the founding of Magdeburg would have taken place in the context of an ecclesiastical expansion, which could have provided a source of income for the faithful archbishops and bishops of the Ottonians. This is by no means a component of an expansionist plan to the east, but a political and economic reality of that time.

The sacralization of conflicts with the rebellious Wends was *par excellence* the work of the German clergy. The earliest testimony regarding Maurice's identification with Ottonian kingship dates back to 1008 and belongs to Bruno of Querfurt, the Saxon missionary bishop. In a letter to King Henry II (1002-1024), Bruno ironically described Maurice's "sacred lance" (*sacra lancea*), standing next to the "diabolic banners" (*diabolica vexilla*) of the Lutician god, Zuarasiz (also known as Redigast).<sup>48</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg tells us that in 961, the relics of St. Maurice were deposited in the cathedral of Magdeburg, and the whole ceremony was received with great honor by the local population.<sup>49</sup>

The association between Ottonians and St. Maurice dates back to the time of Otto I. The saint was associated with the struggle against paganism and the martyrdom of Theban soldiers, who died for faith in Christ. It is very likely that the figure of St. Maurice played an important role in both the conversion and conquest of the Wends. His *sacra lancea* became a

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<sup>48</sup> The letter was reproduced in facsimile by Karwasińska 1973, ns 4, fasc. 3, 97-106, here 101-102 and by W. Giesebrecht, *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit*, Vol. 6 (Leipzig, 1885), II, 702-705, here 704.

<sup>49</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, II, 17. However Thietmar does not mention the *translatio* of St. Maurice's relics or the royal penance performed on this occasion. For more details about this issue, see David A. Warner, "Henry II at Magdeburg: Kingship, Ritual and the Cult of Saints", *Early Medieval Europe*, 3 (2) (1994): 135-166.

powerful visual instrument of early Ottonian proselytism. Only in this way can we explain the deposition of his relics in Magdeburg cathedral, the spiritual heart of the ecclesiastical province of all Slavs. The earliest visual source of Ottonian devotion to the Mauritian cult is an ivory plaque, dating from the second half of the tenth century. It is possible that the ivory plaque adorned one of the shutters of Magdeburg cathedral altar, dedicated to St. Maurice. On the plaque is represented the saint, sitting on the left side, behind Otto I, who bends to hug him. The emperor holds in his hands a model of a church (probably Magdeburg cathedral), pointing to Christ.<sup>50</sup>

### **Contemporary views on the founding of Magdeburg**

The earliest reference to the foundation of Magdeburg is a letter of Archbishop William of Mainz, the bastard son of Otto I,<sup>51</sup> sent to Pope Agapetus II (946-955) shortly before his death. In the letter, William opposed the founding of an archdiocese in Magdeburg, as this would harm his primate and position within the church of Eastern Francia. The idea of founding an archdiocese for missionary purposes came after Otto I's victory against the Wends in 954-955, and the defeat of the Hungarians at Lechfeld shortly after that.<sup>52</sup>

The administrative status of the Magdeburg ecclesiastical province is confirmed both in the documents attesting the founding of the archdiocese and in the records of the Synod of Ravenna on April 20, 967. In Ravenna, Pope John XIII issued a document laying down the status of the archdiocese of Magdeburg, to which the dioceses of Brandenburg and Havelberg were subordinated. In the document, Otto I was associated with the emperor Constantine the Great, the founder of Constantinople. In mid-October, Pope John XIII issued three other documents listing a series of

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<sup>50</sup> For further details about the cult of St. Maurice under the Ottonians, see Blough 2016, 338-361.

<sup>51</sup> Otto's illegitimate son William, the future Archbishop of Mainz, was born in 929 to a captive Wendish noblewoman during the campaign across the Elbe led by Henry I. Sara McDougall, *Royal Bastards: The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800-1230* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 100.

<sup>52</sup> Mayr-Harting 1992, 130-131.

privileges granted to the archbishops of Magdeburg. Based on these documents, the archbishops could invest other bishops in the suffragan dioceses. The official foundation of the archdiocese of Magdeburg entered into force only on October 18, 968.<sup>53</sup>

The founding of Magdeburg as an ecclesiastical province was viewed differently by contemporaries. Depending on their interests, they positioned themselves either on Otto's side or against him. William was not the only prelate hostile to Otto's founding of Magdeburg. Bishop Bernard of Halberstadt shared a similar position. His dissatisfaction was due to the fact that Magdeburg would also include territories from the diocese of Halberstadt. For the Archbishop of Mainz, the founding of a new archdiocese equated with the loss of his ecclesiastical authority. The conflict between the archdiocese of Mainz and the Ottonians dated back to the time of Otto's father, Henry I. Prior to his coronation as king in 919, Henry increased the Saxon military strength by supplying knights<sup>54</sup> with confiscated domains from the archdiocese of Mainz and other nobles, who had supported King Conrad I (911-918).<sup>55</sup> Otto I's coronation as king at Mainz, the main ecclesiastical center of *Francia orientalis*, gave legitimacy to the Ottonian dynasty. His bastard son could have provided warrant for conflict resolution. It is possible that William's opposition to Otto's plan to make Magdeburg an ecclesiastical province was fuelled by the Franconian nobility.

Nevertheless, the opposition of the two prelates did not in any way affect the founding of Magdeburg. From Widukind of Corvey we learn that the two prelates died at the beginning of 968, at an interval of only a few

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<sup>53</sup> *Papsturkunden von 896-1046*, ed. H. Zimmermann (Vienna: ÖAW, 1989), II, no. 177, I, no. 177; Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 37-38; Philippe Levillain, *The Papacy: An Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2 (Routledge: New York and London, 2002), 841.

<sup>54</sup> During the Ottonians, the term *miles* 'knight' (plural *milites*) designated a well-equipped rider. Later, the term gained social connotations. For more details on the evolution of the term in the Ottonian state, and the meaning that authors assign to the term, see David Stewart Bachrach, "Milites and Warfare in Pre-Crusade Germany", *War in History*, 22 (3) (2015): 298-343; Joachim Bumke, *The Concept of Knighthood in the Middle Ages*, trans. W. T. H. Jackson, E. Jackson (New York: AMS Press, 1982), 38.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard Bachrach, David Bachrach, "Saxon military revolution, 912-973?: myth and reality", *Early Medieval Europe*, 15 (2) (2007): 217-218; Althoff 1999, 268.

weeks.<sup>56</sup> Otto's intervention in the election of successors confirms his intention to secure support from the new prelates. Widukind was irritated by Otto's plan, since he was silent about Magdeburg church and its importance in the Saxon history. It was emphasized that the sensitivity of the Saxon chronicler can be attributed to the fact that in his intention to build a monastery dedicated to St. Maurice, Otto brought monks from abbeys like Trier and Gorze, and not from Corvey.<sup>57</sup>

Contemporary writers who mentioned the Ottonian political agenda were usually clerics and monks, and as such, they were not the most objective observers of conflicts between the king's wishes and ecclesiastical interests. Most often, the ecclesiastical community of which they belonged was involved in the disputes. Therefore such writers had to place themselves and their writings within these conflicts. In this sense, they had to adopt a specific style of narration which would either legitimate the king's involvement into ecclesiastical affairs or deny it.<sup>58</sup> An example is Widukind, the Benedictine monk from Corvey, who did not provide information on the founding of the archdiocese of Magdeburg by Otto I. Even though he and Henry I were named *imperatores*, Widukind does not mention the coronation of Otto in 962. The silence of the chronicler contemporary with the events has been interpreted by historians in various ways.<sup>59</sup> It is possible that Widukind's work was commissioned by an important member of the Ottonian dynasty, such as Archbishop William of Mainz, Queen Matilda or Otto's daughter, Princess Matilda. The chronicle

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<sup>56</sup> Widukind of Corvey, III, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Dietrich Claude 1972, 30-31.

<sup>58</sup> In disputes between royal and church powers, royal penance played the role of a quasi-legal argument, especially when the status and prestige of the community to which the writer belonged were involved. For more details, see Iliana Kandzha, "Royal Penance as Quasi-legal Argument in Ecclesiastical Disputes: Representation of Ritual in Ottonian Historiography (919-1024)", *Annual for Medieval Studies at CEU*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz et. al., Vol. 23 (Budapest: Central European University, 2017), 35-47.

<sup>59</sup> Timothy Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages C. 800-1056* (Farnham: Routledge, 2014), 148-175; J. Laudage, *Otto der Große (912-73). Eine Biographie* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2001), 212; Sverre Bagge, *Kings, Politics, and the Right Order of the World in German Historiography c. 950-1150* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 39.

could have served as a teaching tool for Princess Matilda, in order to prepare her for an important position in state government.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, Widukind was a voice of the Saxon opposition to the founding of Magdeburg, which Matilda, as the most important person in Saxony in the absence of Otto (*domina imperialis*), had to accept. Thus, Matilda could have avoided internal conflicts. We cannot exclude the fact that the omission of Otto's coronation was an editorial accident of the chronicler.<sup>61</sup> Prior to the conversion of the Saxons by Charlemagne, their relationship with the Franks was a friendly one (*societas et amicitia*). After they adopted Christianity, the Saxons and the Franks became "brothers and as if one people in Christian faith".<sup>62</sup> Otto's election as king by the *populus Francorum atque Saxonum*, in Aachen, established the connection with the Carolingian Empire. Otto's imperial legitimacy was considered an act of divine will, after which the Ottonians received *Francia orientalis*. In Widukind's conception, Otto's reign was already imperial. This was made possible by Otto's military supremacy in Europe, and the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural character of his state (*rex gentium*).<sup>63</sup> For Widukind, Otto was a king of both the Franks and Saxons. He was crowned in Aachen by the Archbishop Hildebert of Mainz, "a Frank by birth" (*Franco genere*). The archbishop gave him the sword of kingship with a solemn declaration of his divine calling to become a Christian soldier. During this ceremony, Otto was dressed in a tunic tightly wrapped around his body, "according to the Frankish custom" (*tunica stricta more Francorum induto*).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Matilda was the abbess of Quedlinburg founded by her grandmother, whose name bears it. Gerd Althoff, "Widukind von Corvey. Kronzeuge und Herausforderung", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 27 (1993): 262-272.

<sup>61</sup> For more details, see Steven Robbie, "Can Silence Speak Volumes? Widukind's Res Gestae Saxonicae and the Coronation of Otto I Reconsidered", *Early Medieval Europe*, 20 (3) (2012): 333-362.

<sup>62</sup> *Saxones igitur possessa terra summa pace quieverunt, societate Francorum atque amicitia usi*. Widukind of Corvey, I, 14. *Ob id qui olim socii et amici erant Francorum, iam fratres et quasi una gens ex Christiana fide, veluti modo videmus, facta est*. Widukind of Corvey, I, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Widukind of Corvey, III, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Widukind of Corvey, II, 1.

The idea of a Carolingian inheritance did not go away after the death of Otto I. In 1000, the Emperor Otto III opened the tomb of Charlemagne in Aachen. How could this gesture be interpreted? Could it be Otto III's intention to establish the cult of Charlemagne in Aachen? Around 1030, the Aquitanian chronicler Adémar de Chabannes stated that Otto III wanted to exhume the body of Charlemagne from under the floor of the Aachen cathedral. The emperor did not know exactly where Charlemagne's grave was. After three days he received a sort of vision, in which it was pointed out a special spot on the floor which had to excavate. Among the objects found there was a golden throne said to have belonged to the Frankish emperor, and which was donated to Bolesław I of Poland.<sup>65</sup>

### Conclusion

One of the most widespread misconceptions among historians is that in medieval Europe the connection between religion and warfare found its full shape only after the emergence of the crusading ideology. However, as primary sources have shown us, since the Carolingian period, warfare had much in common with religion when it came to the moral and legal justification of military conquests. During the second half of the tenth century, the Ottonian culture of war was influenced by secular and ecclesiastical customs derived from Carolingian and Biblical traditions. The nature of the warfare has determined both the Ottonian influence on the church and the power ratio between Saxony and the other German duchies. The Saxon margraves (later dukes) could at any time launch an expedition against the Wends without the king's consent. They acted as vassals of Otto and therefore they represented his authority across the Elbe. For the ecclesiastical authorities, the eastern expeditions were often seen as a sort of holy wars against the pagans. The moral and legal justification was not only the killing of Christians, but also the refusal of paying tribute and tithe and recognizing of the ecclesiastical authority. Thus the warfare across the Elbe was what united the king and the Saxon magnates and thus it was necessary to increase and expand the Ottonian royal power in Germany.

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<sup>65</sup> Adémar de Chabannes, III, 31, pp. 153-154.

Consequently, in the Ottonians' governing apparatus, spheres of competence between what is now perceived as ecclesiastical and imperial powers were often interrelated. The Ottonians had much support within Saxony, especially from bishops, abbots and a part of the Saxon magnates. This practice was in fact a response to the tendency of the lay lords to build up their local power at the expense of the king. Since the clergy were theoretically celibate, we can assume that they did not always make their ecclesiastical offices hereditary. Therefore the Ottonians could maintain more control over them according to their own interests. The previous rebellions and civil wars against the Ottonian rule in other duchies of *Francia orientalis*, suggested that the legitimacy of the dynasty was questionable. In order to impose their *imperium* and secure domination among the other German dukes, the Ottonians had to exercise military power in other duchies as well as to extend their realm across the Elbe.

The Ottonian dynasty also took the status of divine authority. Their main interest was to secure communication with God and obtain supernatural support in their political actions. By building monasteries, setting up bishoprics, and converting the Wends, the Ottonians strengthened the legitimacy of their rule through the Christian faith. The Duchy of Saxony, however, had no central administrative capital as the Carolingians had. Aachen still retained symbolic significance for the Ottonians, but it was located so far west that its power as a central administrative centre no longer existed. The most significant Ottonian political and ecclesiastical center was Magdeburg, an archdiocese founded by Otto I which supported the conversion of the Wends in theory and practice. Its ecclesiastical province included the suffragan dioceses in the Wendish territory.

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