

ABSTRACT

DECENTRALIZED STABILITY: HOW THE ELECTOR PRINCES OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE KEPT A STABLE STATE DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

Although there is plenty of scholarship on the Holy Roman Empire's existence during the Early and High Middle Ages from English and American authors, considerable detail is unexplored about the internal affairs and political mechanics of the elector princes, the distinct members who kept stability within the empire for centuries. Scholarship tends to focus on the politics and conflicts brought about by the emperors in their struggle for imperial authority against the papacy in Rome. This study summarizes existing research and utilizes the primary sources collected within the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* series, focusing on the roles of the six elector princes within the empire. Looking at both new and older scholarship on the Holy Roman Empire, information on these elector princes can be found meshed within the broader topics being discussed. This fresh analysis of these primary sources provides a clearer understanding of the many roles played by the elector princes before the signing of the Golden Bull in 1356 A.D. This insight into the politics, procedures, and regional duties of these six men provides an improved understanding of the inner workings of the elector princes. This study aims to bring greater insight into the roles of the individual princes that created stability within the empire and who executed their imperial authority rather than focusing on and investigating the usual relationships between the emperor, the leaders of other kingdoms, and the papacy. This project seeks to contribute further research toward our knowledge of Central Medieval Europe.

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May 2022

DECENTRALIZED STABILITY: HOW THE ELECTOR PRINCES OF
THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE KEPT A STABLE STATE DURING
THE MIDDLE AGES

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in History

in the College of Social Sciences

California State University, Fresno

May 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my thesis committee for urging me to be the best writer and version of myself I could be during the completion of this project. Without their guidance, this project would never have been possible. I would like to thank Dr. Mark Arvanigian for aiding me in my search and interests in medieval history, Dr. Kristi Eastin for allowing me into her Latin 1A class over two weeks late into the semester which allowed me to pursue my graduate degree through this work, and Dr. Lori Clune for providing consistent positivity and drudging through the rather dry topic of medieval history.

I would also like to give special thanks to my parents and sister, Bruce, Kathy, and Brittany Hartman, who consistently provided their support throughout this endeavor. To my grandparents, Steve and Raye Previte, who kept me with a positive attitude during the lowest points of this work and reminded me of my drive to pursue history. To my best friends, Nicholas Oaks and Brandon Richardson, whose time listening and commenting on my ramblings about the Middle Ages for these past years provided some semblance of sanity to my madness.

Finally, I would like to thank the many professors I have had in my experience as an undergraduate and graduate student, forcing me to become a better writer throughout these past years. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Maritere Lopez, who made my first semester as a graduate student the hardest and most unforgettable, as it forced me to better myself and my writing. And to my friends and colleagues in the Learning Center at California State University, Fresno, for their never-ending positivity and support throughout my time there as a History and Government Tutor.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Holy Roman Empire, a name given to the conglomeration of autonomous German principalities in Central Europe during the Middle Ages, located in modern day Germany, utilized the Germanic traditional moot system for the election of their kings. Upon the death of a king, Germanic leaders gathered and debated the selection of his successor. This traditional election stemmed from late antiquity as the German tribes chose their leaders through a moot gathering and vote of warlord chiefs. Unlike its feudal counterparts in Europe, the Holy Roman Empire kept this tradition to avoid the dangers of hereditary succession, such as Charlemagne's kingdom splitting into three sections upon his death. Although this medieval election system technically lasted from 936 A.D. (the election of Otto I) until the dissolution of the Empire around 1806 A.D. (during Napoleon's conquest of Europe). After the rise of the Hapsburg dynasty in 1273 A.D., the election process became largely defunct as the Hapsburg emperors followed a strict hereditary dynasty. This investigation, then, is confined to the initial stages and height of the Holy Roman Empire's power. There occurred instances of instability between the Roman Catholic Church and the crown in this period, where minor rebellions by princes were furious with the outcome of an election.

Between the election of Otto I as King of East Frankia in 936 A.D. and the death of Frederick Barbarossa II in 1250 A.D., the fight over the autonomy and sovereignty of the German princes reached its height. The men that elected the emperor, the elector princes, came from two distinct backgrounds, split between great bishops and secular princes. Among the princes, three stood out during the High Middle Ages: the Duke of Saxony, the Count-Palatine of the Rhine, and the Margrave of Brandenburg. All hailed from important regions within the empire, and all commanded the loyalty of significant numbers among the titled nobility within their regions and could dominate the weaker

princes without. The dukes of Saxony portrayed an image of military power within the empire, whether through their support of the crown in wars or for mobilized defense, while the count-palatine of the Rhine used his powers of the local judiciary to secure prestige and the loyalty of the local populace. The margraves of Brandenburg in the east made for a secure eastern border as well as a later launch point for imperial pilgrimages into the Litho-Slavic regions of eastern Europe. Of course, they did not always collaborate for the common good, with friction commonplace. However, their positions as imperial electors added still further layers of complexity to their already fraught relationships.

Indeed, feuds amongst them often originated not from routine territorial claims but from electoral politics. The Prince-Archbishops of Mainz, Cologne, and Trier all benefitted from their electoral roles, enhancing both their prestige and authority within the empire, along with their standing among the bishops and with the Pope. Their great prestige and their strong historical links with Rome and the heirs of Charlemagne gave them precedence over all other ecclesiastics in Central Europe. While a long parade of emperors burned through unimaginable political capital waging war with Rome over the right to appoint these influential imperial archbishops, the inability of the emperor or the papacy to impose clarity on the issue of appointment proved influential across Europe. This inability for clarity on appointment served as an example of the limits of imperial sovereignty, yet simultaneously also reinforcing the papacy's relatively weak claim to ecclesiastical empire even as its Reform Movement (the creation of the German that became the Imperial Church) claimed greater authority over the papacy than had ever been wielded. In all, imperial electors in the period helped shape the political landscape of both church and state, as they sought to balance imperial and papal requirements with the very desirable retention of their political independence.

Questions about the electors and their roles within the empire remain. How did these princes, secular and ecclesiastical, come to wield sufficient influence to merit their inclusion in this process? Why did it matter that this alliance of principalities chose electors, an elaborative process to select their kings, rather than simply following a hereditary, dynastic line? While I sifted through the record available in Church documentation, decrees, chronicles (spanning from Creation to the Last Judgement), and biographies, scholars of the Middle Ages focus on Providence as their base theory when describing the histories of the empire and the legacy of former leadership. Other sources are biased, as the relatives of the leaders tended to write their accounts. An example of this bias appeared in the writings of Otto of Freising on Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Otto was Frederick's maternal uncle and was keen to look after his legacy.¹ The Roman Catholic Church and scholars that wrote many of these sources remain anonymous. In contrast, others, like Otto of Freising, were close to their sources during their writing and often were related.

Chapter two reviews the scholarship about two major topics that make up the heart of knowledge about the Holy Roman Empire: the political mechanics that drove the empire and the structure of unity among the German peoples throughout the Middle Ages. In understanding the political mechanics within the empire, scholars look to the titles created during the Frankish conquest of Central Europe in late antiquity. These titles were the basis through which many of the princes and ecclesiastical leaders obtained their local power. This local power later translated to important duties throughout the empire, while other minor lords were locked within their duchy or appointed territory. Others found themselves in the imperial court and became overseers over enormous regions of

¹ Otto of Freising and Rahewin, *Gesta Friderici I imperatoris*, Ed. Roger Wilmans, MGH SS 20 (Hanover, 1868).

the empire. These same members of the imperial court and local leadership developed individual and native cultures within their regions. These native cultures added distinctiveness to the ways in which certain leaders interacted with imperial authority, as emperors sought changes and the centralization of power. Relationships between these specific leaders made or broke the imperial structure, making it either easier or harder for emperors to impose their authority over the numerous autonomous German principalities.

The third chapter covers the roles, duties, and regions controlled and operated by the secular electors and their importance as electors of the Holy Roman Emperor. Section one follows the duties of the margraves of Brandenburg while positioned on the frontier and within the imperial court. As a margrave served in the far reaches of the empire, the importance of this figure and the authority of the man in charge of the frontier played a vital role in holding the east intact. Section two investigates the counts-palatine of the Rhine and their role on the empire's western border. He controlled the western border territories, playing critical roles in diplomacy with the Burgundians and the Kingdom of France. The counts-palatine's lands were rich in religious connections and political intrigue, including the importance of their position within the imperial court. Section three explores the role played by the military center that comprised the duke of Saxony. The duke's lands were central within the Holy Roman Empire, and the duke found himself in a centralized place within a decentralized imperial system. While the duke controlled a strong military presence within the empire, he found himself in rebellious tussles during certain power transfers and moments of weakness with emperors such as Henry IV, compromising the prominent place the duke maintained within the imperial system. As military leaders and usual candidates within the election system, Saxon dukes held immense influence among imperial nobility and could exercise that power during the congregation of the princes.

The fourth chapter examines the relationship of the ecclesiastical electors with the rest of the empire, their relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, and their influence on the Imperial Church. These electors doubled as a stabilizing force and a dividing influence, as relations with the Pope and specific emperors tested their loyalties. Section one investigates the Prince-Archbishop of Trier and his role as a center of wealth and prestige. Trier's archbishop held a strategic region within the empire, allowing them a tight claim to religious legitimacy. This fight for higher legitimacy was standard while dealing with the Prince-Archbishops of the Holy Roman Empire. Section two inspects the rival region of the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne. This archbishop held a claim large enough to rival that of Mainz for ecclesiastical power. The questions surrounding primacy status stem from coronation questions and disputes of ancestral claims to legitimacy for the primary position of crowning the German king. Section three discusses the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz and follows the struggles presented in holding the position of the primate ecclesiastical authority. From having an enormous expanse of territory to fighting over claims of legitimacy, the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz held special powers over other archbishoprics in which his home city, Mainz, was the place in which elections and coronations were held.

Scholars covering the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages acknowledge the process of the election of a new emperor but offer few explanations on the proceedings themselves or discussions of the electors. Even the inner workings of the empire are not fully addressed within the scholarship. Scholars tend to focus more on the major events, such as the Crusades or the Bubonic Plague, rather than the internal dynamics of the empire itself. The individual princes' political motivations and regional interests are overshadowed by their minor moments within imperial politics or their status, either siding with the emperor or the Roman Catholic Church. While modern scholarship focuses on the relationship between the papacy and the emperor, after the

coronation ceremony, there is little exploration of the decision of the electors and the amount of politicking that characterized the entire election process and its effect on the internal regions of the empire. The King of the Germans symbolized unity between the German princes. The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire functioned as an embodiment and unifying presence for the empire and the Roman Catholic Church within the German territories. The autonomy that the principalities enjoyed also acted as a separating force on the empire, depending on the leadership of the specific elector in question. The emperor's relationship with his principalities and with the Church created a vital bond that allowed the removal of a dynasty and avoided the empire's dissolution. The best example of this comes from the question of royal succession after the death of Otto III in 1002 A.D. when a new dynasty took power.²

Questions of royal succession and its process are lightly handled within modern scholarship. If anything, minor coverage of the mechanisms calls for a rigorous analysis of the existing scholarship in addition to revisiting the primary documents and what they do indeed tell us. As I investigated the sources available and examined the works of scholars of Germany during the Middle Ages, I realized that an investigation regarding the political mechanics of the medieval empire in Central Europe became evident. The primary sources focus on major players, emperors, and kings, but I also found mention of the specific princes and their relationships with the crown. From there, a window opened into the lives and authority held by those electors. So, it is here that this investigation commences, down a path to explore the roles of the individual princes that later became powerful electors during the beginning and height of the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages.

² Geoffrey Barraclough, *Mediaeval Germany, 911-1250: Essays by German Historians* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1939), 55.

CHAPTER 2: SUMMARIZATION OF POLITICAL MECHANICS AND UNITY SCHOLARSHIP ABOUT THE “MEDIEVAL EMPIRE”

To understand the concept of German political mechanics, elections, and unity that existed in the Middle Ages, we must also understand the underlying ideas behind the politics of medieval Germany. Connections made by the emperor to prominent princes and prince-archbishops within Germany proper determined the relationship the emperor held with not just territorial leadership but the relationship between the emperor and the papacy as well. Taking note of these events as to their importance and impact on the system at hand led to the rise of unique mechanics of governance within Central Europe in the Middle Ages. Traditional scholarly discussion of Germany in the Middle Ages is a complex task that looks through the sources between Otto’s unification of the Empire and the end of the reign of Frederick Barbarossa II in 1250 A.D. How imperial authority of the Holy Roman Emperor governed the land was complex. Unlike their French and northern European neighbors, imperial authority established by the Holy Roman Emperor after his election based itself on social interactions with influential princes and prince-archbishops, causing either increased internal tensions or a state of unity within the empire.

In *Medieval Germany: 1056-1273*, Alfred Haverkamp sheds light on conditions and connections set by German princes within the high Middle Ages.³ The primary function of Haverkamp’s work is to explain the regional differences in the Holy Roman Empire. Haverkamp argues for the importance of imperial authority within the German territories of the Holy Roman Empire, an already complex history of Germany within the Middle Ages, and notes the reforms that later allowed the success of many principalities to work together for protection. In Joseph Canning’s *A History of Medieval Political*

³ Alfred Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany, 1056-1273* (Oxford, England; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Thought, 300-1450, the author focuses on the development of political changes throughout Latin Europe, beginning with the dominance of a new Christian Europe and ending with the legacy of the medieval papacy and the rise of “early modern territorial monarchies” as new political discourse began to open.⁴ Anne Latowsky, in her book *Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800-1229*, argues that although the flow of imperial authority stretched to German kings during the High and Late Middle Ages, Charlemagne remained the principal figure for the later emperors’ claims to power and title while still holding onto German lineage.⁵ Frankish titles and their legitimacy later caused infighting between the Prince-Archbishops and other princes, as legitimacy tied itself to regional power. These three works cover the unique political mechanisms that arose through the German reignition of Charlemagne’s imperial vision of a Christian Europe.

In *The Origins of Modern Germany*, Geoffrey Barraclough investigates the combination of German and Christian culture that provided a balance of power within medieval German principalities.⁶ Through the influence of Frankish culture left over from the Carolingians and Charlemagne’s spread of Christianity east in Central Europe, the Germans unified, and through the election of Otto as King of East Frankia, more regions began to fall under Otto’s control where the imperial vision became reborn. In Benjamin Arnold’s *Princes and Territories in Medieval Germany*, Arnold investigates the division between the different princes and their duties within their respective territories; this allowed the establishment of the concept of legitimacy within the Holy

⁴ Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁵ Anne A. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800-1229* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

⁶ Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany* (New York: NY, W. W. Norton Company, Inc., 1996).

Roman Empire.⁷ Through an established and accepted legitimacy, key leaders in the empire held together their regions and the people within it. Without this legitimacy the chances of rebellion and disorder increased. In *Feudal Germany*, James Westfall Thompson considers the different native cultures of each region within the Holy Roman Empire and how they preserved specific mannerisms and customs left over from Frankish rule.⁸ Thompson hosts examples of bouts of unity and disunity within the medieval “empire” and how the different German principalities and their leaders worked together or fought each other regardless of the consequences of the centralizing imperial structure.

Haverkamp describes the imperial power held by the German kings and how their power reached down into the region of the Mediterranean.⁹ Imperial authority and politics began to split during this time, gravitating towards the southern reaches of the Holy Roman Empire and making Italy the powerhouse of German kings. Latowsky, agreeing with Haverkamp, states that this meant that emperors had to find ties to Frankish kings to gain any type of recognition and claim the authority needed to rival the papacy and rivals princes.¹⁰ The concern and importance of imperial authority resulted in the mixing of the new reforms of the papacy through the strength of the Salian monarchy from the rule of Henry III through Henry V.¹¹ After the death of Henry V, imperial authority shattered for a short time, as a new type of electoral monarchy formed under the emperors Lothar III and Conrad III. Haverkamp notes that during these series of struggles for imperial authority, the Salian monarchs had their own problems when dealing with their home territories. A relationship between the nobility and the monarchy was requisite

⁷ Benjamin Arnold, *Princes and Territories in Medieval Germany* (Cambridge: England, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁸ James Westfall Thompson, *Feudal Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928).

⁹ Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 11.

¹⁰ Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, 153.

¹¹ Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 17-19.

to governing such an expansive area in the High Middle Ages. Haverkamp examines the relationship between the noble families, the fiefs controlled by the many princes within the central territories of medieval Germany, and the hereditary rights of the royal lines that would later change the foundations of lordship within the Holy Roman Empire. Haverkamp provides examples of how strict order and attempts to restrict the mobility of the ruling classes became a challenge for the emperor, as territorialization became a hindrance to order, leading to many rebellions usually taken up by the Saxons against the process of centralizing imperial authority.¹²

Canning and Latowsky focus on the longer-lasting impacts of the political mechanisms pressed together to revive the imperial idea, the establishment of a Roman and Christian empire refashioned through Charlemagne's Carolingian Empire after Otto I's coronation in 962 A.D.¹³ Canning connects the period of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, showing that the political structures of Europe went through many changes including those of heavy religious sentiments. Religion, in this case, acted as a basis for a large number of other influences involved in the making of medieval kingship. One of the problems encountered by Canning is that political thought during the Middle Ages had complicated definitions as there was a mix of political theory and religious influences depending on the location of the culture within Europe. Otto wanted to establish a post-800 A.D. view of imperial authority, which derived from the transfer of empire from the Greeks to the Germans, using the Greeks as an example of a crumbling foreign nation aiding the further legitimacy of the German lineage in control of the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁴ According to Latowsky, the Holy Roman Empire hoped to establish its own

¹² Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 112, 331-2.

¹³ Canning, *Medieval Political Thought*, 74-81; Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, 15-18.

¹⁴ Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, 211-2.

universal authority without the drawback of the papacy and the risk of authoritative conflict with the Pope.

Haverkamp discusses the relationship between imperial authority and the papacy. The Holy Roman Empire's relationship with the Church became more complicated as time progressed, as with the Investiture Conflict (the rivalry between emperors and Popes, starting with Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII over the ability to appoint bishops in the eleventh and twelfth centuries), Haverkamp points out the more connected relationship the crown of the Holy Roman Empire had within the papacy and the knightly orders established during this time. Haverkamp follows the close relationship between imperial authority established by Barbarossa and his struggles with the papacy.¹⁵ After losing Sicily, the established relationship between the Papacy and the imperial crown faltered as a power for supremacy between the two kept them in conflict for the next century and throughout the rest of the Staufen dynasty's rulership of the empire. Canning shows that the barbarians of the north understood over time through conquest from the west and Christian missionaries that they saw God as the "ultimate source of royal authority," which aided in shaping the way the Christian rulers of late antiquity came to rule by the "Grace of God."¹⁶ This understanding of rulership, that the king was the vicar of God on Earth in France and England, aided in shaping the defining structures of the theocratic kingships to come in the Middle Ages. The true ideals of empire and imperial authority came from the crowning of Charlemagne as Emperor of the Romans in 800 A.D. as an imperial title. Canning demonstrates how this rise in the reignition of the idea of a "Rome-based emperorship" expanded throughout medieval Germany and began with the establishment of a new style of imperial authority beginning with Otto I in 962

¹⁵ Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 151, 158.

¹⁶ Canning, *Medieval Political Thought*, 17-19.

A.D.¹⁷ Only after Otto II accepted the title of Roman emperor did a sense of Christian emperorship emerge that the line of Germanic emperors followed, attempting to establish legitimacy and their ties to the Roman Catholic Church.

Canning compares the several types of government systems established during the Middle Ages and brings them into perspective. Other scholars tend to focus on the papal relations between the Pope and the emperor, while Canning looks at the political structure surrounding medieval governments. Canning's work is a broad look at the political thought in Europe, like the claims of imperial authority held by the Germans to hold onto the crown once held by Charlemagne. Latowsky shows that in the eleventh century, there rose a thought among political thinkers that Charlemagne was "an imperial protector that had been ordained by God and granted by the Roman people, without any mediation by the papacy," in which these theorists worked against the powers of the papacy.¹⁸ The Holy Roman Empire hoped to establish its own universal authority without the hindrance of papal intervention and the risk of authoritative conflict and eventually picking political fights with the Pope. Through this lens, Canning also investigates the attempts of emperors to attain a claimant to universal authority through Latin Christendom.¹⁹ Latowsky, looking at Frederick II, details the lengths that a newly crowned emperor made to establish his legitimacy for his empire and gain the favor of the papacy to cement that sense of legitimacy. Frankish authority and legacy often led to squabbling amongst the different princes of the empire. The idea of imperial power and legitimacy tended to make or break the unifying structure set within the empire through the emperor's imperial authority and between the prominent members of the imperial court.

¹⁷ Canning, *Medieval Political Thought*, 74-78.

¹⁸ Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*, 9-10.

¹⁹ Canning, *Medieval Political Thought*, 80-1.

Barraclough introduces how Otto I unified his new imperial state in Central Europe after 955 A.D. The inner German principalities found themselves with a sense of security. This sense by the frontier principalities gained potency after several victories against the Slavic tribes in the east. The systems of governance began to centralize authority throughout the usually autonomous principalities.²⁰ This allowed for a united front against Otto's enemies, whether in Lombardy or Germany, after fighting two civil wars. There began a state of pressure on imperial authority after Otto's coronation and the newly established title of Emperor.²¹ The only major backlash once arriving back within German territory came from Liudolf of Swabia, who became disinterested in imperial authority's reach into the autonomous nature of the German princes. Arnold, backing Barraclough's point, shows that the use of Frankish titles allowed for the semblance of legitimacy to the new German kingdom.²² However, some of those powers had limitations, especially in that the emperor could not control the Roman Catholic Church, causing fights to come over the appointment of German bishops within Germany and the northern territories of Italy. However, Thompson takes a different direction from Arnold and Barraclough, unveiling the consequences of combining the many distinct cultures under one "unified" banner. Many principalities did not get along with one another and often vied for power and titles.²³ Although all of the central regions hailed from the same formation of titles and positions of the Franks during the creation of their respective duchies, the princes often fought over territory, legitimacy, and violation of customs.

²⁰ Barraclough, *Origins*, 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²² Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 79.

²³ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 171.

To maintain stability within the empire's interior, the emperors navigated and negotiated with the different leaders around the empire. Barraclough examines the hardship faced by the many emperors attempting to establish control of the interior through imperial authority, clashing directly with the autonomous nature of the princes.²⁴ This legacy caused problems for emperors attempting to usurp local control and centralize authority, attempting to strip away the autonomous nature of the princes tended to have disastrous consequences. The fiercest resistance to the concentration of imperial authority came from the Saxons, who saw themselves as "true-born" free men.²⁵ The Saxons despised any type of feudal law that put them in a position that seemed lesser than other men. Arnold posits that the ecclesiastical Arch-Chancellors of the empire held the territories together. The three Arch-Chancellors held the empire's authority in check through their positions within the imperial court and serving as Arch-Chancellors allowed them to keep the realm within the Church's reach.²⁶ Through the eventual creation of new duchies, started by Conrad III and later implemented by Frederick Barbarossa, Arnold qualifies the success of imperial authority throughout the High Middle Ages within the Holy Roman Empire. These moves later compromised the traditional meaning of a duchy, as the title's weight within imperial politics began to collapse.²⁷ This led to imperial intervention so that rivaling areas, according to Arnold, did not fear their neighbors, knowing that their territories enjoyed the protection of imperial authorities. Barraclough, however, does add that with a lack of a purely centralized system within the empire. Through constitutional changes during the reign of Henry IV, administrative innovations later caused a rise in tensions between the free nobility and imperial

²⁴ Barraclough, *Origins*, 320.

²⁵ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 180-2.

²⁶ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 81.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98-9.

authority.²⁸ Enforcement and breakdowns in imperial authority allowed the various German principalities to remain fundamentally autonomous. However, the cooperation and the estrangement of certain leaders from the emperor's authority caused regions to depend on their local leaders rather than a purely centralized system that could never establish authority over them.

These electors carried on a purpose and position that placed them in critical roles throughout the empire. The electors holding these key roles allowed a decentralized empire to become more centralized, while those princes fought to keep their local autonomy. Although it may seem simple to lump the electors into basic two categories, it is the best way to investigate and observe each of the electors individually, giving a better understanding of their independent roles within the empire. Following cultural and political norms (characterized through their positions and stations throughout the empire), the secular electors held regional and military powers that the ecclesiastic electors could not assemble. The ecclesiastical electors fought each other for legitimacy and primacy of their positions and clashed with the secular side of the electors and the emperor for spiritual authority. The spiritual electors also tied themselves closely to Rome whenever their positions seemed under threat and found that siding with the Pope occasionally gave them the upper hand in their own personal fights or created a dividing line between the emperor on ecclesiastical interference.

²⁸ Barraclough, *Origins*, 84-5.

CHAPTER 3: THE SECULAR SYSTEM

Bulwark in the East

The eastern expanse of the Holy Roman Empire was constantly in disputes with the non-Christian Slavic tribes. After the establishment of the Brandenburg and Billung marches, much of the northeastern territories consolidated under a single regional leader, the Margrave of Brandenburg. The title given to a noble and leader of a bordering territory, the Margraves of Brandenburg held back the pagan Slavs threatening the eastern reaches of the empire as well as quelling the worry of raids that could reach the interior of the empire. The raids from the Slavic and Polish regions tested the ability of the March of the Billungs and assessed the ability of a Margrave to protect his region, as well as the authority conveyed by their title and position. The Margrave acted as a steadfast guardian against the eastern threats and allowed the empire multiple excursions into the Slavic territories for conquest and the conversion of the Slavs to Christianity.

The area of Brandenburg, located on the northeastern frontier of the Holy Roman Empire, bordered the non-Christian Litho-Slavic kingdoms in the east. The eastern-most border of the march lay on the River Oder, just past the town of Stettin where the Oder intersects with the River Spree. To the west, it bordered Saxony, among the most important secular regions of the empire, a military power and the birthplace of several early emperors.²⁹ Also to the west was Holstein, itself a marcher territory bordering the Kingdom of Denmark to the north. Indeed, the Margrave of Brandenburg had historically served as a leading bulwark against Scandinavian raiders – whether Dane, Swede, or Norwegian – all of which had long raided German lands through Denmark.³⁰

²⁹ *Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, Ed. Theodore Sickel, MGH *Dipl. Frederick I* 795 (Munich, 1884), 360-3.

³⁰ Benjamin Arnold, *Medieval Germany, 500-1300: A Political Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 46.

Brandenburg's western border was split by the River Elbe, the main artery of trade and of great strategic import. To the south were the smaller marches of Thuringia and the "East March," which bordered both the Polish and Slavic lands to the east. By virtue of their small sizes and populations, both were traditionally dominated by Brandenburg and her Margraves, their *de facto* overlords. Otto III used the northern regions of the empire to launch pilgrimages into the Litho-Slavic eastern portions of Europe.³¹ If diplomacy were out of the question, Otto III would not hesitate to move into these areas with military intervention. Militarily it seemed more sensible to safely secure the eastern reaches of the empire, and this was a way to launch Otto's pilgrimages to Christianize Polish tribes.³² It later became the duty of the margrave to protect the Christianization campaigns of the emperors. These campaigns were launched from this region as they were the perfect entry points for Christianization where the pilgrimages could gather supplies or possibly military resources before heading into the east.³³ The margraves were in general concord in their defense of the eastern marches, in the long and absorbing Christianization efforts in Pomerania, Eastern Prussia, Poland, and Lithuania – the latter still very much incomplete and uncertain during the High Middle Ages.

The legitimacy of the Margraves of Brandenburg seems to have been manifold, but it was, in general, the result of their history, function, and unique role in the empire from an early date. Initially among the great Carolingian counts of East Francia under Charlemagne, the margraves enjoyed much of the same long, customary authority as their peers elsewhere in the empire. Long tenures, allied with successful marriages and the establishment of a single familial line lasting centuries, provided added stability and

³¹ Peter H. Wilson, *Heart of Europe: A History of the Holy Roman Empire* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 205-6.

³² Gerd Althoff, *Otto III* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 46-8.

³³ Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 212.

prevented any loss of authority through regnal discontinuity. Moreover, the Margraves of Brandenburg also enjoyed the unique benefit of having a singular imperial purpose, a result of their days of the Frankish regime, protecting the realm from the non-Christian lands to the east and north. Indeed, the very title of “margrave” signified the entrusting of special responsibility to its holder, unique amongst the imperial nobility: a margrave was entrusted with the defense of one of the empire’s largest frontier regions, or “Marches.” More critically was that the Margrave of Brandenburg was entrusted with the exceptionally perilous northeastern imperial frontier or march. Continuity and success in defending the empire on its eastern flank led to the consolidation of their authority there. Located far from the centers of imperial authority and faced with a unique and perilous set of military challenges, the Margraves of Brandenburg were bejeweled with a commensurate level of autonomy in their region, perhaps greater than any other count in the empire. Margraves were also, of course, expected to retain a military force sufficient to their task, and at times they controlled a virtual standing army – something of a novelty for the period and, like their unusual autonomy, a real mark of distinction amongst their peers. In fact, both contemporary princes and writers occasionally remarked upon these very facts – sometimes critically. The Saxons, during the Salian dynasty, relied heavily on the might of the margraves in Brandenburg, stopping any retaliating Slavic tribes from entering and damaging the interior regions of the empire.³⁴ Yet, perhaps because of their unique role as the indispensable defender of the east and despite the envy of other counts – clerical and secular – the status of the Margraves of Brandenburg rarely ebbed during the period. This speaks loudly to their crucial role, and the nature of that responsibility not only in defending Brandenburg but also in

³⁴ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 121-5.

maintaining a stable buffer zone between Saxony and the wild east beyond imperial borders.³⁵

Another way in which the Margraves of Brandenburg maintained control of their region, while also warding off frequent attempts of other princes either to gain the distinction themselves or usurp that of Brandenburg, was to assume control of the neighboring March of the Billungs and the so-called *Ostmark* (East March), thus exercising significant feudal authority in both.³⁶ In doing so, the counts of Brandenburg could plausibly describe themselves as *dux et marchio*.³⁷ The margraves not only fended off encroachment from rival counts in the marcher lands under their authority but in fact increased their standing within the empire, likely the result of their unique, critical responsibility defending imperial lands in the north-east.

In due course, these lands became wealthier, more populous, and of new strategic import. The northeastern region became essential as jumping-off points for new expeditions into the east, ones which eventually paved the way for the Baltic Crusades and the formation of the Teutonic Order, as Christian bishops and the Order itself regularly launched missions into Polish and Lithuanian territories from their bases along the Baltic and Pomerania.³⁸ As the Romans had seen the “Germans” as barbarians from the north and east, so now did the Germans consider the Slavic peoples to their north and east. This extension of territory and power allowed for the Archbishop of Magdeburg and the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz to expand their archbishoprics and press the Christian faith into the Litho-Slavic northeastern territories. Through the German Church, Otto III

³⁵ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 123.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁷ *Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, Ed. Theodore Sickel, MGH *Dipl. Otto I 76* (Munich, 1884), 156.

³⁸ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 105.

set up a new archbishopric in Poland as a spearhead of further Christianization within the northeastern territories.³⁹ This followed Otto's cosmopolitan reforms and his focus on the eastern frontier of the empire between 995 A.D. and 1000 A.D. The Margrave's duty then befell to these reforms as the Slavs did not find these policies, and those of the later emperors like Henry II, satisfactory to the culture of the region, later leading to revolts. The German princes cast a negative light on the Slavic peoples and their barbaric culture, painting them as the empire's enemy. Slavic tribes led raids into the empire's territories and even harried its heart. Saxons mustered their army to put down the Slavic incursion, which forced the Margrave into a position that acted more than the guardian of the northeastern territory. As relationships with the Slavs soured under Henry II's border reforms in the east, a revolt in 1018 A.D. led to the pillaging of the Brandenburg region which resulted in priests being slaughtered and the inhabitants taken and sold as slaves along the Baltic Coast.⁴⁰ Along with the Saxons, the Margrave of Brandenburg often worked with the Church to Christianize the Slavs, barbarian heathens to the Christian population living within the Germanic principalities of Central Europe.⁴¹ This created great tension on the eastern side of the empire as the Margrave became the chief defense against the Slavic threat after 1127 A.D. when leaders of the march began closing ties with the nobility of the empire. These responsibilities allowed the Margrave to gain power within the imperial court to which he gained imperial authority over that which he retained as Margrave.

Owing largely to his rising importance in the marches, the status of the Margraves of Brandenburg rose within the imperial court. The office of Arch-Chamberlain to the emperor was made their personal hereditary honorific, which helped them to influence

³⁹ T. F. Tout, *The Empire and the Papacy, 918-1273* (London: Rivingtons, 1924), 45-6.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 407.

⁴¹ Barraclough, *Origins*, 260-5.

the flow of royal patronage and more easily stay in touch with the main currents of imperial court politics. It also served to elevate the counts of Brandenburg to a formal status above that of other counts, by virtue of imperial recognition of their great import and their long history of vital service. The margraves remained so until being made imperial electors following the signing of the Golden Bull in 1356 A.D.⁴² However, this was simply formal ratification of the margrave's long-held supremacy amongst the secular nobles of the east. That supremacy recognized him, formally, as the leader of the eastern nobility and defender of the frontier there, while simultaneously granting him the power to consolidate and re-organize the region using a system of much greater and more formal authority.

The Golden Bull's formalizing of arrangements, however, was in many ways simply a recognition of the margrave's strategic importance: without the Margrave of Brandenburg and his armies, the eastern territories were vulnerable to invasion by the Slavic tribes, and would thence subject the Duchies of Saxony and Swabia to much greater peril.⁴³ In that sense, while the margrave's time as a formal elector of the Holy Roman Emperor did not come until the fourteenth century, he was nonetheless an influential figure before that point, participating in the custom of imperial affirmation of prospective imperial candidates for some time since the tenth century. His vital role in the ongoing project of imperial defense had long been recognized as a region flourishing and as a safe eastern border for the empire. And moreover, in the age of Crusading, he was also a sharp spear in the outreach, expansion, and potential Christianization of the East European steppes, so crucial for the expansion of the Roman Church and in bringing so many Polish, Litho-Slavs and Prussians into the Catholic fold. This came from Otto III's

⁴² Barraclough, *Origins*, 320-1.

⁴³ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 123; Helmold, *Slavenchronik*, MGH *Dipl. Lothar III* 66 (Munich, 1884), 102.

dream of making Poland and its territories confederate states of the empire with varying status in attempts to assemble a Roman style of empire.⁴⁴ Serving as both a leading marcher count on the eastern frontier and holding a key position in the imperial court gave the Margrave of Brandenburg specific privileges not often associated with the other leaders of the border territories in the east. His position became favorable to the imperial court as many of the early emperors had to deploy through Brandenburg to enter the eastern frontier in any form. The Margrave dealt firsthand with the Slavs on the other side of the River Elbe, also having to reap the consequences of their resentment during the reign of Henry II, especially after the previous Saxon emperors, Otto I and Otto II, had brutalized the eastern Slavs through military campaigns to safeguard the region.⁴⁵ Providing direct protection for the Saxon Duchy gave the northeast of the empire stability and protection from invasion, and likely enriched it and made possible its contribution to the leadership of the German people.

Consistent with the pattern elsewhere in Europe, the responsibilities undertaken by the Brandenburg margraves were enormous, coinciding with a greater prerogative. Margraves were appointed by the emperors throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, the first line of defense against the Litho-Slavs and other groups along the vulnerable eastern frontier of the empire, especially in Saxony, Bavaria and Carinthia.⁴⁶ The appointment of the Margrave of Brandenburg took place during the March of the Billungs in 936 A.D. as Margrave Gero I became the first local noble to take governorship of the territory.⁴⁷ This later included the territory of the North March that

⁴⁴ Frederick Heer, *The Holy Roman Empire*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 47-8.

⁴⁵ Herbert Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2 (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 9-11.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 122.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 186-7.

held the city of Brandenburg. Otto I essentially created the march lands and office of margrave there with his victories over the Magyars, the local Slavic inhabitants, in the 930s A.D.⁴⁸ He then expanded the march by moving into the Slavic region directly east of the province of Hamburg-Bremen, simultaneously making the Margrave of Brandenburg the manager of an extremely diverse region, which included, *inter alia*, Wagrians, Polabians, Redarians, Wilzians, and the Hevellians. The tenuous situation this entailed necessitated a commensurate increase in marcher authority, in that region which was conceived of not only as a defensive stronghold but was also to be the principal staging ground for further eastward expansion by the emperors' armies.⁴⁹ For example, most of the important campaigns of conquest and conversion waged against the Litho-Slavs initiated from the province of Brandenburg, testimony to the intentions of the Ottonian emperors for the territory's role in quelling the "Slavic threat". Indeed, through the margrave of Brandenburg Otto I was able to establish and define a northeastern border of the Holy Roman Empire, a militarized buffer zone that could provide the rest of the empire with early warning of Slavic and Polish (or Scandinavian, or later, Mongol) incursions. As the militia leader of the frontier lands, the Margrave of Brandenburg substantially transcended their original remit under the Billung family as a wielder of lordship-by-proxy for their feudal lords, the dukes of Saxony; they consolidated their power and emerged as great lords and imperial electors in their own right, a status which grew out of their crucial role as the first line of defense against risings within the march, and more crucially as bulwarks against outside attacks from the east.

⁴⁸ Josef Fleckenstein, *Early Medieval Germany* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1978), 137.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 213.

Judicial Service in the West

As Brandenburg's authority within the empire was on the rise, resulting chiefly from its margrave's role in organizing imperial defense on the dangerous eastern and north-eastern frontiers, another lay figure was rising to prominence in the far-more placid western march. The Count-Palatine of the Rhine had long been the leading noble in and around Franconia and the region of the Rhine Valley, which was then the western frontier of the empire and bordered the duchy of Burgundy and the Kingdom of France. It was ultimately the palatine status, and remarkably contiguous nature, of the count's holdings that proved critical in their imperial prominence. Within their palatinate, they exercised a variety of plenipotentiary powers of unusually wide-ranging legal and political scope, allowing them for example to settle within their own law courts the disputes of even their greatest subjects-tenants, generally without any further redress. This extensive jurisdictional reach especially was provided and continued to be tolerated, with the understanding that it remained a steadfast center of imperial authority on the western frontier. Indeed, the counts for their part provided stability for centuries, until the crisis brought by a disruption to the count palatine's hereditary line that led to direct imperial intervention and the subsequent grant of the lands and title to a junior member of the imperial family.

The territory of the Rhine Palatinate was indeed extensive. It included territory along all the great expanse of the Upper Rhine River, which flowed through modern Alsace-Lorraine and stretched to the north-western borderlands of the Alps, skirting the duchy of Burgundy before pressing even into the lower Rhône River Valley of France. This gave the count-palatine wide overarching authority over the duchies of Lower Lorraine, West Franconia, Swabia, and that part of Upper Burgundy which fell within imperial borders. This unusually large jurisdiction was, of course, the result of a unique set of historical outcomes. The title and authority of the "Count-Palatine" emerged from

the ashes of the old Franconian nation. By slowly expanding their legal and customary authority, they successfully stabilized that anarchic situation and even enjoyed limited success in unifying its far-flung regions – sufficient to allow the region to eventually be incorporated into the Holy Roman Empire as its western frontier, instead of remaining with the duchy of Burgundy, joining one of the nascent Italian duchies to the south, or being absorbed into the Kingdom of France west of the rivers Meuse and Mosel.

Nonetheless, as the counts-palatine of the Rhine surely benefitted from their own ancient prerogatives and customary power, as well as the wealth and authority within their region, they similarly faced competition from others with similar claims throughout their sprawling territory. Not only did they compete for regional power with a variety of wealthy local nobles in consolidating their authority, but they were faced with the unique authority of the great archbishops, who in addition to their ecclesiastical responsibilities were also significant landowners and politicians. Because the Rhineland Palatinate contained within it the cities which served as the capitals for the empire's three Prince-Archbishops, the region was frequently the site of competition and feuding, not only between palatine authorities and their local subjects but also between the counts-palatine and the great ecclesiastical powers of the empire.⁵⁰ As the counts-palatine held the local power in the region, imperial resources merely made an impact while the counts-palatine became the political centers of their regions. They had the structural management power through traditional styles of administration.⁵¹ Yet the ancient foundations which underpinned the authority of the counts-palatines, and their single-minded focus on maintaining and extending their ruling legitimacy, combined to preserve their supremacy

⁵⁰ *Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, Ed. Theodore Sickel, MGH *Dipl. Lothar III* 15 (Munich, 1884), 58.

⁵¹ Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: the Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 120-3, 247-50.

in the region. Chief among these was his customary authority, and the ancient foundation of that authority under the Carolingians.⁵² The very title of “Count-Palatine” was itself derived from old Frankish tradition and identified its holder as feudal baron of the first rank, as well as elevated status amongst the empires many counts and secular nobles. He was especially powerful along the western frontier, with those close to the border of the Burgundian Duchy and the Kingdom of France, both to the west.

Yet the status of the counts-palatine as leaders on the empire’s western frontier was not the only reason for their enduring authority there. In their domain, the Count-Palatine were also powerful judicial figures, another benefit of their origins as managers within the Frankish Empire. They retained their former function in the empire following its reinstatement under the Ottonians, exercising not only his feudal authority via his own courts but also oversight of those of the emperor within his vast jurisdiction.⁵³ This meant that the count-palatine held significant authority over the western aristocracy, especially with regard to land disputes and matters of jurisdiction.⁵⁴ This brought about frequent questions over the legitimacy of that authority, and over the exact nature of the imperial jurisdictional structure – one that is not unique to the imperial circumstance in this period but one certainly made more complex by its unusual layers of jurisdictional authority. In this sense, the count-palatine of the Rhine was an unusual figure, in that he could wield princely authority and prestige, while also remaining a servant of the broader imperial project and laboring under the constraints that were imposed by the Ottonian Crown.⁵⁵

⁵² James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1915), 233.

⁵³ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 122.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-8; *Diplomata regum*, MGH *Dipl. Otto I*, 189.

The signing of the Golden Bull in 1356 A.D. formally established and codified amongst the principal princes, high-ranking aristocrats and archbishops the very kind of shared autonomy and legal authority already enjoyed for centuries by the counts-palatine in the Rhineland. Yet the unique authority with the imperial throne – owed much to the custom and practices which emerged from its own history. The counts-palatine were the titular heirs to the dukes of Lothringia, themselves a creation of the Treaty of Verdun in 843 A.D. – the original ratification of the devolution of the vast Carolingian Empire into the largest possible version of its former constituent parts; East, Middle and West Francia. The ability of the counts-palatine to trace their title, lineage, and many privileges back to such an ancient date – and to associate their line with the original Carolingian project – offered them not only a spotless pedigree but also the considerable force of custom in the resuscitation of their primacy in the region.⁵⁶ Likewise, by the eleventh century at least, the counts-palatine were encumbered with duties and obligations commensurate with their status which, among other things, justified such trappings of power as the building and maintenance of fortifications and the creation of a massive personal military retinue – much of it at imperial expense.⁵⁷ Similar to the prevailing situation of the margraves of Brandenburg, over time the states of the Counts-Palatine of the Rhine rose substantially above that of the balance of their region's elite. The imperial grant of palatine status to the Rhineland, under the hereditary control of a single-family, gave the counts a far more extensive remit than those enjoyed by their peers, one that recognized his level of autonomy as that of a duke elsewhere.⁵⁸ To some degree, this granting of palatine status was partially a corrective to the diminutive formal status of the counts of the Rhine. This took the form of a disconnect between the extensive customary

⁵⁶ Barraclough, *Origins*, 320-1.

⁵⁷ Barraclough, *Origins*, 243-5.

⁵⁸ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 72-3.

authority routinely enjoyed by the counts-palatine within their sphere on the one hand, and their diminutive feudal title on the other, which was the subject of some confusion on the part of the neighboring peerage especially as to their status. Many of these (like those of Burgundy and Aquitaine) were themselves *les petits princes*, effectively autonomous rulers of their own principalities that ruled their duchies absolutely, technically, and formally subordinate to the kings of France but in fact the holders of near-total autonomy over their respective domains.⁵⁹

This is not to say, however, that title and rank were unimportant amongst the German princes. Far from it. However, assignations of nobility were far more likely to reflect the commensurate responsibilities which their forebears had undertaken to earn them – reflections more of duty and responsibility than perhaps of raw privilege. In part, this reflects the differing realities alive in the French and German contexts, respectively. The latter, of course, had historically been more rural and sparsely populated and lacked the experience and traditions associated with the kind of urbanization and trade the Romans had established in western Francia. Yet the Ottonian Empire, with its strategic position in Central Europe, in fact, bore much of the burden for the defense of Catholic Christendom in the north and east, and defense of the empire from the incursions of the predations of the great duchies and the French Crown to the west.⁶⁰ It is unsurprising then that, in the German context, duty and responsibility might cling more doggedly to feudal title and lordship there, where honorifics continued to represent those responsibilities to a far greater degree than they did further west.⁶¹ Nonetheless, in Germany as in France, the responsibilities of counts did fade, and as they did so, their

⁵⁹ Barraclough, *Origins*, 243-4.

⁶⁰ Wilson, *Heart of the Empire*, 78-81, 89-92.

⁶¹ John Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, 936-1075* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 51-53.

holders adopted other markers of distinction to help reinforce their status and uphold their privileges; such familiar markers as dynastic succession, chivalric codes of honor, and a kind of privilege only hazily connected with ancient responsibility slowly emerged.⁶² Yet, as in Brandenburg with her margraves, the counts-palatine of the Rhine ultimately owed their lasting, formal status as imperial electors significance to the value of their historic service to imperial governance and defense – in this case as the *de facto* military leaders of the western frontier, and *de jure* chief justiciars of the western portion of the empire. These were significant and lasting contributions to imperial governance which were not easily put asunder. Indeed, they may have been of incalculable benefit during the earliest uncertain decades of Ottonian Saxon rule. In those decades, beginning with the Saxon duke Henry the Fowler, the dukes of Saxony claimed the right to rule East Francia as kings and heirs to the old East Frankish dynasties. Fowler's heir, Otto I, having been duly elected king in the old Carolingian capital of Aachen, henceforth claimed access to the full measure of Charlemagne's legacy when, following his great victory at Lechfeld, he assumed the crown of a newly-revived version of the Carolingian Roman Empire, through which the Saxon duke-kings could now claim a similar legal and seigneurial jurisdiction over the powerful, independent duchies of East Francia that were established in the absence of central authority.

On the ground, however, much of this jurisdictional authority was initially quite notional. The Ottonians simply lacked the imperial infrastructure and the genius for management possessed by the Carolingians. This was the breach into which stepped the powerful counts of the Rhineland, who became strong administrative avatars of the crown. Bridging the aspirations of these new emperors with their precarious real authority in the west was the task set before them, and their subsequent, startling rise

⁶² Arnold, *Princes and Territories in Medieval Germany*, 121.

meant that quickly, merely holding the title of Count-Palatine of the Rhine meant working closely with imperial judicial officials and administrators and overseeing the imperial council and government through the hereditary office of Imperial Arch-Steward.⁶³ Indeed, the very prominence of this single count, who exercised great authority in the region but was also a high imperial official, helped preserve the unique character and relative independence of the western imperial territories. The limitations of the Ottonian reestablishment of the old empire provided space for limited regional autonomy while also functioning reasonably cohesively within the empire's proto-facto structure.

The Counts-Palatine of the Rhine were not solely attached to the western region of the empire but maintained responsibilities to the larger body politic. For example, the Count-Palatine of the Rhine served as a mediator between Henry VI and Henry the Lion in 1192 A.D. Aiding in attaining peace proved his position to be valuable and ultimately a way for the Germans to maintain control of Richard the Lionhearted and to delay his release back to England.⁶⁴ Accompanying the title and position also came a variety of responsibilities to the imperial court, most notably of course those attached to his hereditary office of Imperial Arch-Steward. As its grand title implies, the office carried with it significant symbolic and ceremonial aspects. The arch-steward was the *de jure* presider over all meetings of council, and of any of the greater assemblies brought together occasionally for ceremonial, military, or administrative purposes.⁶⁵ Moreover, as also befits the title, the Arch-Steward was vested with a consular power over much of the empire during the emperors' infrequent absences. The juridical powers of the counts-

⁶³ Ernest F. Henderson, *History of Germany in the Middle Ages* (New York: Haskell House, 1968), 304-5.

⁶⁴ Henderson, *History of Germany*, 298-304.

⁶⁵ Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 237-9; Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 212-15.

palatine in the west were, in these moments of imperial absence, crucial precursors to extending their authority territorially. Moreover, the devolution to them of near-proconsular power in the confines of the western empire served also as a basis for their stewardly duties, which granted much authority to them over regional matters in the emperor's name. Given the role they undertook as arch-stewards and the powers bestowed upon them in royal absentia, their enhanced imperial roles were very much envisioned as an extension of the kinds of authority already enjoyed in the west by the counts-palatine of the Rhine.

The directional expansion of the roles already exercised locally by the counts-palatine of the Rhine meant that they were likely to retain much in the way of relevant experience, a fact which usually assured a seamless translation to the higher level. This gave them experience in such routine, but crucial, matters as border security or disputes between great lords over land or jurisdiction. Other responsibilities of the post included deputizing local lords and impressing them into service in aid of the emperor, at moments of stress which saw the emperor unavailable to do so himself, sometimes due to absence.

The empire itself was, like all the kingdoms of the west in the Middle Ages, comprised only loosely of feudal components, and to the modern eye, characterized by an almost-disastrous state of decentralization. For example, one of its significant weaknesses lay in the provision of benefits to the region. One such was the failure of the emperor, Conrad III, to invest in the Rhineland the kinds of infrastructure which might have better tied together some of the parts of this vast and populous region which was so very blessed with the potential for trade and prosperity.⁶⁶ The emperors were often without motivation in this area towards the west, a part of the empire that, while a frontier region, was nonetheless largely bereft of military emergencies or large-scale conversion

⁶⁶ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 357.

campaigns – until, that is, around 1085 A.D., when hereditary stability of the line of counts-palatine began to falter; the line collapsed finally in 1156 A.D., which brought with it significant stress on the region, as other minor noble families attempted to fill the void and take on the mantle of Count-Palatine of the Rhine before imperial intervention eventually re-established stability in the region.⁶⁷ The new hereditary line began anew with Henry IV's son-in-law Otto of Wittelsbach, the prior duke of Bavaria from 1231A.D. to 1253 A.D., in which his descendants held the position for the rest of the existence of the empire.⁶⁸

This event was in some ways telling and illustrating of the fault lines built into the structure of this unusual empire. The overt meddling by the emperor in the dynastic affairs of the great comital dynasty of the Rhineland naturally created tensions. Yet these were not simply confined to those between the palatinate and the imperial crown, a fact noted by the counts-palatine of the Rhine being a direct representative of the imperial court during situations when the king brought action against a prince.⁶⁹ The incident served also to stir resentment of many members of the imperial secular nobility against the Prince-Archbishops residing within those territories. This is perhaps the best illustration of the inherent tension between secular and ecclesial nobility, who while united in their general conservatism and predilection for stability and peace, were nonetheless also divided in other ways. At the very apex of interests treasured most by the secular aristocracy was their preoccupation with dynastic succession and the lasting nature of their family's feudal and seigneurial legacy. As such, in addition to the expansion of their territorial and administrative ambitions and authority was their concern

⁶⁷ Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 357.

⁶⁸ Otto of Freising and Rahewin, *Gesta Friderici I imperatoris*, Ed. Roger Wilmans, MGH SS 20 Hanover, 1868.

⁶⁹ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2, 226-7.

that these be passed along to their heirs, in a system dominated by primogeniture and the exceptional rarity of passing land and title through one's female offspring to future generations. This was their good of goods, against which all other concerns paled. As such, in common with every other kingdom of Christendom, German nobility paid close attention to the maintenance of custom and the autonomy of feudal lords within their proper sphere, as a simple matter of self-preservation. This collective shared interest had the general effect of preserving seigniorial privilege against imperial or ecclesiastical or other encroachments, and that stability ensured relative order, each representing who were in so many ways beholden to the German kings and Ottonian emperors and were in any case generally in favor of stability and the centralized authority offered (at least imperfectly) by imperial rule. This manifested in several ways.

Whenever clashes broke out between local princes and the bishops in the confines of his jurisdiction, the counts-palatine were generally able to use juridical tools and their implied and overt imperial authority to preserve the peace and reinforce the efficacy of imperial overlordship. In such cases, only the overarching claims of imperial jurisdiction could provide such authority in adjudicating between great men with significant standing and resources of their own; and only the imperial law courts and courts of chivalry could offer a stage sufficiently grand for the exercise of that overarching authority. Indeed the counts-palatine were roundly regarded by 1050 A.D. as the judicial officer of the western regions of the empire and became still more so after 1056 A.D., when a junior branch of the Saxon dynasty assumed the lands, titles, and authority of Count-Palatine of the Rhine, thus tying it inextricably with the crown. Thereafter, after a brief period of uncertainty, the west saw an entirely explicable increase in stability, albeit with the addition of a greater level of imperial presence.⁷⁰ This kept the Count-Palatine focused on securing

⁷⁰ Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 349.

peace within the region as many towns and cities saw military incursions from rival and neighboring princes. These, for the counts-palatine were already familiar judicial and military matters, which as arch-stewards they exercised occasionally at the broadest imperial level.

Throughout the existence of the western imperial title of the Count-Palatine of the Rhine, he served as an elector for the King of the Germans, who then became the Holy Roman Emperor. An example in an exercise of his power the Count-Palatine Conrad of the Rhine, ordered from Italy by the crown, moved in and assisted the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne in putting down a commune and reestablishing control.⁷¹ Any man that held the title of Count-Palatine of the Rhine got the permanent position of an elector, this secured the western territories and held together the interests of the western duchies and bishoprics on the imperial stage.

Indeed, the counts-palatine of the Rhine enjoyed a status roughly equal to that of dukes elsewhere. Their unusually extensive authority over the affairs of other members of the region's elites, its sheer size, and strategic position, and the fact that his jurisdiction included several important trading centers along the Rhine, Mosel, and Pfalz rivers, all contributed to his importance within the empire. Throughout the existence of the land counts-palatine of the Rhine, depending on the inheritance of the current count, established how much territory they controlled. When the dukes of Bavaria came to inherit the title of counts-palatine in c. 1190 A.D., the Bavarian duke's newly inherited lands were brought under his existing territory's fold until later generations of the duke of Bavaria chose to strictly inherit the title of the counts-palatine.⁷² Yet their authority was always understood to be of a strictly secular nature, in that his palatinate overlapped with

⁷¹ *Diplomata regum*, MGH Dipl. Frederick I, 338.

⁷² Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 125-7.

the provinces of the empire's three great ecclesiastics, the archbishops of Mainz, Cologne and Trier each of ancient foundation and each arrayed with extensive lands, customary authority, and rights as landowners – alongside their powerful ecclesial eminence as princes of the Imperial Church. All were formidable foils to the authority of the counts-palatine, especially in ecclesiastical matters and in the affairs of their cities. Yet none matched the authority of the counts-palatine, who boasted the irresistible combination of a stranglehold on the imperial office (military, juridical and administrative) with his standing as the Rhine's greatest feudal lord.⁷³

Prior to the hereditary instability that took place in 1156 A.D. due to the end of the counts-palatine's dynastic line with no heir, the counts-palatine had kept the western imperial territories under imperial control, resisted the potential incursions of the bordering duchies, and managed the potential chaos of the remaining unincorporated lands which also lay beyond the western frontier. Following a brief period of instability led to an imperial intervention, which definitively solved this hereditary crisis, the palatinate was able to fully regain the stability that had been provided by the prior dynasty. On top of the amount of geographical area the Count-Palatine took charge of, he also served as an imperial aristocrat who maneuvered the system and kept in good graces of his local nobles and the crown. Covering a massive amount of territory required skill and patience as the Count-Palatine dealt with problems from both the secular and ecclesiastical princes. Along with the honor of serving as an elector of the King of the Germans and the Holy Roman Emperor, the western reaches of the empire were secured together by the judicial and authoritative power granted to the Count-Palatine.⁷⁴ They achieved this through a combination of the family's indigenous feudal authority and vast

⁷³ Herbert Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 226-7.

⁷⁴ Henderson, *History of Germany*, 152-5.

estates, as well as the power vested on them by the Ottonian, then emperors, who consistently reinforced their efforts to establish a kind of hegemony by treating them as imperial avatars in the west.

The Power of the North

The Ottonian Holy Roman Empire was essentially a hybrid of the old Carolingian heartland around the Rhine with other more northerly and peripheral territories further afield, first brought into the imperial axis during the conquests of Charlemagne himself and which, following their attendant conversion to Catholicism, were thereafter integrated into Western Christendom. Chief among the latter was the duchy of Saxony, which by the tenth century had become the most important of the northern German regions and its rulers the source of the renewed imperial project. From the reign of Henry the Fowler forward, the duchy served as a bulwark against Magyar and Slavic incursions and became the military backbone of the renewed Holy Roman Empire. By establishing several notable features and practices which later emperors were to follow, the early Saxon emperors played pivotal roles in fashioning the empire's enduring character. For example, their interest in Italian affairs and willingness to expend time and treasure campaigning there re-established the old Carolingian link between north and south, Church and Empire, which was to prove enduring.⁷⁵ The Ottonians' interest in western Germany – especially the region which they considered to be the old Frankish heartland around the great river valleys of the Mosel, Saar, Ruhr, and Rhine – was immense. It was sparked by their aspirations over the re-establishment of (Austrian Frankish) German kingship, and forging links between those Carolingian predecessors and themselves. This was the impetus for renewed empire under the Ottonian dukes of Saxony, who as a measure of their seriousness sought to legitimize their rule by assuming the trappings of

⁷⁵ Barraclough, *Origins*, 184-191.

the great empire that preceded them, thereby continuing the process of integrating Frankish, Latin and Germanic cultures under that new imperial umbrella.⁷⁶

From the start, this new kingdom or empire was designed with the duchy of Saxony itself at its core. Indeed, Saxony should be properly understood as the center of that new project. It provided first the kingdom, then empire, with all its rulers for the better part of the first two centuries of its life. Moreover, as the strongest of the German lands, it was the new empire's central military stronghold, renowned for the toughness and fighting spirit of its armies.⁷⁷ Saxony's strategic location – equidistant to many of the empire's most important places – provided its dukes with the necessary reach and ease of access to the rest of the empire that was required for effective imperial governance: the ability to swiftly mobilize their armies and effectively project military power abroad. The Ottonians used this power to consolidate Saxon rule, and practices and approaches which better facilitated this need to project authority. The endowment and enrichment of the Saxon church and especially its monasteries with the lands taken from defeated rebellious nobles – a practice adopted from that of their Carolingians predecessors, likely with enthusiastic clerical support – became a more general imperial practice under the Ottonians and was critical in the establishment of an “imperial church.”⁷⁸

Beyond the Ottonian period (ending c. 1125 A.D.), the dukes of Saxony continued to play crucial supporting roles in imperial politics. Under their Salian successors, Saxony's military role remained paramount, and its duke a powerful symbolic representation of a glorious imperial early – and pre-history. He continued therefore as a fixture at court and in council, a strong pediment within imperial infrastructure. This role,

⁷⁶ Len Scales, “The Holy Roman Empire,” in C. Carmichael, M. D’Auria, and A. Roshwald (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): 54-75.

⁷⁷ Henderson, *History of Germany*, 121; Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 167-184.

⁷⁸ Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 90-5; Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 84-92.

in addition to the duke's own troubles with the local lords and nobles, he also dealt with troubles generated by the ecclesiastical princes. The dukes of Saxony anchored the northern region while holding their own Saxon traditions in highest regard.

The area controlled by the Duke of Saxony was both vast and strategic, home to the greatest of the German tribal peoples and well-fortified with natural borders, abutting Friesland, two other duchies, three further marches, and the imperial territory of Thuringia. In its north, Saxony bordered the Kingdom of Denmark, reached via the Holstein region and the March of the Billungs controlled by the Margrave of Brandenburg. In the direct east, Saxony shared its border with the March of the Billungs, the North March, the East March, and the March of Thuringia. Further southeast was Thuringia, just south of Duderstadt and near where the lower River Unstrut flows into the Elbe. The eastern border then sidled along the length of the River Elbe, until it gives birth to the River Saale, near the March of Thuringia. Beyond the southwestern frontier of Saxony lay the duchy of West Franconia, near the great fork of the River Weser. To the west lay Friesland and the Duchy of Lower Lorraine, along the provincial borderline of Westphalia. Saxony, as Charlemagne had long ago realized, was the gateway for invasion from the north and east into the heart of Francia, which to the Carolingians made its subjugation and conversion necessary for strategic reasons. Yet precisely its location, and the quality of its warriors, caused the Franks to labor greatly in its acquisition – possibly even going so far as to ceremonially burn parts of the sacred Saxon forests, and even burned the *Irmisul* itself, their greatest Pagan symbol.⁷⁹ Saxony was in fact the most enduring campaign for the Franks as they assembled their empire, laboring mightily there for decades and campaigning far longer there than anywhere else. Not surprisingly, therefore, Saxony proved to be at the core of the newly re-constituted empire, focused

⁷⁹ Arnold, *Medieval Germany*, 42-6; Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 1, 81-93.

this time on the former East Frankish kingdom (Austrasia), alongside Saxony and the other newly converted North-Central European lands. Indeed, the duchy of Saxony was the formative spirit of the new unification of the German lands, and its dukes, and gave the early German “reich” a new post-Carolingian shape, with a heartland further north and east of the old Carolingian heartland, always west of the Rhine encompassing the older Roman province around Trier, Aachen and the great river valleys.⁸⁰ Saxony now shared all but two borders with allied states and provided a stable defensive northern border for the rest of the empire.

The most important period for the German higher nobility, however, came during the interregnum: the period between Carolingian and Saxon imperial authority, which was punctuated by the frequent incursions from the north and east by pagan invaders – especially the Vikings and Magyars. The violent incursions of these non-Christian peoples were experienced throughout the Christian World from the mid-ninth century onward, though their impact was arguably greatest in Central Europe, and made more of an impact on the social and political context of Germany than perhaps anywhere else. Part of that impact, of course, can be seen in the response to those incursions, namely the return to a strong form of local lordship. While this so-called “feudal response” to the withdrawal of Carolingian central authority was not unique to the German context, it was there that it achieved its greatest expression. Here, local power once again ruled, and the higher nobility especially re-ignited their traditional authority, now bolstered by the prestige of their Carolingian titles, to take leading roles once again in the protection of their regions. The most successful of these used the bonds of local control to strengthen their comital or (more usually, ducal) overlordship, using the military potential of feudal lordship to oppose other forms of rule in their territory, and bringing lesser nobles to heel.

⁸⁰ Heer, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 22-36.

It was in this way that the dukes of the pre-Carolingian period were re-established as autonomous rulers.

By the Ottonian period, the main role of any duke within this relatively new Germanic imperial context was to lend military support to the crown, in exchange for a relatively free role within their duchies – including critically the role of supreme magistrates in any of the relevant court systems – in relatively large imperial regions nominally under first royal, then imperial, control.⁸¹ In this sense, the dukes represented the leading edge of a relatively autonomous provincial aristocracy. The dukes became chief guarantors of their people's defense and established themselves as chief judicial officers over their people.⁸²

Among these, the dukes of Saxony had established themselves as first among equals within the German lands. Frequent pan-German assemblies of the aristocracy and upper clergy regularly gathered there from across the empire, seemingly staged to demonstrate the political importance of the duchy.⁸³ The gathering of prominent figures from throughout the empire proved the prominence of the region, certainly; it also was intended as a stage for highlighting the prominence of this individual duchy. From the beginning, and even prior to the establishment of the eastern margraves, Saxony served as the chief bulwark against the “pagan” Vikings. From the mid-ninth century, the people of Saxony had successfully defended against major Danish incursions aimed at the heartland of the early Franconian kingdom of Louis the German, while also serving as the main defense against invasions by the Slavic peoples invading from the southeast.⁸⁴ Indeed, Saxony's position and strength were both vital to the success and revitalization of

⁸¹ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 89.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 103-5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁴ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 1, 124-7.

the imperial idea under Otto I following his election as King of the Germans (a title known then as King of East Franconia), and his subsequent coronation as Holy Roman Emperor.

The duchy of Saxony provided a buffer zone for the more southern duchies and provinces from northern aggressors and had ease of access to the other imperial provinces. As for the Saxon duchy itself, the local provinces consisted of Westphalia, Eastphalia, and Angria.⁸⁵ These borders allowed the Saxon military to mobilize in multiple directions which aided the empire in wars and to protect itself from invasion and internal threats. The dukes of Saxony proved themselves strong military assets as well as capable leaders during wartime. When the duke served as a military leader, equivalent to a general in modern armies, he held the power of command over the aristocracy and controlled the people within the central region of the German kingdom.⁸⁶ Whenever an emperor would hail from Saxony, they attended themselves with Saxon nobles and a Saxon military force.⁸⁷ The dukes contributed their own large retinues, or military outfits, to most imperial campaigns and maintained oversight of numerous military fortresses and towns, sharing in the responsibility for the defense of these places.⁸⁸ Beyond their military leadership of the imperial forces especially in the north, they also retained numerous civil duties, with numerous ceremonial positions at the imperial court as well as a leading voice in the council, one that emphasized their military prominence.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Arnold, *Medieval Germany*, 52-3

⁸⁶ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 89.

⁸⁷ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2, 137.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸⁹ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 105-8.

Being the military leader of a duchy and an elector of the King of the Germans, the duke of Saxony held an imperial office and position within the court. After the Saxon revolts (1073 A.D. to 1075 A.D.), the dukes of Saxony held the position of Arch-Marshall to demonstrate their new loyalties to the empire and to demonstrate that they could serve as ample leaders during wartime.⁹⁰ As the Ottonian dynasty originated from the Saxon duchy, the Saxons stayed loyal to the crown even when the emperor himself did not hail from the duchy. The duke of Saxony readied himself to aid his emperor, especially when fighting against the Slavic tribes, as many incidents took place where the Poles and Bohemians invaded the interior of the empire pillaging the land in their wake.⁹¹ The duke of Saxony held personal sensitivities about the question of hereditary rights within his lands, as the duke had done under Lothair which resulted in the rise of arms across the empire.⁹² This question led to the beginning of multiple rebellions under the dukes of Saxony. Some dukes even waited until major collapses in the power of the crown, looking for reasons to rise against the emperor when imperial authority meddled with the autonomy of the Saxon duchy.⁹³ The duke of Saxony proved himself a powerful and beneficial position and a strength to his allied principalities, as he controlled the middle and northern territory of the Empire.

The power of the Imperial Church dominated the bishoprics and the individual bishops overpowered the influence of the duke, creating a battle between the secular duty of the duke and ecclesiastical prestige of the bishops. The emperors placed more faith in the bishops within the individual provinces than the dukes as intermediaries of their

⁹⁰ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 81.

⁹¹ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 1, 122-3

⁹² Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2, 318.

⁹³ Tout, *The Empire and the Papacy*, 123.

imperial influence in the localities.⁹⁴ As the Salian dynasty took control of the empire in 1024 A.D., the crown pressed support of the archbishopric of Mainz, which covered much of the Saxon and Swabian duchies. The Prince-Archbishop of Mainz controlled many vassals that belonged to the Saxon duke.⁹⁵ Although the people of Saxony and its duke preferred to remain isolated in comparison to other duchies of the empire, the Saxons allowed the emperor to consult them on affairs of the empire. Acting as an elector for the King of the Germans also put the Saxons in a unique position as the reignition of the imperial idea started under Otto I, who hailed from the Saxon duchy.

As an elector, the duke of Saxony played a role in not only the stability of his personal duchy but also kept the Germanic tradition of electing their king alive. During the revival of Charlemagne's imperial idea, the duke of Saxony tended to back the candidate from his home province to protect their autonomous nature.⁹⁶ This was especially the case as the Ottonian dynasty hailed from the Saxon duchy and the Saxons backed and trusted their own to lead. With this attitude towards the crown, and when the idea of the duchy's autonomy came into question, the Saxons tended to constantly rise in defiance of imperial authority. This led to several conflicts between the dukes of Saxony and the crown. An example of the rise and rebellion of the Saxons took place during the Investiture Conflict, as Emperor Henry IV attempted to consolidate and centralize power under himself.⁹⁷ Whenever the duke felt satisfied with the emperor and the activities of the empire, he served loyally in their northern territory, keeping an eye on the march regions and watching for possible Danish invasions from the direct north.

⁹⁴ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 91.

⁹⁵ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 1, 72-73.

⁹⁶ *Diplomata regum*, MGH Dipl. Frederick I, 360-3.

⁹⁷ Tout, *The Empire and Papacy*, 132-4.

Even though the duke of Saxony's autonomous nature kept the relationship between himself and the crown on edge, the protection he provided, geographical position of the duchy, and the military leadership of the duke amounted to periods of stability. Saxony's position in the northern region of the empire gave them initial advantages and disadvantages for protection and response to foreign and internal threats to the empire. That provided defense of the empire's interior and served as an extra resource for the eastern margraves offering a chance at internal stability. Backing the traditional systems of the Franks, Germans, and Romans gave the Saxons the ability to provide cultural and political stability in the north in addition to enforcing laws and imperial edicts when they agreed with that imperial authority. The protection offered by the Saxon duchy's military tended to offset the problems of the individualist attitude of its dukes as he would generally stand in retaliation to the spread of imperial authority and its centralization.

More than serving as an anchor for the empire's vast northern territories and frontier (see above), however, the Saxon people had retained their fierce reputation for independence throughout the German lands, one derived ironically from their heroic resistance to Charlemagne in the early ninth century. This gave them a reputation for resistance to colonization, based on hazy notions of indigenous German independence nurtured by vague memories of the Teutoburg Wald and their sustained independence from Rome in antiquity: the Saxon people remained outside of the Roman imperial project, neither Romanized nor Christianized in late antiquity and only converted later (famously) at the sharp point of Charlemagne's sword. By the tenth century, this set of facts (and attendant fables) helped the Saxon dukes project for themselves a symbolic leadership of a newly-united German empire – this one different in character and aspect, focused as it was on the German heartland rather than the West Francia of Charlemagne. The success of the Saxon dukes in their campaigns against the Magyars in the tenth

century, and their subsequent establishment of an enduring eastern frontier of Western Christendom, cemented their claim to leadership of the early German empire, and allowed them to re-ignite the old dream of empire by assuming the claims of their Carolingian predecessors. This had real consequences for many centuries, in that they patterned much of their approach to imperial matters on those of their Frankish predecessors, with their constant presence in Italian politics and their leading lay voice in the affairs of the Church. Saxony was the model German duchy, and its imperial dynasty set the tone for the politics of the empire for several subsequent centuries.

CHAPTER 4: PRINCES OF THE IMPERIAL CHURCH

As was the case throughout Western Christendom, a significant portion of the arable land lying within the new Ottonian Empire was controlled by the Church.⁹⁸ Among the most important of these were the lands attached to the estates of the three great western archbishoprics – those of Trier, Cologne, and Mainz – who enjoyed the authority vested upon them by dint of office and exercised unusually wide remits as secular landlords.⁹⁹ Much of that authority was surely derived from their ancient foundations, often predating the Frankish imperial project and, as with Trier, hearkening back to its status as the ancient capital of the North under the Romans. The antiquity of their foundations, in fact, allowed for the quite-normal accumulation of both ecclesiastical and secular privileges, which, once granted, were jealously guarded by subsequent archbishops. Their age and prominence from an early date, and with their lines of succession virtually unbroken through the lengthy periods of instability that marked late antiquity and the Viking periods, gave them a prestige which was not easily matched by other clerics nor easily challenged by the secular nobility of Germany. These three major “Prince-Archbishops” held significant authority both as wealthy landlords within their respective regions and as the senior clerical figures of Germany, truly “Princes of the Imperial Church.”

Prestige and Wealth – The Archbishop of Trier

The Prince-Archbishop of Trier enjoyed the most-westerly province and the smallest landed estate of these three great metropolitans. Whatever his landed deficiency, however, seems to have been consistently compensated for by the wealth and native

⁹⁸ Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 174-77.

⁹⁹ Barraclough, *Origins*, 295-302; Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, 15-7.

urbanity of his province, the antiquity of his authority, and the attendant prestige of his title, all of which helped him, forge a position of power and prestige beyond the western reaches of the empire, and gave him an exceptionally elevated position amongst imperial ecclesiastics. Indeed, when compared with the other great archiepiscopal sees – Mainz and Cologne – that of Trier was distinct for the relative paucity of its corresponding landed estate. In that important sense, therefore, the archbishops of Trier were at a grave disadvantage.¹⁰⁰ Yet, although lacking in this crucial component of medieval noble authority, other ancillary factors seem to have been employed as compensation and brought the archbishops roughly level with their wealthier siblings.

Firstly, the prince-archbishops of Trier could point to a far older provenance than not only the other two but indeed to virtually any in German lands – because Trier had not, in fact, been a part of what the Romans considered Germany during antiquity; it was instead the effective capital of eastern Gaul, always known as an important Roman outpost near the German frontier and among the bishoprics which helped provide stability during the Christianization of the empire from the fourth century onward. Indeed, the archiepiscopal designation to the province of Trier speaks to its importance not only to imperial defense but also to the size of the Christian population of the city from that early date.¹⁰¹ Thus, the archbishops of Trier could easily connect themselves to – and appropriate – the glories of Ancient Rome via the simple fact of the city's importance since antiquity. This, in turn, allowed her archbishops to claim a governing legitimacy based upon both historical and tangible elements of the city and her church. Archbishops regularly pointed to the built environment – with its cathedral as its centerpiece – and to a wide variety of customs and imperial, regional, and local records that could readily attest

¹⁰⁰ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2, 93.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 1, 222-5.

to the city's critical importance half a millennium before the Ottonian emperors. The archbishop of Trier, in fact, skillfully leveraged these powerful and ancient – though largely intangible – claims to authority to forge a place among the early electors of the kings of the Germans before becoming similarly situated as an elector in the new Ottonian empire. Though only modestly endowed with lands, the Prince-Archbishop of Trier was able to compensate through other means.

Critical among these was in playing a formative role in the new German imperial Church in the tenth century, critical in supporting the imperial claims of subsequent emperors and assisting them in pressing their imperial authority over the regional aristocracy. As such, the archbishop of Trier was an important translator of the Church's vision for the renewal of empire in the German lands, opposing the claims of the feudal aristocracy in favor of the stability and harmonization potentially offered by the Ottonians.¹⁰²

The archbishop of Trier was uniquely suited to this task in that he held territory within the four different duchies in the imperial west, with ecclesiastical authority ranging further still. While the bulk of the province lay in the duchies of Lower and Upper Lorraine, it also extended eastward to encompass the relative positions of West Franconia and the northwestern territory of the duchy of Swabia.¹⁰³ The city of Trier itself, also known by its Frankish name of Trèves, sat on the southern bank of the Mosel, the Rhine's most important great tributary in the west and one of the ancient frontiers separating Roman Gaul from the lands of the German tribes – which was, in fact, one of the reasons for the original grants to her archbishops of virtual-ducal authority there. Yet it also had the beneficial effect of tying in the popular mind of the bishops of Trier with

¹⁰² Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2, 80-1.

¹⁰³ Arnold, *Medieval Germany*, 56-7, 144-5.

the original expansion of Christianity into Central Europe during antiquity and later under the Franks – spreading the Good News for centuries as instruments of our Lord and aiding His great commission to spread the religion to all nations as part of the great unfolding of His plan. This gave the archbishops a powerful myth to wield in the formation and maintenance of prestige and privilege and to use as intellectual and historical ballast in the great tussle over supremacy within the German Church.

The Prince-Archbishop of Trier was therefore endowed with great wealth and prestige. His See was in the strategic position of the Rhineland and meant that, as with the Count-Palatine of the Rhine, he exercised great traditional authority there, drawing from the customs established under Frankish tradition and law. In the twelfth century, the prince-archbishop dealt with sporadic uprisings both within the city of Trier itself and the hinterland beyond; these were generally inspired and led by a local nobility eager to re-establish local rule, though, in the end, they all failed, ending with their suppression and re-establishment of order to the region.¹⁰⁴ His authority in the region was of particular importance to the Church, as many of the ancient and traditional sees lay within his territory. These included some of the most established routes in Europe, first built by the Romans for political and military purposes and now among the main routes used as byways by the army of priests coming from the south into German lands. This, in turn, pointed to the substantial ecclesiastical and political authority vested in the rules of the Rhenish area, now established as the heartland of any imperial project for its wealth, population, and historical significance.¹⁰⁵ The imperial office of the Arch-Chancellor belonged to the Prince-Archbishop of Trier, an office that also gave him responsibility for the territory of Burgundy. In fact, Burgundy was something of a buffer zone at the

¹⁰⁴ *Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum*, Ed. Jakob Schwalm, MGH *Const.* ii. 61, (Hannover, 1893), 75.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 255.

western edge of the empire, bordering imperial lands to the north and east, as well as those nominally ruled by the king of France to the west, making it vital to foreign and ecclesiastical relations. Though nominally within the imperial cordon, Burgundy because of its position nonetheless retained great autonomy – a fact which the Prince-Archbishop used to his advantage. As such territory overseen by Trier lay at the far reaches of the empire, the encompassed vassals resulted in gaining greater privileges fitting the archbishopric's prestige.¹⁰⁶ The suffragans controlled by the Prince-Archbishop of Trier enjoyed the privileges of legitimacy and ties stretching back to the period of Christianization and the efforts at converting the Germanic tribes of Europe from Late Antiquity to the Carolingians. This area had been something of a staging place for those efforts, and now both the prestige of their ancient stat and their proximity to France made them yet more important.¹⁰⁷

The three major suffragans, appointed lower bishops, included those in Verdun, Metz, and Toul. The Archbishop, Baldwin of Luxemburg, held the position of Archbishop from 1307 A.D. to 1354 A.D., proved that even though the Archbishopric of Trier held less territory than the two other major archbishoprics, he wielded ultimate influence and power.¹⁰⁸ Archbishop Baldwin showed his power by claiming fiefs, advocacies, and pledges from nobles and princes outside of his established principality, expanding the archbishopric of Trier from the center of the Moselle River through the entirety of the Rhine valley. These actions increased the size of the territory Archbishop Baldwin claimed, and he held complete control without the interference of the other

¹⁰⁶ Hassall, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages*, 133.

¹⁰⁷ Arthur Hassall and William D.D. Stubbs, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages, 476-1250* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), 133.

¹⁰⁸ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 253-4.

archbishoprics and the imperial court.¹⁰⁹ Through these actions, the Prince-Archbishop of Trier gained imperial authority to support both his local authority as a landowner and his additional duties to the crown. Within the imperial court, the Prince-Archbishop used the title of Arch-Chancellor to wield imperial power at home, and the other areas over which he also claimed ecclesiastical authority, providing him with a strong combination of traditional, feudal authority with that of his ecclesiastical office, alongside that provided through service to the crown.¹¹⁰

Established authority from their ancient Carolingian role was, therefore, a crucial pillar supporting the authority of the prince-archbishops of Trier. They administered the vital travel routes that went through the old episcopal sees of the west leading north and eastward from Italy and the Mediterranean up through Francia to Germany in the north – an important incentive for the archbishops and their allies to continue to labor in the maintenance of order. The archbishops of Trier were thus tasked with the maintenance of order in the region, providing stability through the suppression of local uprisings and the diminution of the region's nobility. Yet the antiquity and extent of their ecclesiastical province brought other benefits. The strategic location of the prince-archbishop of Trier's province and estates gave them an element of control over the affairs of the Burgundian Church – including significant influence over the naming of its bishops. Their royal connections and the authority of their offices gave them the ability to wield the authority of the emperor, even in areas which lay beyond the borders of the empire itself, as their ecclesiastical province straddled the western border of the empire and included vestiges of the older Carolingian empire. As such, the archbishops of Trier reflected a more cosmopolitan episcopal style, including calling upon the traditions of Frankish law and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 234.

¹¹⁰ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2, 233-5.

bringing elements of that to governing imperial lands, most notably the portion of Rhenish territory under their ecclesiastical control. There, they helped to introduce several “foreign” (Carolingian) legal and constitutional customs and practices into the German context. When the archbishop of Trier felt under threat and called for imperial aid, the surrounding nobles and princes heeded the call, and lent military support to their archiepiscopal overlord, a critical sign of their fidelity. Their role as imperial electors cemented their influence in Germany and only added to the Prince-Archbishops’ authority. This not only cemented his authority over the local region and the Burgundian territories (through the office of Arch-Chancellor of Burgundy) but also allowed the Prince-Archbishop’s voice to carry an imperial weight throughout the empire.

A Competitor for Primate Legitimacy

To the northwest of the empire lay the province of the archbishop of Cologne, the main rival to the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz and the secondary primate at the coronation of the kings. The region of Cologne was not peaceful and saw numerous uprisings within its borders. Like the other Prince-Archbishops, Cologne acted as one of the three Arch-Chancellors of the empire. The region also saw prosperity as the See became powerful and wealthy from its inception within the German Church. The archbishopric of Cologne functioned as one of the oldest archbishoprics within the empire, and Cologne had legitimacy and traditional weight to advance any decision he made from his See.

The archbishopric of Cologne took up the area around the city of Cologne and most of the duchy of Lower Lorraine encompassed Friesland, in the modern-day Netherlands. The far northern border stretched to the Holstein border region and through the Duchy of Saxony’s province of Westphalia to the city of Bremen. The Prince-Archbishop shared a border in the south with the Prince-Archbishop of Trier and that

border was marked by the city of Salm and along the border of the duchies of Lower and Upper Lorraine. The province expanded far enough to the east to border the province controlled by his rival, the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz, and encompassed the city and territory around Dortmund. The western side of the archbishopric lay on the western half of the duchy of Lower Lorraine, where it connected to the county of Flanders and the Kingdom of France along the River Scheldt. This position gave the Prince-Archbishop ties to antiquity while also being able to serve an imperial role on the opposite side of the empire.

Many among the region's aristocracy were effectively vassals of the Prince-Archbishops of Cologne and looked to them as the leader of the region; they carried major responsibilities within the empire and had been critical in the creation of the German Church. This eventually appeared true as Otto I proved himself as the clear imperial authority, in which he created peace on German soil with the help of the main archbishoprics of Cologne, Trier, and Mainz.¹¹¹ The power given to the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne as one of the six electors of the college resulted in the creation of one of the oldest and most wealthy of the archbishoprics within the empire. As the influence of the Prince-Archbishop reached as far south as the northern regions of Italy through their imperial court position, Cologne's job as an elector rivaled the power of the primate, the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz.¹¹² His imperial authority as an Arch-Chancellor gained him southern territories, including those down in the Italian regions controlled directly by the crown.

This traditional and administrative importance caused many conflicts within his archbishopric, but his position also gave him a measure of authority and respect from the

¹¹¹ Heer, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 32.

¹¹² Tout, *The Empire and the Papacy*, 25-6.

other princes. One of the oldest German archbishoprics, the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne held real influence among the western nobility, never more so than when the decisive moment of the imperial election meeting reared its head. He was a critical figure in maintaining the stability of his region with the backing of the imperial court and was critical to the maintenance of ecclesiastical order in the empire's northern Italian provinces, often preserving peace for and keeping imperial forces at home rather than forcing them to march south to put down Lombard uprisings.¹¹³

The Prince-Archbishop could also boast, in common with many imperial primates, direct familial ties to the emperor and other great noble families, in the case of Cologne tying closely to the imperial dynasty itself. As far back as the re-formation of an Imperial Church with the coronation of Otto I in 956 A.D., the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne had been a rival for supremacy of that Church with the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz, at times even eclipsing him and establishing practical supremacy – *de facto* if not *de jure* – amongst the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Beginning with the appointment of Otto I's faithful brother, Bruno, to the see of Cologne, Otto and his successors were able to claim the role of protector of the clergy against the region's lay nobility, who sought with some regularity to seize and secularize ecclesiastical property.¹¹⁴

The Prince-Archbishop of Cologne resided in one of the oldest and richest Sees within the Empire. On the coronation of Otto I in 936 A.D., after the rite of consecration between the three archbishoprics, the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz emerged victorious. Yet in an unusual display of ecclesiastical solidarity, both the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz and Cologne anointed and crowned the king at Aachen following his election.¹¹⁵ During the time of decision for their new king, the two archbishops fought politically for

¹¹³ Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 174-6.

¹¹⁴ Tout, *The Empire and the Papacy*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Heer, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 26.

jurisdiction over the coronation, each seeking to hold the ceremony within their province. This rivalry between the prince-archbishops of Mainz and Cologne became something of a tradition, in that they would be consistent rivals for the honor of conducting the coronation of each new king.¹¹⁶ Some of the problems that the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz created started as disputes with aristocrats who opposed the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne's duties to the empire, causing chaos within Cologne's archbishopric.¹¹⁷ Though the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz had been designated primate of the German Church from the start, as the victor in the original debates over the first coronation and was the subsequent choice to serve as primate of the Imperial Church, the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne nonetheless retained enormous power within his region and influence throughout the imperial territory delegated to him, both as archbishop and administration.

Among the most important of these duties was the exercise of authority vested in his imperial office of Arch-Chancellor of Italy, an important one to crown and church owing to the region's strategic importance, its distance from the imperial heartland, and its proximity to Rome.¹¹⁸ Through this role, for example, the archbishop had been a key influence in the campaign of 1014 A.D., which saw an imperial army headed by Emperor Henry II seeking to bring the Lombard dukes of Capua and Salerno into submission.¹¹⁹ As the early Holy Roman Emperors resided in and dealt with matters mainly in Germany and on the eastern frontiers, such crises often arose over the establishment of control of the imperial holdings in northern Italy – depending of course on the dynasty in control of

¹¹⁶ Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 305-10.

¹¹⁷ *Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum*, Ed. Jakob Schwalm, MGH *Const. ii.* 57 (Hannover, 1893), 70-2; Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 80-7.

¹¹⁸ Fisher, *The Medieval Empire*, Vol. 2, 233-5.

¹¹⁹ Heer, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 50.

the empire at the time; some later emperors especially actually favored their Italian holdings over their German ones, and a few even resided there.

As guardians of the northwestern German Church and vested with imperial authority over the emperor's lands in Northern Italy, the Prince-Archbishops of Cologne, like his archiepiscopal brethren, was a force for stability within an empire built upon and knit together by respect and honor of Germanic and Frankish traditions. As electors, all the empire's Prince-Archbishops personified those traditions, housing and safeguarding the traditions and cultural practices of the Church while also serving as important forces of stability. Among these, the inclusion of three great archbishops – as participants in the empire's local election system, served essential functions in both reinforcing the ancient German tradition of electoral kingship and ensuring the provision of the empire and its stakeholders with competent leadership, generation after generation. Of course, the Ottonian ties to the see of Cologne highlighted the degree to which the church could be subject to the vagaries of high politics, and the susceptibility of ecclesiastical corporations to the power of secular lords. Undoubtedly, the existing familial ties between the see of Cologne and the imperial family brought occasions of bias – in the election of emperors, for example. In general, however, and especially during times of great stress like the Investiture Conflict of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Prince-Archbishops of Cologne generally followed the established status quo, for example ranging the archbishop against the emperor Henry IV in the name of stability.

A Position with Primacy and Land

Known as the largest of all the German archbishoprics, the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz controlled and maintained the largest See within the Holy Roman Empire in the Middle Ages. The Prince-Archbishop also held the seat of primate among all the other archbishops, getting the privilege of crowning the King of the Germans at the seat of his

personal See in Mainz. He served as an elector of the King of the Germans and the Holy Roman Emperor as the leader of the ecclesiastical electors and held the largest amount of ecclesiastical land among the three prince-archbishops. The prince-archbishop retained stability within his local bishoprics and among the nobles, however, that feat proved easier on paper and somewhat difficult even with his established imperial authority and offices.

The archbishopric of Mainz held a large domain of land in the center regions of the empire. The main holdings of the archbishopric consisted of the land around the city of Mainz itself and to the banks of the Rhine River in the western territories that were under the control of both the Prince-Archbishops of Trier and Cologne. The largest section of the archbishopric consisted of the center of the empire, passing through multiple duchies and territories, the northern side of the Alpine Mountain range, and the north to the northeastern reaches that fell under the control of the Margrave of Brandenburg. His territories included most of the duchy of Saxony in the north, where the River Weser turns towards the east. The central portion of Mainz's territory contained Thuringia, the East and West Franconian duchies in their entirety. The border of the central region followed the Elbe River from the north to where it turns into the River Saale and where the border continued south until it reached the western portion of the River Danube located north of the duchy of Bavaria and into the duchy of Swabia. The southern border of the Prince-Archbishop's region pressed against the Alps, to the city of Zurich. As the empire expanded into the Slavic regions to the east, the Prince-Archbishop gained control of a portion of those regions during Christianization efforts.

As the imperial marches expanded in the east around 1005 A.D., and with the creation of the duchy of Bohemia as a region within the Holy Roman Empire in 1004 A.D., the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz took charge of the new territories and added them to his See. The Archbishop of Magdeburg took the northern portions of the marches that

included the March of the Billungs, the North March, and the East March. Mainz gained control of the March of Thuringia, the duchy of Bohemia and the northern regions located above the Bavarian East March (in modern day Hungary). Mainz maintained control over these regions with the use of his imperial authority as Arch-Chancellor of the German principalities within the Holy Roman Empire itself.¹²⁰ This increased the prestige of the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz as he gained more power within his own See among both his bishops and nobles. This further expanded his imperial authority and his influence throughout the empire, giving him an edge over the Prince-Archbishop of Cologne and cementing the primate position strictly for his archbishopric.

Overall, the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz commanded a total of fourteen suffragans (including the Margrave of Brandenburg), bishops appointed to aid the Prince-Archbishop in his duties, where most of the lands controlled by the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz became protected by royal grants that strengthened jurisdictional immunity from outside interference.¹²¹ After the death of a prince-archbishop, especially that of Mainz, great care went into the appointment of his successor as his essential seat amongst the German archbishoprics appeared appetizing to ambitious bishops seeking imperial appointment and authority. This position within the Roman Catholic Church acted as a type of Pope to the north of the Alps. Because of this, the region controlled by Mainz became the most distinguished of all the bishoprics in Germany during the Middle Ages.¹²² Mainz existed also as the location where German princes traditionally met to elect a new king.¹²³ In many cases, the three Prince-Archbishops, before the established

¹²⁰ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 81.

¹²¹ Arnold, *Princes and Territories*, 80-82.

¹²² Fleckenstein, *Early Medieval Germany*, 190.

¹²³ Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany*, 136.

primate, could not agree on whose position was truly primate to hold the coronation of their new king as they fought traditionally for the rite.

The Prince-Archbishop held the title of the Arch-Chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire which allowed him to supervise the work of the chancellor and notaries throughout the empire. The job of crowning the emperor at the coronation often fell upon Mainz. In 1024 A.D., Mainz used his power and took advantage of his authority within the election system to prevent the accession of any prince wanting to succeed in the reign of Henry II.¹²⁴ Instead, the Prince-Archbishop and other smaller bishops labored at electing Conrad of Swabia. The Prince-Archbishop searched Conrad's family lineage to see if he descended from Conrad the Red, who married Otto I's daughter and nephew of Pope Gregory V which would give him greater legitimacy over his rivals.¹²⁵ After continuous pressured influence by Mainz, the crown was given to Conrad of Swabia, who became the next elected king. This would not be the last time Mainz used his influence to chart the course of the Holy Roman Empire and the choice of the king.

For example, after the death of Henry V in 1125 A.D., the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz summoned the princes for the election of a new king. Of the three most worthy princes to sit on the throne, the most natural successor was Frederick the Duke of Swabia. The Prince-Archbishop of Mainz at this time, Albert, was a determined enemy of Henry V and stood against his nomination, forcing the weight of his position into the process as the duke of Swabia hailed from Henry V's hereditary family line.¹²⁶ The Prince-Archbishop asked whether the nominees agreed that the determination of the crown through a diet (a deliberative assembly). All the nominees agreed except for Frederick. After this hesitation, the diet unanimously rejected the duke of Swabia and Lothair

¹²⁴ Ekkehard of Aura, *Chronicon Universale*, Ed. Georg Pertz, MGH SS 6 (Hanover, 1844).

¹²⁵ Tout, *The Empire and the Papacy*, 50-51.

¹²⁶ Hassall, *Early Middle Ages*, 183-184.

became the next elected king. Violent feuds took place in Mainz during tense elections such as Lothar's election, as the duties of Mainz drew the ire of others who sought to control the archbishopric and the empire.¹²⁷ Other archbishoprics, like those under the control of the Prince-Archbishoprics of Trier and Cologne, continuously tried to find a way to undermine the power of Mainz to diminish his coronation rite.

During the peaceful transfers of power, the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz kept stability within most of the inner regions of the empire, as his power spanned the entirety of his See. Controlling that mass of territory allowed the Prince-Archbishop of Mainz to expand imperial authority in addition to spreading his own influence within the German Church. As the Prince-Archbishop controlled a considerable amount of the German Church through the fight for primate legitimacy and by winning many fights against Cologne for primacy, Mainz gained power over rival emperors through events like the Investiture Conflict. Those events allowed the ecclesiastical princes to return stability to the empire and autonomy to the principalities by contradicting and attempting to rid themselves of chaotic figures like Henry IV, an emperor who fought physically against the Church. A lack of centralized authority allowed for a stable state in the German principalities and a strong backing for the German Church that became threatened by certain monarchs that wished to implement full imperial authority over the Roman Catholic Church.

¹²⁷ Tout, *The Empire and Papacy*, 23-7.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The roles of the ecclesiastical princes and the secular princes made the empire a formidable force in Central Europe during the Middle Ages. As the imperial idea took shape from the traditional style of election of warlords during late antiquity, after the election of Otto I, the progression of the medieval election system resulted in the college of electors, and the elector's political power was essential to maintaining the empire's election system and unique imperial court system. The stability the elector princes offered to the empire and its many principalities worked to keep the decentralized empire from fracturing and required men from various places in authority to take control of the process in selecting their monarch.

The secular princes held important regions vital to the survivability of the empire, whether enacted through the strength of their positions or from their reliability to implement local and imperial authority. Margraves of Brandenburg controlled the military province and held off the Litho-Slavic invasions of the empire's eastern territories. The position of the Arch-Chamberlain gave the margrave authority within the imperial court and gave him a senior position within the empire. The counts-palatine worked to uphold the Frankish laws and projected himself as a strong figure through his autonomy and loyalty to the crown. The counts-palatine retained the office of Arch-Steward, controlling portions of the empire due to the unavailability of the emperor. His imperial powers and authority allowed him to secure the western region of secular nobles to remain robust with a safe western border for the empire. The duke of Saxony proved himself as a warrior, military leader, and staunch servant of the empire through his military prowess and the position of Arch-Marshal. He also played a crucial role in securing the center of the empire from threats to the north and east.

The ecclesiastical members of the college of electors, the Prince-Archbishops of Trier, Cologne, and Mainz, after the Investiture Conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy against the emperor, rose to prominence as they held positions that allowed them to contest the power of the crown. Their imperial positions allowed them to fill the positions of Arch-Chancellors within their archbishoprics and abroad throughout the empire, controlling regions in Germany, Italy, and Burgundy. Under the control of these ecclesiastical princes, the empire and its ecclesiastical vassals inherited a strong bond with the German and later Imperial Church. This created a stable religious presence within the empire until the much later Thirty Years War in 1816 A.D., which would divide all Central Europe along religious lines.

The six men that held these positions possessed *gravitas* and *authoritas*, contributing to the longevity of the imperial idea and were instrumental to the traditional process of imperial elections. It became the duty of these six men (through the college of electors and their local and imperial positions) to ensure that the Holy Roman Empire kept an election system that sought to place a stable leader on the throne to halt any chance of dissolution of the imperial infrastructure. Although arriving at the diet in Aachen was traditional and the official way to gather to elect the empire's next emperor, the electors, had decided on their candidate by the time they arrived at the diet. Their personalities, the customs of their jobs, and the cultures of their territories influenced their selection during the election. These six men contemplated their choice to seek the best leader for the empire at the time. Their stabilizing presence ultimately kept the empire functioning throughout the political and religious turmoil of the Middle Ages, also allowing for the reignition of Charlemagne's Carolingian Empire by Otto I in 956 A.D. to live on through to the nineteenth century.

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