

The Disastrous Feast at Werla: Political Relationships and Insult in the Succession

Contest of 1002

Sarah Greer

It is an unforgettable dinner that ends in murder, especially the murder of a man who would be king. At an assembly held in 1002, shortly after the sudden death of Emperor Otto III, ruler of the Ottonian Empire, we are faced with precisely this scenario. Margrave Ekkehard of Meißen, a frontrunner in the race to become the next king, is said to have taken over a feast prepared for two of the late emperor's sisters: Adelheid, the abbess of Quedlinburg, and Sophia, a canoness at Gandersheim. We are told that by interrupting the sisters' feast, he not only brought about his own defeat, but also ensured his violent murder at the hands of his enemies shortly afterwards. The events at this dinner, held in the Ottonian palace at Werla, were a turning point in this succession contest: by removing a possible future leader and allowing the eventual victor the chance to push forward his own claim to the throne, the feast determined who would become the next ruler of the German empire.

The events at Werla represent a landmark in the 1002 succession contest, which itself has been the subject of considerable debate by historians of medieval Germany. As Otto III had died before he could produce an heir, the subsequent competition for the throne by a number of candidates allows us to discern early medieval ideas about what constituted a legitimate king. The series of deliberations among the German elite leading up to the eventual coronation of a new king in 1002 lets us test ideas about kingship in this period: did one become king on the basis of hereditary succession from previous rulers or was kingship achieved through election by the other magnates of the kingdom?¹ Moreover, the succession contest has also featured in scholarly debates on symbolic communication in the German Empire. Political events in early medieval Germany were highly choreographed, and there is

ongoing discussion about the ability of individuals to secure their power and achieve their political goals through using public demonstrative gestures and ritual acts.²

As a result, the feast at Werla and its disastrous aftermath have quite understandably drawn the attention of historians. Here we have a striking example of the destructive forces that demonstrative acts—such as disrupting a feast—could apparently unleash. In the various analyses of the succession dispute of 1002, Ekkehard's behaviour at Werla is uniformly considered to be the cause of his defeat. His insult towards Otto III's sisters cost him both the throne and his life. Yet, despite the consensus on the consequences of Ekkehard's actions, thus far there has been no truly convincing explanation for his motivations. Why would an experienced political figure act in this way, especially in a society so sensitive to honour and insult that disputes were usually negotiated behind closed doors before public resolutions were enacted? This article offers a set of new perspectives on Ekkehard's reasons for appearing at the sisters' table by considering the relationships that already existed between the various individuals who were present at the feast. These perspectives help us understand why the sisters are shown as responding so negatively, why they both chose to support Henry of Bavaria as their brother's successor, and what this episode reveals about how the Saxon elite responded to the succession crisis after Otto III's death.

Before we move on to the analysis, though, we should begin by outlining the account of the feast that we have. Our source for this episode is Thietmar, bishop of Merseburg and a Saxon nobleman himself, who reported the events at Werla and offered some commentary on them in his *Chronicon*, written just over a decade later.³ Thietmar recorded that in January 1002, the sudden death of the 21-year-old Emperor Otto III had sparked a contest among the German elite for the throne. Since Otto was unmarried, with no son, no close male relatives, and no nominated successor, there was no logical candidate to succeed him. Accordingly, various noblemen tried to push forward their claims to become king. Three men quickly

emerged as the frontrunners in the succession contest. Duke Hermann of Swabia, Margrave Ekkehard of Meißen and the eventual winner, Duke Henry of Bavaria (later Henry II), spent the first half of 1002 travelling around the German regions of the Empire trying to gain support from the other members of the ruling elite for their candidacy. In April, an assembly was held at Werla, in the Saxon heartland of the Empire.

The *Chronicon* describes in detail how Ekkehard's downfall played out at the assembly. The nobles of Saxony had come together at Werla to discuss which man they would collectively endorse as the new king. Amongst them were Adelheid of Quedlinburg and Sophia of Gandersheim—Otto III's sisters and leaders of Ottonian imperial convents within Saxony.⁴ Henry had sent a delegate to the assembly to make his case, following the advice of his supporter Count Liuthar of the Northern March. Henry's representative offered the Saxons rewards and made promises of 'many good things' to those who would support Henry's claim to the kingship.⁵ These promises were persuasive. The majority of those gathered responded that Henry should indeed become the next king, and they swore to support him in his bid for the throne. Thietmar reported that this decision greatly upset Ekkehard, who fought back against the public affirmation of Saxon support for his rival that very evening. A table had been richly prepared for the imperial sisters in the palace at Werla following the assembly. Ekkehard 'took over it' in the company of Bishop Arnulf of Halberstadt and Duke Bernhard of Saxony, greatly disturbing Adelheid and Sophia.⁶ The next morning, 'as everything which he had anticipated would happen in that place had turned out differently from what he had hoped for', Ekkehard departed in the company of his other supporter, Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim, to the latter's see, where he was received in the manner of a king.⁷ Shortly after the assembly, Ekkehard was set upon and murdered at Pöhlde by a group of Saxon noblemen, which included the sons of Count Siegfried of Norheim. Thietmar commented that while he could not explain this murder himself, he had

heard that some linked it to the events at Werla, attributing it to the insult and threatening remarks that Ekkehard had publicly made to Otto's sisters at the feast.⁸

Following Ekkehard's demise, Henry and Hermann were left as the only competitors for the throne. A majority of German nobles had pledged their support for Hermann following Otto III's funeral, held in April at Aachen. Nevertheless, Henry had secured the support of the Saxon elites, and following the death of Ekkehard he ventured out to Mainz, where Archbishop Willigis crowned and anointed him as king in June 1002. Hermann and his supporters continued to oppose Henry for a few months, but by October Hermann had recognized Henry as his king, before dying in 1003.⁹ The succession dispute was resolved with Henry as the final victor. The collapse of Ekkehard's bid for the throne was thus the turning point in the succession contest that led to Henry of Bavaria succeeding Otto III as king, and eventually as Emperor.

Those who have analysed the events of 1002 have consistently argued that Ekkehard's behaviour towards Otto's sisters, Adelheid and Sophia, placed the seal on his defeat. After all, Thietmar himself said that others were attributing the murder of Ekkehard to the insult he had offered the pair. However, there is no consensus on what Ekkehard hoped to achieve from this insult. Was it an outraged response to the sisters' declaration of support for his rival Henry?¹⁰ Did Ekkehard simply underestimate the influence of the Ottonian sisters in a foolhardy attempt to push his own claim without sufficient support?¹¹ Or could it just have been a 'fit of pique'?¹² Karl Leyser offered a reading of the events that focused less on Ekkehard's emotional state and more on the purportedly demonstrative aim behind his actions. He argued that Ekkehard's commandeering Adelheid and Sophia's dinner was a symbolic dismissal of the Ottonian dynasty's role in the succession contest. Identifying the two sisters as representatives of the imperial family, Leyser suggested that they had an 'enhanced sacral place and role' in determining their brother's successor; their approval

could legitimize their distant cousin Henry, by presenting him as a close relative who shared in the imperial legacy of their family.¹³ Ekkehard, however, had far less of a claim to be a member of the Ottonian dynasty through his family connections than Henry.¹⁴ As such, his insult to the sisters could be read as an insult to the imperial dynasty that they represented, a repudiation of the need to gain their legitimization for his power.

This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that it was a public dinner that Ekkehard chose to disrupt. Feasts (*convivia*) have attracted the attention of those interested in ritual communication and bonds of association in medieval society.¹⁵ A *convivium* provided an opportunity to publicly assert common bonds between the participants, acting as a pledge of mutual co-operation and support. These feasts were particularly linked to friendship alliances, co-operative associations and commemorative confraternities.¹⁶ As such, these meals made a statement about the horizontal ties of friendship—whether real or affected—that linked the participants.¹⁷ Consequently, any kind of subversion of a *convivium*, whether through poor behaviour or violence, could be interpreted in the opposite way: rather than signalling the support, trust and co-operation between the participants, it instead communicated insult and revealed the animosity of the subverter towards their fellow diners.¹⁸

Yet, if Ekkehard's arrival at the feast was intended to be an insult to the sisters, then we must also ask why he did not foresee the fallout from such an explosive political act. In every other respect Ekkehard was a successful politician. He was extremely well regarded by Otto III and had received benefices granted to him outright as personal properties.¹⁹ He had defended the eastern border of the Empire and maintained good relationships with external rulers. He claimed military service from Duke Boleslav of Bohemia and had the support of Duke Boleslaw Chrobry of Poland, confirmed through the marriage of Ekkehard's son to Boleslaw's daughter and Ekkehard's brother to Boleslaw's sister, or possibly sister-in-law.²⁰ Thietmar reported that he was elected duke over Thuringia and that the eastern counts of the

Empire supported his attempt to succeed Otto III. His death was marked by Thietmar praising him as ‘the pride of the kingdom, a solace to his fatherland, the hope of his subjects and the terror of his enemies’.²¹ Ekkehard was no foolhardy newcomer to Ottonian assemblies, but someone with a lifetime’s experience in both regional and imperial politics. It is difficult to explain why a seasoned political figure like Ekkehard would make such a shortsighted decision in publicly insulting two individuals who could provide royal legitimization during a hard-fought succession contest.

If, then, we recognize that Ekkehard was fully aware of how politics functioned in Ottonian society and that he knew the risk involved in insulting other individuals at public events, we should try to understand what he thought his actions at the feast could achieve. Given the importance of the events at Werla to the outcome of the succession crisis, it is worth re-examining Ekkehard’s possible motivations in appearing before Adelheid and Sophia at their dinner with his supporters alongside him. If we think closely about the kinds of relationships that existed between the individuals who were present in the room, the events at the feast can be read in a very different light.

According to Thietmar, Ekkehard arrived at the feast with two of his supporters, Duke Bernhard of Saxony and Bishop Arnulf of Halberstadt, both of whom were influential figures in Saxon politics.²² However, these two men were not connected to Ekkehard alone. Both Bernhard and Arnulf were also closely linked to Adelheid, in her role as abbess of Quedlinburg. Arnulf, the diocesan bishop for Quedlinburg, had consecrated Adelheid as abbess of the convent three years earlier.²³ From the detailed account of Adelheid’s consecration given in the Quedlinburg Annals, a text written under her supervision from 1008 onwards, we see that immediately before Adelheid became abbess, Arnulf had conferred with two other men in order to arrange her consecration. Those two individuals were Duke Bernhard and Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim, both of whom Thietmar presented in the

company of Ekkehard at Werla.²⁴ Adelheid had close and apparently beneficial relationships with the key allies that Ekkehard had gathered in his bid for the throne.

However, Adelheid's consecration was not the first time that she had met Ekkehard and his supporters. Ekkehard, Bernhard and Bernward were all part of a group that had sworn an oath—a *coniuratio*—against Henry's father, Duke Henry the Quarrelsome of Bavaria, in 984. Otto II had died in 983 while on campaign in southern Italy, whereupon his cousin Henry the Quarrelsome took custody of the young Otto III and eventually tried to claim the throne in his own right in 984. A group of Saxon magnates, including these three men, swore an oath to oppose Henry and to restore Otto III as his father's successor.²⁵ The *coniuratio* took action by successfully attacking the fortress at Alaburg, held by Henry's supporters. In doing so, Thietmar reported, they freed the young Adelheid, who was being held there along with some treasure.²⁶ While *coniurationes* like this most likely disbanded after they had achieved their objective—in this case the restoration of Otto III in 985—the oaths that had bound these men together, and linked them to Adelheid, must have still resonated in 1002.²⁷

Indeed, after Otto III was given back into the care of his mother, Empress Theophanu, his grandmother Empress Adelheid and his aunt Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg, Ekkehard fostered a particularly close connection to the convent of Quedlinburg himself. He was an intercessor in two of Otto III's diplomas to Quedlinburg issued during Adelheid's de facto regency. The first was a charter which both confirmed the donation of Empress Adelheid's dowry to Quedlinburg and established a daughter convent at Walbeck in 992; that charter also featured Duke Bernhard and two other members of the *coniuratio* from 983, Count Palatine Dietrich and Count Sigbert of Liesgau (Bernward of Hildesheim's father and uncle), as intercessors. The second was a charter granting property at Potsdam and Geltow to Quedlinburg in 993.²⁸ Ekkehard even placed his young daughter, Liutgard, into the care of Abbess Mathilda at Quedlinburg for her education before her marriage.²⁹

However, Thietmar tells us that around 999, during Mathilda's period of governance over Saxony during Otto III's campaign in Italy, Ekkehard began to reconsider his daughter's betrothal to Werner, the son of Count Liuthar of the Northern March. His hesitancy prompted Werner to raid Quedlinburg and abduct Liutgard while Mathilda was holding an assembly at Derenburg. Mathilda's response to the abduction was emphatic. She forced Werner to return Liutgard to her care, to offer compensation and to beg her forgiveness. Liutgard was returned to Quedlinburg and remained there under Abbess Adelheid's supervision after Mathilda's death later that year.³⁰ Mathilda was unquestionably on Ekkehard's side in the quarrel with Liuthar and Werner, and the Quedlinburg Annals further report that the assembly where Werner was forced to make amends to Mathilda was convened by the abbess along with Duke Bernhard of Saxony.³¹ By tracing these relationships, we see that the convent of Quedlinburg was a nodal point, a place where the former members of the alliance against Henry the Quarrelsome in 984 could continue to demonstrate their mutual support and their links to Otto III, Abbess Mathilda and Abbess Adelheid.

When we take these relationships into consideration, Ekkehard's arrival at the feast accompanied by Arnulf and Bernhard, with Bernward waiting in the background, appears in a different light. Rather than seeing this as Ekkehard's attempt to offer an insult to the sisters by disrupting and subverting the symbolism of their feast, we can read it in a more straightforward manner. Ekkehard had a strong case to make for Adelheid to be counted amongst his supporters. He appeared before her in the company of their mutual friends at a *convivium*, an occasion associated with exactly the kinds of friendship alliances and mutual bonds that linked them together. In doing so, Ekkehard was publicly emphasizing the connections that linked him to both Adelheid and Quedlinburg, a site strongly associated with ideas of Ottonian rulership and legitimate imperial power.

In addition to stressing his relationship to Adelheid, Ekkehard's arrival at the feast alongside his powerful Saxon allies sent another message about his claim to power. Ekkehard was already a member of the ruling elite of Saxony, the heartland of the Ottonian Empire. In comparison with Henry, whose political power base was to the south in Bavaria, Ekkehard was a well-established figure in the network of elites that lay at the centre of the Empire. In the aftermath of a Saxon assembly pledging their support for his Bavarian rival, Ekkehard's entrance alongside Bernhard and Arnulf, followed by his journey with Bernward the next day, must also have been intended to reaffirm his credentials as a Saxon candidate for the throne.

As such, I suggest that rather than trying to insult the sisters of his former king and patron Otto III, Ekkehard was making an aggressive bid to publicly remind Adelheid of her connections to him and his supporters. In doing so, he might well have hoped that she would withdraw her backing for his rival, Henry, and instead endorse him as her brother's successor. Winning the support of the sister of the former Emperor and the leader of Quedlinburg—a site in Saxony closely linked to the Ottonian dynasty—would help mitigate some of the damage to Ekkehard's bid to become Otto III's successor. The symbolic acquisition of Quedlinburg would have been a powerful message to send to a Saxon audience as well; it was the place where Henry's father had tried and failed to take the throne from Otto III in 984.³² Indeed, this may have been part of Ekkehard's appeal to Adelheid, frankly reminding her that he and his supporters had freed her from her captivity at the hands of Henry's father, thus linking Henry by association to the rebellion against her brother. If Ekkehard had achieved his aim in winning over Adelheid, he may have prompted enough of the Saxon nobles present to switch their endorsement back to him as the Saxon candidate for the throne to allow him to continue on in the succession contest. Ekkehard, shaken by the declaration of Saxon approval for his rival, must have felt the potential benefits of publicly

claiming Adelheid as a supporter were great enough to risk stepping outside of the usually regimented structure of Ottonian political events.³³

While Ekkehard was probably hoping to claim Adelheid's support, he likely did not expect her sister Sophia to join him too. Although Adelheid had favourable relationships with all of the men who accompanied Ekkehard at Werla, Sophia had a long and bitter relationship with one of them in particular. Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim and Sophia had been involved in the so-called 'Gandersheim Conflict', an acrimonious battle over control of the convent of Gandersheim, where she had been placed as a young child by her parents around 979.³⁴ The conflict began, so the account from Hildesheim says, when Sophia was to be veiled as canoness. The bishop of Hildesheim and the archbishop of Mainz had each declared that they had the right to perform the consecration as both claimed authority over the convent. Although the heated argument between the two men was resolved by their simultaneously veiling Sophia, the question of which diocese had authority over Gandersheim was not fully resolved.³⁵

When Sophia began to take a more active role in the affairs of her convent in the 990s, the conflict with Hildesheim reignited. The consecration of the rebuilt church at Gandersheim in 1000 led to open antagonism between Archbishop Willigis of Mainz and Sophia on the one hand and Bernward of Hildesheim on the other. Both of these men held prominent positions in Otto III's court, with Willigis serving as archchancellor and a guardian figure to Otto III during his minority, while Bernward was Otto III's tutor. It was likely a shift in power between the two men that rekindled the Gandersheim Conflict: when Otto reached his majority in 994, Willigis could no longer sustain his position of prominence as the young king's guardian.³⁶ For this reason, Bernward, who remained close to Otto throughout the 990s, may have been emboldened to push once again Hildesheim's claim to authority over Gandersheim. Willigis and Bernward resorted to a set of competing synods, with each trying

to assert his right to preside over Gandersheim. A series of aggressive scenes at these synods culminated in a violent attack by Willigis's supporters on Bernward's proprietary convent of Hilwartshausen.³⁷ A final synod was called by the pope, but at the point that the conflict was coming to a head, Otto III died. Settling the dispute over Gandersheim was postponed until the more pressing issue of the succession was resolved. Thus, while the Werla assembly was being held in April 1002, the conflict between Bernward and the pair of Sophia and Willigis, a prominent supporter of Henry of Bavaria, was still simmering in the background.

As tension mounted in the phase of the Gandersheim Conflict before the emperor's death, a critical development took place. Gerberga, the abbess of Gandersheim, died on 13/14 November 1001.³⁸ However, no successor was appointed as abbess at Gandersheim until after the resolution of the succession debate in mid-1002. It was only after Henry had been crowned king that Sophia was consecrated as abbess by Willigis of Mainz, in the same ceremony in which he crowned Henry's wife, Cunigund, as queen.³⁹ The length of time that Gandersheim went without an abbess has not struck scholars as especially remarkable. Instead, the gap between Gerberga's death and Sophia's consecration has been seen as the consequence of Otto III's death, with Sophia as the 'obvious successor', designated as such well before Gerberga's death.⁴⁰ Yet the ongoing conflict hinged precisely on the question of who had jurisdiction over Gandersheim; this must have been a central factor in the delay before the consecration of the next abbess of the community. Any action by either Willigis or Bernward to consecrate a successor to Gerberga would have been an intolerable act of aggression in the already volatile dispute. As a result, Sophia was in a precarious position in 1002. She did not have an official position of authority over Gandersheim, which was by no means a formality in the environment where this exact issue was being scrutinized. Should Bernward succeed in pushing his claim to authority over the community, Sophia's becoming

abbess must have seemed less likely. Her future at Gandersheim was still in question when the feast took place.

Viewed with these events in mind, Ekkehard's appearance at the feast alongside two powerful men with close connections to her sister must have alarmed Sophia. As the Gandersheim Conflict proved, Sophia had a very close relationship with Willigis of Mainz. Due to Willigis's strong support of Henry of Bavaria as Otto's heir, it was a logical option for Sophia to also support Henry. With Henry's backing, Willigis could rebut Bernward's claims to authority over her community, and Sophia would be able to become abbess of Gandersheim. This alone may have been enough to lead Sophia to support Henry's bid to become king, but she also had another reason to be positively disposed to the duke: her convent of Gandersheim had long been linked with Henry's branch of the Ottonian family. Abbess Gerberga, who had led Gandersheim from around 956 down to her death in 1001, was the daughter of Henry the Younger, thus making her the sister of Henry the Quarrelsome and the aunt of Henry of Bavaria.⁴¹ Over the past four decades of Gerberga's rule, Gandersheim was tangibly connected to the Bavarian branch of the Ottonian family, a connection made permanent in 995 when Henry the Quarrelsome died and was buried in the convent's church.⁴² As the burial site of his father, ruled by his aunt, Henry of Bavaria surely would have visited Gandersheim and met with his relative Sophia.⁴³ Given her close connection to Willigis, it is not difficult to imagine that Sophia and Henry had a friendly relationship in their own right, which must have been galvanized by the events leading up to the feast at Werla.

If, however, Ekkehard were to win the contest for the throne, then Sophia's future would be markedly less bright. Although Bernward was tactfully absent from the feast, it was scarcely a secret that he supported Ekkehard's bid. Their connection was proven beyond doubt when the pair rode to Hildesheim together the next day and Bernward received

Ekkehard in the manner of a king. If Ekkehard did succeed, Bernward would be in a very powerful position. As we have seen, Sophia's grip on Gandersheim was already uncertain; after the blow of losing her brother as a patron and supporter, the possibility of Ekkehard taking the throne must have been intolerable to Sophia.

Yet, in contrast to her sister's vehement opposition to Bernward, Adelheid's relationship with the bishop of Hildesheim was essentially positive. Bernward had helped Adelheid succeed her aunt Mathilda as abbess of Quedlinburg in 999.⁴⁴ In fact the Annalist, writing under Adelheid's supervision, used the now-lost *Annales Hildesheimensis maiores* as a source for its entries up until the eleventh century, suggesting a further connection between the two institutions under Adelheid's leadership.⁴⁵ It is surprising to see Adelheid maintaining links to her sister's opponent, especially as the two women were often presented in each other's company, acting in unison in our sources.⁴⁶ However, we must not mistake these carefully constructed textual representations as evidence for Adelheid and Sophia's sharing identical motivations and patronage networks. While they were both sisters of the late Emperor and leaders of convents, the different individuals who were linked to each woman reveal that they were in fact connected to two different groups of nobles and bishops.⁴⁷ On the death of Otto III, these groups each backed a different candidate for the throne. The tensions that resulted from the contested succession carved up the political elite of the kingdom, with earlier rivalries and conflicts roughly determining the cluster of supporters around each candidate.⁴⁸ Sophia's close connections to Henry of Bavaria and Willigis of Mainz brought her into their group, not least because Ekkehard's group included her opponent, Bernward. On the other hand, Adelheid had far less pleasant memories of Henry's father's attempt to seize the throne for himself; this, along with her history of friendly relationships with Ekkehard and his supporters, would have made it feasible to expect Adelheid to support Ekkehard.⁴⁹

With a better understanding of the kinds of political relationships linking all those present at feast, we can read Ekkehard's appearance in front of the sisters very differently. It is difficult to see Ekkehard coming to co-opt Adelheid and Sophia's dinner with the intention of insulting them as representatives of the no-longer relevant Ottonian dynasty. Instead, it is more likely that Ekkehard was dismayed at the show of support for his rival by both Adelheid and the rest of the Saxon assembly and thus appeared at the feast in hopes of forcefully reminding Adelheid of her relationships with him and his supporters. Although his behaviour was high-risk in that it stepped outside of the stage-managed actions that usually characterized these political assemblies, it is unlikely that his primary intention was to insult the pair.

The feast that had been organized might in fact have been the ideal scene for Ekkehard to make his case. After the *coniuratio* of 984 had been formed at Asselburg, Henry the Quarrelsome had travelled to confront them at Werla, about thirty kilometres away, but he was forced to retreat and escaped to Bavaria.⁵⁰ *Coniurationes* and friendship alliances were closely associated with *convivia*—the successful defence of Werla could well have been followed by a feast at the palace before the *coniuratio* set out to attack Alaburg and rescue Adelheid. If that is the case, then the feast there in 1002 would have been the perfect setting for an appeal to the mutual support and co-operation that Adelheid would be expected to show towards Ekkehard and his fellow oath-takers.⁵¹ Indeed, if Ekkehard had truly wanted to communicate disrespect, he simply could have brought Bernward of Hildesheim along with him; Bernward would have surely been eager for any opportunity to assert his authority over Sophia, the unruly canoness of Gandersheim.

Sadly for Ekkehard, his attempt to bring Adelheid over to his side failed. While we cannot definitively establish what Adelheid's reasoning was, as we have no source that outlines her point of view on this issue, we can however contemplate her possible

motivations by considering her own position after Otto III's death.⁵² As Ekkehard was pointedly reminding her at the feast, Adelheid was a member of the group of Saxon ruling elites that made up his supporters. However, she had no distinct familial relationship with him that she could leverage in the way that she had been able to with her brother. While Ekkehard may have promised her his favour and continued patronage in return for her approval, there was nothing to ensure that this relationship would endure for the rest of his reign. In contrast, Henry did have tangible familial relationships with Adelheid and Sophia. The three all shared great-grandparents in King Henry I and Queen Mathilda, the first royal couple of the Ottonian dynasty, whose tombs conveniently lay in the church of Quedlinburg. If Henry became king, then Adelheid could emphasize that these bodies, along with the monastery built around them and dedicated to commemorating them, were much-needed sources of royal legitimacy for his rule.⁵³ Henry could take his great-grandparents as models, imitating them and their Ottonian descendants, presenting himself as another king in their line; indeed, the new version of the *Vita Mathildis* written shortly after Henry's accession as king echoed this idea exactly.⁵⁴ As such, if it was indeed his Ottonian ancestry that swayed Adelheid over to Henry's side, this was likely less out of some sense of dynastic solidarity than it was that Adelheid recognized the patronage opportunities offered by having a distinct familial relationship with the future king.⁵⁵

If the feast at Werla was an attempt by Ekkehard to win over one of Otto III's sisters to his cause, then why did Thietmar suggest it was a deliberate insult? Throughout his account of Ekkehard's actions at Werla, Thietmar presented the margrave as sadly arrogant and lacking in humility, with these faults eventually causing his own murder. He noted that Ekkehard's actions at the feast had distressed the two sisters and that he later heard some people attribute Ekkehard's death to the public insult and threats made to the sisters at Werla.⁵⁶ However, Thietmar was not an impartial commentator on these events. One of the

figures woven through the narrative leading up to the Werla feast was Thietmar's paternal uncle Count Liuthar of the Northern March. As we have seen, the collapse of the betrothal between their children and the subsequent abduction attempt in 999 had led to a rupture in Liuthar and Ekkehard's relationship. It was also Liuthar who had played a leading role in preventing Ekkehard from gaining the full support of the Saxon magnates gathered at an earlier assembly at Frohse, and it was Liuthar who played a key part in arranging the Werla meeting.⁵⁷ In fact, Thietmar explicitly mentioned that it was on his uncle's advice that Henry sent a delegate to Werla to convince those assembled—including Adelheid and Sophia—to support him.⁵⁸ Liuthar had realized the value of gaining Saxon support, including the approval of the two sisters of the previous Emperor, and he also benefited from Ekkehard's downfall and murder. Once Henry became king, Liuthar's son Werner was finally able to marry Ekkehard's daughter Liudgard, who at that point was still residing at Quedlinburg under Adelheid's rule. After Liudgard had married his cousin, Thietmar formed a very close bond with her, mentioning in the *Chronicon* that she was particularly dear to him not just owing to their family ties, but also through personal affection.⁵⁹

Yet Thietmar was also connected to Adelheid herself and to her convent. Thietmar's father was Count Siegfried of Walbeck, and Mathilda of Quedlinburg had established a daughter convent at Walbeck in 992. In fact, Thietmar himself had been raised under Mathilda's supervision, being put into the tutelage of his maternal aunt Emnilde, a canoness at Quedlinburg, until the age of twelve.⁶⁰ He must have maintained this connection to Quedlinburg under Adelheid's rule, as his *Chronicon* drew on a copy of the Quedlinburg Annals that he acquired around 1013.⁶¹ It seems that Thietmar's links to Quedlinburg, and to its abbess Adelheid, remained positive at the time that he was composing his text.

As a result, Thietmar had a delicate task in explaining what had happened at Werla. This was compounded by the murder of Ekkehard after the feast, an event which directly

benefited both Thietmar's close relatives and the current king, Henry II, to whom Thietmar was particularly positively disposed owing to his restoration of Thietmar's diocese of Merseburg.⁶² On the one hand, if Thietmar overtly outlined the links between Adelheid and Ekkehard's party, or mentioned that Ekkehard could have expected her support, he would place Adelheid in a difficult position, as well as reminding his audience that the current king's position as Otto's successor in 1002 was not ironclad. On the other hand, if Thietmar did not use the events of the dinner to provide an explanation for the later murder, or at least to signal what might have caused it, then a shadow would remain over his relatives' involvement.

The ideal way out of this problem was to raise the idea that Ekkehard's presence at the feast was an insult to the sisters, with frequent allusions to Ekkehard's public display of arrogance, lack of humility and threatening behaviour at Werla. Thietmar could condemn Ekkehard's murder for the unlawful act that it was, while still pinning the ultimate blame for the situation on Ekkehard himself. The problematic positions of Adelheid and the surviving powerful Saxon politicians who had supported Ekkehard in 1002 were skimmed over, and Adelheid was instead presented as a supporter of Henry, along with Sophia and the rest of the Saxon elite. Thietmar thus converted this politically volatile episode into an cautionary moral tale of the rewards of arrogance and pride, signalled by his quotation from Proverbs immediately after Ekkehard's arrival at the feast in the text: 'Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour.'⁶³ In doing so, Thietmar was able to neutralize the feast's dangerous implications and mould it to fit his broader vision of Ottonian history.⁶⁴

The Werla feast and its fallout reveal the issues that could arise when sudden political ruptures, like the unexpected death of an Emperor, forced the ruling elite to separate into different factions. The Saxon nobility split into groups that were roughly based on their pre-existing relationships, but as they were so closely connected in so many different ways, those

decisions were not always straightforward. Openly supporting one candidate could lead to conflict with friends or relatives who chose to support a rival. These were not automatic divisions, but rather individual decisions made by people who needed to secure their own political futures. The sons of Siegfried of Northeim, for example, could have turned to support Ekkehard, as their fathers were both members of the 984 *coniuratio*, but they instead took part in Ekkehard's murder, with Thietmar reporting that this may have been because they had served the sisters.⁶⁵ The struggle to determine the next king left a number of individuals with difficult positions to reconcile in the wake of Henry's coronation. Thietmar's decision to shape the memory of the Werla assembly this way was perhaps also an attempt to smooth out the unresolved problems created by the succession crisis, at a time when we can see other reconciliations being made in the disputes caused by these events.⁶⁶

It is also worth noting that Thietmar left a number of questions open in his presentation of what happened at Werla. Duke Hermann is notable for his absence from this episode; directly before he recounted the Werla assembly, Thietmar made a brief comment that Hermann 'armed himself against Henry, as he had been seduced by many who were pleased by his gentleness'.⁶⁷ Yet, other than Thietmar mentioning that Ekkehard headed west to meet Hermann after the feast, the duke only reappears in June 1002, when he tried to prevent Henry from crossing the Rhine to travel to Mainz for his consecration.⁶⁸ Earlier, however, Thietmar had mentioned that Hermann had received the acclaim and support of the nobles who attended Otto III's funeral at Aachen in April 1002.⁶⁹ The consequences of the events at Werla directly affected Hermann, yet we hear nothing about his involvement or response.⁷⁰ Was this another attempt to clear the narrative path to Henry's coronation? Thietmar is also silent about exactly what the 'many good things' were that Henry promised to the Saxons. It is likely that the consecration of Sophia as abbess by Willigis of Mainz was included in these promises. As noted, Sophia was consecrated in the same ceremony where Cunigund was

crowned queen, making this event a powerful signal of Sophia's royal favour, a reassertion of Henry's familial links to Gandersheim and perhaps an indication of the personal friendship between Sophia and Henry. But beyond that, we can only speculate. It may well be that Thietmar chose not to record what Henry had offered to the Saxons as rewards to support his candidacy, as little good could come from openly reminding his audience of this difficult—and potentially humiliating—episode in Ottonian politics.

The situation faced by the elite of the Ottonian empire in 1002 was unusual for them; Ottonian sons had succeeded their fathers since 936, and they had been crowned as kings with their fathers' approval since 961. In living memory, no ruler had died before he had nominated his successor, even if that successor's claim to his father's legacy had to be fiercely defended. Confronted with this political crisis, noble and ecclesiastical magnates responded by discussing and debating the matter, with candidates trying to accrue support from key political figures.⁷¹ In this environment, it mattered whom Adelheid and Sophia chose. Their approval was not simply given to whoever already had victory within their reach, nor was it automatically given to the candidate who was their closest relative. Both women were keenly interested in safeguarding their own futures as well as those of their institutions and they made their decisions accordingly. That they both backed Henry of Bavaria, however, should not lead us to assume that they were naturally inclined to support the same candidate, or even to belong to the same friendship groups. Because they each had a different set of needs and different constellations of relationships, Adelheid and Sophia in the end both supported the same candidate for very different reasons.

Ekkehard was an unexpected and unwanted guest at the sisters' dinner. His appearance forced the sisters to deal with his claim to Adelheid's support. Ekkehard was driven to this action in part because of his desperation at Henry's ability to secure the support of both the sisters and of the Saxon nobles assembled there. His arrival at the feast, while unwelcome,

was not made with the intention of spoiling it, but rather in hopes of sharing it, to allow him to remain in the succession race. By moving outside of the usual negotiation process, Ekkehard revealed the messy nature of these political discussions in a public forum. That, along with the ultimately negative response of Adelheid and Sophia to his request, left him open to Thietmar's suggestion that he had insulted the sisters and thus caused his own downfall.

We can only understand the events at Werla if we take into account the web of political relationships in which these demonstrative acts were set. Those who created the texts that recounted ritual actions or symbolic gestures could often be interested parties themselves, and each had their own reasons for presenting these actions in the way that they did. In the case of the succession contest in 1002, the ruling elite of Germany were not simply debating the criteria by which a king should be chosen: each of them was also trying to make the best decision to secure their own future in this uncertain new political context. We must pay close attention to the connections between the individuals taking part in order to understand these moments of crisis and how they were represented textually. A complex framework of political relationships lay behind these public demonstrative acts; by tracing the shape of that framework around these explosive moments, we can better appreciate the motivations of both the political actors involved and those who documented them.

University of St Andrews

slg6@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

Ekkehard of Meißen's appropriation of the feast prepared for the sisters of the late Emperor Otto III was a turning point in the succession contest to determine the next ruler of Germany

in 1002. Ekkehard's arrival at the feast has been construed as an insult to the Ottonian sisters, marking the point at which he lost the succession race and paved the way for his own murder. However, there is no convincing explanation in current scholarship for why Ekkehard thought publicly insulting the family of the former Emperor and breaking the regulated structure of Ottonian politics was a good move. This article sets Ekkehard's actions at Werla into the broader context of Saxon politics by tracing the relationships between those present at the feast and the author of our account, Thietmar of Merseburg. In doing so, we can see that Ekkehard was not trying to offer an insult, but rather aggressively claiming the support of one of the sisters by emphasizing their connections and mutual friends. By reassessing the disastrous feast at Werla, this article stresses the importance of taking into account the context in which demonstrative acts and disruptions of usual political conduct took place.

¹ There is extensive literature on this topic: see, for example, R. Schneider, 'Die Königserhebung Heinrichs II. im Jahre 1002', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 28 (1972), pp. 74–104, esp. 78–9; A. G. Finckenstein, 'Beobachtungen zur Königswahl nach dem Tode Ottos III.', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 34 (1978), pp. 512–20; E. Hlawitschka, *Untersuchungen zu den Thronwechseln der ersten Hälfte des 11. Jahrhunderts und zur Adelsgeschichte Süddeutschlands. Zugleich klärende Forschungen um 'Kuno von Öhnungen'* (Sigmaringen, 1987), esp. pp. 20–79; W. Schlesinger, 'Erbfolge und Wahl bei der Königserhebung Heinrichs II. 1002', in Schlesinger (ed.), *Ausgewählte Aufsätze von Walter Schlesinger, 1965–1979* (Sigmaringen, 1987), pp. 221–53; H.-C. Faußner, 'Die Thronerhebung des deutschen Königs im Hochmittelalter und die Entstehung des Kurfürstenkollegiums', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Germanistische Abteilung*, 108 (1991), pp. 1–60, here pp. 9–14; A. Wolf, 'Königskandidatur und Königsverwandtschaft: Hermann von Schwaben als Prüfstein für das

“Prinzip der freien Wahl”’, *Deutsches Archiv*, 47 (1991), pp. 45–118; S. Weinfurter, *Heinrich II. (1002–1024): Herrscher am Ende der Zeiten* (Regensburg, 2002), pp. 36–58; Wolf, ‘Zur Königswahl Heinrichs II. im Jahre 1002: verwandtschaftliche Bedingungen des Königswahlrechts’, *Genealogisches Jahrbuch*, 42 (2002), pp. 5–88, esp. pp. 75–86.

² An insightful overview of the debate is provided in C. Pössel, ‘The Magic of Early Medieval Ritual’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 17 (2009), pp. 111–25. See also the collected essays in G. Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter: Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde* (Darmstadt, 1997), esp. pp. 229–57; and G. Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), esp. pp. 289–311.

³ On the dating of the *Chronicon*, see Robert Holtzmann’s introductory comments in *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, ed. R. Holtzmann (Monumenta Germanica Historica: Scriptorum Rerum Germanicum Nova Series, 9, Berlin, 1935), pp. xxviii–xxix.

⁴ Thietmar’s account of these discussions makes no mention of Otto’s third sister, Mathilda, who had married Count Palatine Ezzo; her infant son, Liudolf, was not included as a candidate in the succession debate. See S. Patzold, ‘Königserhebungen zwischen Erbrecht und Wahlrecht? Thronfolge und Rechtsmentalität um des Jahr 1000’, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 58 (2002), pp. 467–507, here p. 473.

⁵ ‘bona plurima promisit’: Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, 5.3, *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg*, ed. Holtzmann, pp. 222–4.

⁶ ‘preoccupans cum Arnulfo episcopo et Benhardo duce ibi epulatur’: *ibid.*, 5.4, pp. 224–5.

⁷ ‘omnia aliter, quam umquam speraret, ibi provenire prospexisset’: *ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.6–5.7, pp. 226–9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.10–5.22, 6.9, pp. 232–47, 284–5.

¹⁰ G. Althoff, 'Gandersheim und Quedlinburg: Ottonische Frauenklöster als Herrschafts- und Überlieferungszentren', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 25 (1991), pp. 123–44, here pp. 133–4.

¹¹ Herwig Wolfram argued that Sophia and Adelheid stood as Ottonian kingmakers in the succession contest, and that 'die Mißachtung ihrer Rolle dem Thronprätendenten Ekkehard von Meißen nicht bloß seinen Mißerfolg, sondern auch einen frühen gewaltsamen Tod bescherte', H. Wolfram, *Konrad II. 990–1039: Kaiser dreier Reiche* (Munich, 2000), p. 77.

¹² D. A. Warner, 'Thietmar of Merseburg on Rituals of Kingship', *Viator*, 26 (1995), pp. 53–76, here p. 73. For other interpretations, see H. Fichtenau, *Lebensordnungen des 10.*

Jahrhunderts: Studien über Denkart und Existenz im einstigen Karolingerreich, 2 vols, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1984), p. 42; H. Goetting, *Das Bistum Hildesheim*, 3 vols, vol. 3: *Die Hildesheimer Bischöfe von 815 bis 1221 (1227)* (Germania Sacra, N.F. 20, Berlin, 1984), p. 194; S. Bagge, *Kings, Politics, and the Right Order of the World in German Historiography c.950–1150* (Leiden, 2002), p. 119.

¹³ K. Leyser, 'Ritual, Ceremony, and Gesture: Ottonian Germany', in T. Reuter (ed.), *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe*, 2 vols, vol. 1: *The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries* (London, 1994), pp. 189–213, here pp. 203–4. For more on the role of familial relationships in the determination of the 1002 succession crisis see Patzold, 'Königserhebungen', pp. 467–507, in particular his discussion of Thietmar's use of the idea of *ius hereditarium*.

¹⁴ The nature of the exact relationships between the Ottonian family and the three candidates of Hermann, Henry and Ekkehard continue to be debated. Of all three, Henry had the most straightforward descent, being the great-grandson of Henry I and Queen Mathilda through his grandfather Henry the Younger and his father, Henry the Quarrelsome.

¹⁵ G. Althoff, 'Der frieden-, bündnis-, und gemeinschaftstiftende Charakter des Mahles im früheren Mittelalter', in I. Bitsch, T. Ehlert and X. von Ertzdorff (eds), *Essen und Trinken in*

Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Vorträge eines interdisziplinären Symposions vom 10. bis 13. Juni an der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen (Sigmaringen, 1987), pp. 13–26; G. Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue: zum Politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im Früheren Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1990), pp. 206–7; L. Roach, ‘Hosting the King: Hospitality and the Royal *iter* in Tenth-century England’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), pp. 34–46, here p. 38.

¹⁶ Feasts were also part of the formal announcement of heir decisions. Althoff, ‘Der frieden-, bündnis-, und gemeinschaftstiftende Charakter’, pp. 14, 17–22; Althoff, *Verwandte*, pp. 206–7.

¹⁷ Leyser, ‘Ritual’, p. 201.

¹⁸ Althoff, ‘Der frieden-, bündnis-, und gemeinschaftstiftende Charakter’, pp. 13, 23–4.

¹⁹ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.7, pp. 228–9; D. A. Warner, *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 24, 27.

²⁰ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 4.58, 5.7, 5.18, 5.36, pp. 196–9, 228–9, 241–3, 260–4; Warner, *Ottonian Germany*, pp. 23–4.

²¹ ‘decus regni, solatium patriae, spes commissis, terror inimicis’: Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.7, pp. 228–9.

²² *Ibid.*, 5.4, pp. 224–5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.43, pp. 180–1; *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 999, ed. M. Giese (Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum in Usus Scholarum Separatim Editi, 72, Hanover, 2004), pp. 499–510.

²⁴ *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 999, pp. 499–510; Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.4, pp. 224–5.

²⁵ Thietmar names the other members as Margrave Dietrich; Counts Bio and Esiko of Merseburg; Count Siegfried of Northeim and his namesake son; Count Palatine Dietrich and Count Sigbert of Liesgau (Bernward of Hildesheim’s father and uncle, respectively); Count

Frederick of Eilenburg and his brother Dedi; Count Hoiko of the Hedergau; Ekkehard (the founder of the monastery of Helmarshausen) and his brother Bezeko; Brunig (possibly a count of Braunschweig) and his brother; the *milites* of St Martin; along with a number of others from the west. Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 4.2, pp. 132–5; Warner, *Ottonian Germany*, pp. 150–1, n. 6.

²⁶ Adelheid would have turned seven in 984. Thietmar noted that Adelheid had been raised at Alaburg, though Leyser suggests that Henry was holding her there along with Ottonian treasure as a pawn in his bid for the throne. Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 4.2–4.3, pp. 132–5; K. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (London, 1979), p. 12; G. Althoff, *Otto III.* (Darmstadt, 1996), pp. 46–7. For Adelheid’s birth in 977, see Giese, ‘Introduction’, *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, pp. 89, 339.

²⁷ For more on *coniurationes* see G. Althoff, ‘Zur Frage nach der Organisation sächsischer Coniurationes in der Ottonenzeit’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 16 (1982), pp. 129–42; Althoff, *Verwandte*, pp. 119–33.

²⁸ DD OIII 81, 131 ed. T. Sickel (Die Urkunden Otto des II. und Otto des III., Monumenta Germania Historica: Diplomatum Regum et Imperatorum Germaniae, 2, Hanover, 1888–93), pp. 489, 542.

²⁹ In addition, Quedlinburg was home to Oda, the stepmother of Ekkehard’s ally, Boleslaw Chrobry of Poland. See Giese, ‘Introduction’, *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, p. 77.

³⁰ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 4.40–4.42, pp. 176–81.

³¹ *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 999, pp. 499–510.

³² Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 4.2, pp. 132–5; *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 984, pp. 470–3. For Henry the Quarrelsome’s attempted coup and use of Quedlinburg, see Warner, ‘Thietmar’, pp. 278–9; Althoff, ‘Gandersheim und Quedlinburg’, pp. 127–8; Giese, ‘Introduction’, *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, pp. 83, 87; Bagge, *Kings*, p. 131.

³³ For unexpected events at assemblies see T. Reuter, ‘Assembly Politics in Western Europe from the Eighth Century to the Twelfth’, in P. Linehan and J. Nelson (eds), *The Medieval World* (London, 2001), pp. 432–50, here pp. 438–40; S. Airlie, ‘Talking Heads: Assemblies in Early Medieval Germany’, in P. S. Barnwell and M. Mostert (eds), *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 29–46, here p. 41.

³⁴ D OII 201 likely marks her entrance into Gandersheim.

³⁵ Thangmar, *Vita Bernwardi Episcopi Hildesheimensis*, 14–32, ed. G. H. Pertz (Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum, 4, Hanover, 1841), pp. 765–73. While Knut Görich and Hans Kortüm have suggested that Thangmar should be dated to the twelfth century, both Marcus Stumpf and Martina Giese have argued that the basis of the *Vita* was an eleventh-century text composed by Thangmar with later additions in the twelfth century. K. Görich and H. Kortüm, ‘Otto III, Thangmar und die Vita Bernwardi’, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 98 (1990), pp. 1–57; M. Stumpf, ‘Zum Quellenwert von Thangmars Vita Bernwardi’, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 53 (1997), pp. 461–96; Giese, *Die Textfassungen der Lebensbeschreibung Bischof Bernwards von Hildesheim* (Hanover, 2006), esp. pp. 9–10, 29–51.

³⁶ Görich has challenged the idea that Willigis and Otto had fallen out in the 990s, arguing that there is no conclusive evidence to support this. See K. Görich, *Otto III. Romanus Saxonicus et Italicus: kaiserliche Rompolitik und sächsische Historiographie* (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 124–7; Görich, ‘Der Gandersheimer Streit zur Zeit Ottos III.: ein Konflikt um die Metropolitanrechte des Erzbischofs Willigis von Mainz’, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung*, 79 (1993), pp. 56–94, here p. 58.

³⁷ Thangmar, *Vita Bernwardi*, 14–32, pp. 765–73. The charter of Otto III granting Hilwartshausen to Bernward has not survived. See M. Uhriz (ed.), *Regesta Imperii II*.

Sächsisches Haus 919–1024, vol. 3: *Die Regesten des Kaiserreiches unter Otto III. 980 (983)–1002* (Graz and Cologne, 1956), 1366a.

³⁸ See Uhlirz, *Regesta Imperii II*, vol. 3, 1426g; G. Althoff, *Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung: Studien zum Totengedenken der Billunger und Ottonen* (Munich, 1984), p. 157. Gerberga was also the aunt of Henry II, which Althoff used to explain why he is mentioned in the *Vita Bernwardi* as being particularly interested in the outcome of the conflict over Gandersheim. However, the *Vita* presented Henry as favourably disposed towards Bernward, which is difficult to reconcile with his close relationship to Willigis of Mainz. It would seem that Thangmar was trying to reshape the earlier part of the Gandersheim conflict to argue that Hildesheim had the future ruler on their side. See Thangmar, *Vita Bernwardi*, 22, p. 768; Althoff, *Otto III.*, p. 164.

³⁹ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.19, pp. 243–5; *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 1002, pp. 515–20.

⁴⁰ J. W. Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c.936–1075* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 150.

⁴¹ She became abbess at some point between 2 January 948 and March 968; Goetting has noted that the extensive diploma Otto I provided for the convent on 21 April 956 (D OI 180) may mark her consecration; Goetting, *Das Bistum Hildesheim*, 3 vols, vol. 1: *Das reichsunmittelbare Kanonissenstift Gandersheim* (Germania Sacra, N.F. 7, Berlin, 1973), pp. 293–4.

⁴² D HII 444, ed. H. Bresslau *et al.* (Die Urkunden Heinrichs II. und Arduins, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Diplomatum Regum et Imperatorum Germaniae, 3, Hanover, 1900–1903) p. 566; Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 4.20, 4.49, pp. 154–5, 188–9; Weinfurter, *Heinrich II.*, p. 34.

⁴³ For a fuller—albeit reproving—summary of Sophia’s political career, see G. Wolf, ‘Prinzessin Sophia (978–1039): Äbtissin von Gandersheim und Essen. Enkelin, Tochter und

Schwester von Kaisern’, *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 61 (1989), pp. 105–23.

⁴⁴ *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 999, pp. 499–510.

⁴⁵ Giese, ‘Introduction’, *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ They are repeatedly presented as a pair in *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 999, 1000, 1002, 1012, 1021, 1024, pp. 507, 511, 519, 533, 566, 576.

⁴⁷ For a study of how the differing relationship networks of powerful siblings determined their political positions in a later period, see J. Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters: The Sibling Bond in German Politics, 1100–1250* (Ithaca, NY, 2013), pp. 121–49.

⁴⁸ For another example of this phenomenon see S. MacLean, “‘After his Death a Great Tribulation Came to Italy ...’: Dynastic Politics and Aristocratic Factions after the Death of Louis II, c.870–c.890’, *Millenium-Jahrbuch*, 4 (2007), pp. 239–60, here p. 249.

⁴⁹ It also appears that Ekkehard and Bernward could count another prominent abbess from the Ottonian family among their network of friends: Mathilda of Essen, the granddaughter of Otto I by his son Liudolf. Mathilda appeared alongside Ekkehard and Bernward as an intercessor in a diploma for Bernward’s sister, Thietburg, in 997. This must have been a particularly pointed action as Mathilda had previously appeared alongside Willigis of Mainz as an intercessor in two diplomas in 990, confirming donations of her mother Ida’s property to Hilwartshausen, the convent later transferred to Bernward as his proprietary foundation. See DD OIII 59, 60, 253, pp. 464–6, 669; Amalie Föbel, ‘Ottonische Äbtissinnen im Spiegel der Urkunden: Einflussmöglichkeiten der Sophia von Gandersheim und Essen auf die Politik Ottos III.’, in T. Schilp (ed.), *Frauen bauen Europa: internationale Verflechtungen des Frauenstifts Essen* (Essen, 2011), pp. 89–106, here p. 91.

⁵⁰ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 4.2–4.3, pp. 132–5.

⁵¹ Althoff, ‘Zur Frage’, pp. 135–8.

⁵² The Quedlinburg Annals are silent on the Werla assembly and do not present Adelheid or Sophia's involvement in the succession debate other than showing them greeting Henry II after his coronation 'like a brother'. *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 1002, pp. 515–20.

⁵³ On the continued political importance of kings' burial sites after their deaths, particularly during succession crises, see N. Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2014), pp. 4–11, 123–4.

⁵⁴ *Vita Mathildis Posterior*, Praefatio, ed. B. Schütte (*Die Lebensbeschreibungen der Königin Mathilde*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum In Usus Scholarum Separatim Editi, 66, Hanover, 1994), pp. 145–6. Schütte proposed that the *Vita* was authored by a member of Henry II's entourage, which could indicate that Henry himself shared this sentiment. See Schütte, *Die Lebensbeschreibungen*, pp. 43–4. See also S. MacLean, *Ottonian Queenship* (Oxford, 2017), p. 197.

⁵⁵ The Quedlinburg Annals emphasize the familial bonds between Henry and Adelheid, as well as stressing the benefits that came to the other members of the Ottonian dynasty through supporting Quedlinburg. See *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses*, 999, 1000, 1002, 1019, pp. 501, 511–12, 519, 553.

⁵⁶ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.4, 5.6–5.7, pp. 224–9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.52, pp. 190–3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.3, pp. 222–5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.13, 6.84–6.85, pp. 18–21, 374–7.

⁶⁰ Warner, *Ottonian Germany*, p. 45.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶² H. Lippelt, *Thietmar von Merseburg: Reichsbischof und Chronist* (Cologne, 1973), pp. 166–73.

⁶³ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.4, p. 224, quoting Proverbs 18:12. This quotation is included in Thietmar's original copy of the work, but not in the version copied in the Corvey codex.

⁶⁴ Kerstin Schulmeyer-Ahl suggests that the famous 'missing wheel' of Ekkehard's cart that Thietmar refers to in 4.52 should be seen as *humilitas*, emphasizing his *superbia*. If Schulmeyer-Ahl's argument that the coronation of Henry II in 1002 and the re-establishment of the bishopric of Merseburg in 1004 were the definitive events carefully positioned at the centre of Thietmar's *Chronicon* is correct, then Thietmar's need to resolve the events at Werla in this way was made even more pressing. K. Schulmeyer-Ahl, *Der Anfang vom Ende der Ottonen: Konstitutionsbedingungen historiographischer Nachrichten in der Chronik Thietmars von Merseburg* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 105, 377–9.

⁶⁵ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.6–5.7, pp. 226–9.

⁶⁶ See the reconciliations between the other plotters against Ekkehard and his heirs, and between Thietmar's family and the family of Duke Bernhard II in 1017: Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 7.50, pp. 458–61. On assessing events separately from how they are remembered, see Pössel, 'Magic', pp. 117–21; D. A. Warner, 'Ritual and Memory in the Ottonian Reich: The Ceremony of Adventus', *Speculum*, 76:2 (2001), pp. 255–283, here pp. 256–9.

⁶⁷ 'a multis, quibus lenitas eius placuit, seductus contra Heinricum se armavit': Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.3, pp. 222–3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.11, pp. 232–5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.53–4.54, pp. 192–4.

⁷⁰ Thietmar also noted in the scene of Hermann and Henry's reconciliation that he was related to Hermann himself: Hermann's father was the uncle of Thietmar's mother. See Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 5.22, p. 247. On Thietmar's view of Hermann, see Warner, 'Thietmar', pp. 70–1.

⁷¹ Patzold, 'Königserhebungen', pp. 503–4.