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Establishing Just Rule

The Diplomatic Negotiations of the *Dominae Imperiales* in the Ottonian Succession Crisis of 983–985*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The death of an emperor can cast an empire into deep disarray¹. The sudden death of Emperor Otto II in Rome in December of 983 certainly threatened to do so. “Ruined, ruined”, was how Bishop Gerbert of Aurillac described the state of the *res publica*, the stability of the Church, and the fate of the Ottonian people; Thietmar of Merseburg characterised Otto II’s death as a “harsh bolt”, the effects of which resounded through

* This article is borne out of the *Verbis et Exemplis* conference and publication workshop, where we received significant and insightful feedback from the participants of both events. We would like to thank our sponsors for these events, namely University of Notre Dame (USA) in England, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies at the University of Notre Dame, the Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame, the St Andrews Institute of Medieval Studies, and The Rossell Hope Robbins Library and Koller-Collins Center for English Studies, University of Rochester, and in particular JoAnn Della Neva, Charlotte Parkyn, and Anna Siebach-Larsen for their support. We would also like to thank Julia Smith, Simon MacLean, and Levi Roach for providing invaluable comments and feedback.

¹ Overviews of succession crises in tenth-century Saxony and the Ottonian Empire can be found in JOHANNES LAUDAGE, *Hausrecht und Thronfolge. Überlegungen zur Königserhebung Ottos des Großen und zu den Aufständen Thankmars, Heinrichs und Liudolfs*, in: *Historisches Jahrbuch* 112, 1992, pp. 23–71. STEFFEN PATZOLD, *Königserhebungen zwischen Erbrecht und Wählrecht? Thronfolge und Rechtsmentalität um das Jahr 1000*, in: *Deutsches Archiv* 58:2, 2002, pp. 467–507. MATTHIAS BECHER, *Von den Karolingern zu den Ottonen. Die Königserhebungen von 911 und 919 als Marksteine des Dynastiewechsels im Ostfrankenreich*, in: HANS-WERNER GOETZ – SIMON ELLING (eds.), *Konrad I. Auf dem Weg zum Deutschen Reich?*, Bochum 2006, pp. 245–264. GERD ALTHOFF, *Die Ottonen. Königsherrschaft ohne Staat* (Urban-Taschenbücher 473), Stuttgart 2005, pp. 202–208. From the perspective of Ottonian queens and empresses, see AMALIE FÖSSEL, *Die Königin im mittelalterlichen Reich. Herrschaftsausübung, Herrschaftsrechte, Handlungsspielräume* (Mittelalter-Forschungen 4), Stuttgart 2000, pp. 256–267 and 319.

the empire². In the months following, the contest for custody over the three-year-old king and heir, Otto III, and the subsequent control over the Ottonian throne divided allegiances within the Ottonian nobility and beyond between two parties: those loyal to the empresses Theophanu and Adelheid and those loyal to Duke Henry II (‘the Quarrelsome’) of Bavaria³. The Ottonian empresses famously gained custody and control of Otto III at Rohr in 984, but how these women, alongside Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg, established their primary position at the helm of the Ottonian court over the next few years remains to be studied.

This article explores how the Ottonian *dominae imperiales* consolidated their control over the Ottonian Empire in the wake of this traumatic dynastic transition. In the face of opposition from Henry the Quarrelsome and his supporters, these three women needed to marshal their resources to achieve their shared aim of establishing Otto III as king, under the guidance and direction of Adelheid and Theophanu until he came of age. Adelheid, Theophanu and Mathilda each acted in response to their own unique constellations of distinct motivations, opportunities and limitations. Yet, over the course of the succession crisis and its immediate aftermath, they worked collectively to ensure they succeeded in this common goal⁴. The careful collaborative negotiations that facilitated their success are revealed in two diplomas drawn up for Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg in the name of the new Emperor Otto III in late January and early February of 985⁵. Each of these documents grants Mathilda the same plots of

² *Occidit, occidit*. Gerbert of Aurillac, Letter 16, in: Gerbert d’Aurillac Correspondence, vol. 1, ed. PIERRE RICHÉ – JEAN-PIERRE CALLU (Les classiques de l’histoire de France au Moyen Age 35), Paris 1993, p.32. *Obseram modo tercii seriem voluminis duro vecte necis deflenda tercii imperatoris nostri et certitudinem pietatis almae, qua omnem exclusit ambiguitatem, stilo laetus aperire conabor*. Thietmar of Merseburg, Chronicon, ed. ROBERT HOLTZMANN (MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S.9), Berlin 1935, cap. 4.26, pp. 130–131.

³ As will be discussed below, Henry also received support from key clerics, Saxon nobles, as well as external magnates and kings, most notably by King Lothar of Francia. On Henry the Quarrelsome, see FRANZ-REINER ERKENS, ...more Gregorum conregnantem instituere vultis? Zur Legitimation der Regentschaft Heinrichs des Zänkers im Thronstreit von 984, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 27, 1993, pp. 273–289. PATRICK BALSCHUN, Heinrich der Zänker. Ein ottonischer Rebell?, in: ROSWITHA JENDRYSCHIK et al. (eds.), Auf den Spuren der Ottonen III. Protokoll des Kolloquiums am 22. Juni 2001 (Beiträge zur Regional- und Landeskultur Sachsen-Anhalts 23), Halle an der Saale 2002, pp. 106–112; HUBERTUS SEIBERT, *Bavvarica regna gubernans*. Heinrich der Zänker und das Herzogtum Bayern (955–995), in: ID. – GERTRUD THOMA (eds.), Von Sachsen bis Jerusalem. Menschen und Institutionen im Wandel der Zeit. Festschrift für Wolfgang Giese zum 65. Geburtstag, Munich 2004, pp. 123–142.

⁴ There is a vast scholarship on medieval women’s exercise of power, including an increasing body of work on Ottonian queenship in particular. Overviews can be found in PAULINE STAFFORD, Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers. The King’s Wife in the Early Middle Ages (Women, Power, and Politics), Athens 1983; AMALIE FÖSSEL, Die Königin im mittelalterlichen Reich (as note 1); MARTINA HARTMANN, Die Königin im frühen Mittelalter, Stuttgart 2009; SIMON MACLEAN, Ottonian Queenship, Oxford 2017.

⁵ D O III 7a and D O III 7b, in: Die Urkunden Ottos III., ed. THEODOR SICKEL (MGH DD Regum et Imperatorum Germaniae 2, 2), Hanover 1893, pp. 401–404. These two texts, surviving as single-sheet parchment, are now housed at Magdeburg, Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, MS Rep. U 9 A I a, n. 20 and Magdeburg, Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, MS Rep. U 9 A I a, n. 21.

land, most of which were drawn from the dower of her mother, Empress Adelheid. Despite the terms of the grant not changing, though, the distinctive differences between the two documents have drawn the attention of scholars: while one contained an extensive justification for the granting of these lands by Adelheid to her daughter, it is without a seal and other endorsements; the other, which is fully authenticated, omits or perhaps even excises the empress's actions outside of her intercession.

These visual and textual differences have ensured that scholars have mainly studied these charters in the context of queenly dowries and assumed tensions between 'Italian' and 'German' models of queenly power in the tenth century⁶. This has essentially required Theophanu, Adelheid's daughter-in-law and Mathilda's sister-in-law, to act as the antagonist of Adelheid alongside other members of the German court, pitting these two widowed queens against each other as opponents battling for supremacy in the aftermath of Otto II's death.

Such approaches have resulted in several unresolved problems in the interpretation of these two documents. The first issue revolves around the lack of attention towards one of the major players involved in these grants: their recipient, Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg. The consequent effect of analysing these texts purely through the lens of queenly contestations over dower rights has resulted in little consideration to uncover why these particular places were being given to this particular woman. The second issue is an absence of the contextualisation of these charters within the political events taking place at the time that they were issued, namely this period of dynastic transition. Instead, they have been removed from their immediate political context to play a part in a much broader theoretical debate.

In order to discern the full extent of the transfer of imperial power in the mid-980s and to interpret the ability of the women involved to access and deploy different resources of power, we address these two problems. This article offers an alternative

⁶ MATHILDE UHLIRZ, *Die rechtliche Stellung der Kaiserinwitwe Adelheid im Deutschen und im Italischen Reich*, in: *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Germanistische Abteilung* 74, 1957, pp. 85–97, here pp. 94–97. EAD., *Die Schenkungsurkunde (D 7) Ottos III. für die Äbtissin Mathilde von Quedlinburg vom 5. Februar 985*, in: EAD., *Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reiches unter Otto II. und Otto III. (Jahrbücher der Deutschen Geschichte 10, 1–2)*, 2 vols., Berlin 1902–1954, vol. 2, pp. 444–448. GERD ALTHOFF, *Probleme um die *dos* der Königinnen im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert*, in: MICHEL PARISSÉ (ed.), *Veuves et veuvages dans le haut Moyen Âge. Table ronde organisée à Göttingen par la Mission Historique Française en Allemagne*, Paris 1993, pp. 123–132. See also PAUL KEHR, *Die Urkunden Otto III.*, Innsbruck 1890, pp. 35–38; THEODOR SICKEL, *Erläuterungen zu den Diplomen Otto III.*, in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 12, 1891, pp. 369–431, here pp. 376–377. FÖSSEL, *Die Königin im mittelalterlichen Reich (as note 1)*, pp. 70–72. GIOVANNI ISABELLA, *Matilde, Edgith e Adelaide. Scontri generazionali e dotari delle regine in Germania*, in: *Reti Medievali Rivista* 13, 2012, pp. 203–244, here p. 234. RÉGINE LE JAN, *Douaires et Pouvoirs des Reines en Francie et en Germanie (VI^e–X^e siècle)*, in: FRANÇOIS BOUGARD et al. (eds.), *Dots et Douaires dans le Haut Moyen Âge. Actes de la table ronde „Morgengabe, dos, tertina ... et les autres ...“*. Réunie à Lille et Valenciennes les 2, 3 et 4 mars 2000 (Collection de l'École Française de Rome 295), Rome 2002, pp. 457–498, here pp. 478–482. PENELOPE NASH, *Empress Adelheid and Countess Mathilda. Medieval Female Rulership and the Foundations of European Society (Queenship and Power Series)*, New York 2017, p. 117.

construction of what the actors involved were trying to achieve, how they interacted in this period, and what other motivations may have led to these two texts being created. We suggest that the transfer of these lands to Mathilda were a mechanism by which the three *dominae* hoped to achieve their ultimate aim: the securing of the throne for Otto III under their auspices. As such, these diplomas are revealed as one part of a calculated strategy that paved the way for these women to achieve their shared goal, rather than a spiteful legal contest between mother- and daughter-in-law over the control of dower property. We begin by performing a close analysis of the two charters in question. We then examine the relationships between Mathilda, Adelheid and Theophanu, as well as the one person who was not present here, but who connected all three and whose presence casts a shadow over all these events: Otto II. Then, the article turns to a closer reading of the events leading up to these texts, and those that followed it. As a result, these texts can be used to think in much greater depth and detail about a range of important debates, such as dynastic succession, symbolic communication and the role of diplomas in political relationships.

2. TWO DIPLOMAS IN THEIR HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Royal diplomas and private charters have long served as the foundation for early medieval political history⁷. Once seen as precedents for early modern and modern bureaucratic practices, historians have now refined their interpretations of these documents as rhetorically-informed projections of what issuers, recipients, and the wider court wished to convey⁸. Recently, researchers have returned to the visual semiotics embed-

⁷ For an excellent historiographical analysis and pertinent bibliography of the study of early medieval diplomatics see GEOFFREY KOZIOL, *The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas. The West Frankish Kingdom (840–987)* (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 19), Turnhout 2012, pp. 17–62. ID., *The Conquest of Burgundy, the Peace of God, and the Diplomas of Robert the Pious*, in: *French Historical Studies* 37, 2014, pp. 173–214.

⁸ HAGEN KELLER, *Zu den Siegeln der Karolinger und der Ottonen. Urkunden als ‚Hoheitszeichen‘ in der Kommunikation des Königs mit seinen Getreuen*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 32, 1998, pp. 400–441. ID. – STEFAN AST, *Ostensio cartae. Italienische Gerichtsurkunden des 10. Jahrhunderts zwischen Schriftlichkeit und Performanz*, in: *Archiv für Diplomatik* 53, 2007, pp. 99–122. PETER RÜCK (ed.), *Mabillons Spur. Zweiundzwanzig Miscellen aus dem Fachgebiet für Historische Hilfswissenschaften der Philipps-Universität Marburg. Zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Heinemeyer*, Marburg an der Lahn 1992. SIMON KEYNES, *The Diplomas of King Aethelred ‘the Unready,’ 978–1016. A Study in their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought. 3rd series 13), Cambridge 1980. CHARLES INSLEY, *Charters, Ritual and Late Tenth-Century English Kingship*, in: JANET L. NELSON et al. (eds.), *Gender and Historiography. Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford*, London 2012, pp. 76–89. LEVI ROACH, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978. Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought. 4th series), Cambridge 2013. BRIGITTE BEDOS-REZAK, *Ritual in the Royal Chancery. Text, Image, and Representation of Kingship in Medieval French Diplomas (700–1200)*, in: HEINZ DUCHARDT et al. (eds.), *European Monarchy. Its Evolution and Practice from Roman Antiquity to Modern Times*, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 27–40. EAD., *Medieval Identity. A Sign and Concept*, in: *American*

ded in the physical layout of the charter⁹. As Geoffrey Koziol has observed, “[i]n their graphic traits alone, diplomas asserted power, majesty, and artistry in ways that went far beyond a pragmatic functionalism of writing as record”¹⁰. One must consider the extent to which diplomas were not just proclamations of legal and juridical import, but also reflected the diplomatic semiotics that form part of the king’s *Herrschaftszeichen*¹¹. In both their textual and visual messages, diplomas served as public projections of how rulers intended their authority and their relationships with the wider kingdom to be perceived. This was most critical at moments of dynastic succession¹².

The political negotiations behind the production of Ottonian diplomas often remain obscured by the formulaic language and polished character of these documents¹³. In the *narratio*, scribes often note the intercessions, petitions, and counsel from queens, abbesses, and other members of the noble and clerical elite, which allude to conversations and the exchange of letters prior to the diploma’s production. However, such clauses often do not delve into detail. To take but one example amongst hundreds across the tenth century, a diploma issued for Hilwartshausen Abbey in 970 declared that Otto I granted six manses in Gimte *pro remedium* of his parents’ and his own soul, “as well as through the intervention and the petition of our beloved wife and august *consortis regnorum, Adelheid*”¹⁴. While a vital clue for the exercise of Ottonian governance, this single line of text elides what must have been an extended process of negotiation between Otto I, Adelheid, Abbess Helmburg of Hilwartshausen and other members of the Ottonian court.

Historical Review 105, 2000, pp. 1489–1533. KOZIOL, Politics of Memory (as note 7). ILDAR H. GARIPZANOV, Metamorphoses of the Early Medieval *signum* of a Ruler in the Carolingian World, in: Early Medieval Europe 14, 2006, pp. 419–464. ID., The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877) (Brill’s Series on the Early Middle Ages 16), Leiden 2008.

⁹ HAGEN KELLER, Ritual, Symbolik und Visualisierung in der Kultur des ottonischen Reiches, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 35, 2001, pp. 23–60. BRIGITTE BEDOS-REZAK, When Ego was Imago. Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages (Visualising the Middle Ages 3), Leiden 2011. For the broader implications of visual semiotics in diplomatics in an interdisciplinary approach, see the collected articles in ANDREA STIELDORF (ed.), Die Urkunde. Text – Bild – Objekt (Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung. Beihefte 12), Berlin 2019.

¹⁰ KOZIOL, Politics of Memory (as note 7), p. 59.

¹¹ See, for example, the collected articles in PETER RÜCK (ed.), Graphische Symbole in mittelalterlichen Urkunden. Beiträge zur diplomatischen Semiotik (Historische Hilfswissenschaften 3), Sigmaringen 1996.

¹² KOZIOL, Politics of Memory (as note 7), p. 118.

¹³ SEAN GILSDORF, The Favor of Friends. Intercession and Aristocratic Politics in Carolingian and Ottonian Europe (Brill’s Series on the Early Middle Ages 23), Leiden 2014.

¹⁴ [...] *nec non et per interventum ac petitionem dilecte coningis nostrae Adelheidae augustae regnorumque nostrorum consortis*, D O I 395, in: Die Urkunden Konrad I., Heinrich I. und Otto I., ed. THEODOR SICKEL (MGH DD Regum et Imperatorum Germaniae 1), Hanover 1879–1884, p. 537. Regesta Imperii II, vol. 1: Die Regesten des Kaiserreiches unter den Herrschern aus dem sächsischen Haus 912–1024, ed. EMIL VON OTTENTHAL (hereafter RI II, 1), Innsbruck 1893, n. 520. This diploma survives as an original single-sheet diploma in Hanover, Hilwartshausen Hauptstaatsarchiv, n. 3.

This study examines in more detail these processes of political negotiation by analysing two single sheets that detail the same grant: D O III 7a and D O III 7b. Scholars typically have analysed these documents as evidence for two ongoing debates within the field of Ottonian queenship: the legal parameters of the Ottonian queen's property and the tenuous relationship between Empress Adelheid and Empress Theophanu. The significant differences in language has led scholars, including Mathilde Uhlirz and Gerd Althoff, to argue that Adelheid initially attempted to grant her land to Mathilda *inuste et legaliter* (that is, by her own authority), but that her attempt was forestalled¹⁵. Directly related to arguments of Adelheid's inability to control and dispose of her lands *inuste et legaliter* (and by extension, the inability of early medieval queens at large to do so), scholars have pointed to these two charters as evidence of simmering tensions between Adelheid and her daughter-in-law, Theophanu¹⁶. Uhlirz and other scholars argued that Empress Theophanu, along with the archchancellor and archbishop of Mainz, Willigis, "undoubtedly" instigated these distinctive changes between the draft and the final authorised charter¹⁷.

More recently, however, scholars have turned to examining these documents in the context of Ottonian diplomatic and archival practices. Hans Schulze, for instance, carefully reads these two diplomas in the wider context of the Quedlinburger *Stiftsarchiv*, while Phyllis Jestice has tempered such conclusions concerning Ottonian queenship by returning to the process of issuing diplomas themselves¹⁸. She points to the possibility that instead of a contest over legal rights or a personal conflict between the two empresses, the difference in diplomatic language suggests that "two scribes disagreed on the amount of detail to include in the document"¹⁹. With these attentive arguments, Schulze and Jestice both have shifted the conversation surrounding these two documents towards larger debates over the production of imperial diplomas. This article builds upon this momentum. Indeed, D O III 7a and D O III 7b allow historians to peel back the polished veneer of the formulaic language and visual semiotics of the finished, fully authenticated diploma, and recover the intense negotiations that occurred at this crucial moment in Ottonian governance.

The death of an early medieval king or emperor created the political space for rival contenders for the throne, often with attendant armed factions. This was par-

¹⁵ See note 5.

¹⁶ For an important critique of this characterisation of an ongoing antagonistic relationship between Empress Adelheid and Empress Theophanu, see AMALIE FÖSSEL, *Die Königin im mittelalterlichen Reich* (as note 1), p. 150, n. 357.

¹⁷ "[...] der zweifellos von der Kaiserin Theophanu and dem Erzkanzler Willigis ausging [...]". UHLIRZ, *Die rechtliche Stellung* (as note 6), p. 95.

¹⁸ HANS K. SCHULZE, *Quedlinburger Urkundenstudien*, in: MATTIAS THUMSER et al. (eds.), *Studien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters. Jürgen Petersohn zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 62–74, here pp. 66–74. PHYLLIS JESTICE, *Imperial Ladies of the Ottonian Dynasty. Women and Rule in Tenth-Century Germany* (Queenship and Power Series), New York 2018, pp. 83–84.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

ticularly true in the case of heirs who had not reached the age of majority, as in the case of Otto III, who was but three years old in 983. Thus, the immediate historical context – those anxious years following Otto II's sudden death – prove essential for understanding the linguistic choices made in these charters' production.

The months following Otto II's death saw the rise of two main camps: those supporting Duke Henry the Quarrelsome (Otto III's uncle) and those supporting the *dominae imperiales*, namely Empress Adelheid, Empress Theophanu, and Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg. The latter camp was at an immediate disadvantage by virtue of Otto II's extended campaign in Italy. In the wake of the emperor's disastrous defeat in southern Italy the year prior, Empress Theophanu and Abbess Mathilda travelled to Rome with Otto II and the imperial entourage in December of 983²⁰. According to Thietmar, Otto II immediately became ill and sensing his imminent demise, he settled his final affairs and died on December 7th, 983.

After Otto II's death, the Empress Theophanu, Abbess Mathilda, and the imperial retinue traveled to Pavia, where Empress Adelheid and her brother, King Conrad of Burgundy, currently resided²¹. Upon Theophanu's arrival, Thietmar claims that "Adelheid received her with deep emotion and soothed her with affectionate comfort"²². The Ottonian court in Italy had many reasons for concern, primarily because the three-year old Otto III was in Saxony. Otto II and Theophanu had sent their son north after a major *conventus* in Verona in June of 983, so that Otto III could be crowned as co-king²³. According to Thietmar, Otto III was consecrated as king at Aachen by Archbishop Willigis of Mainz and Archbishop John of Ravenna on Christmas Day. In tragic irony, the joyous celebration that followed his coronation came to a crashing halt, when a messenger suddenly arrived with the sad news of Otto II's demise.

Once the emperor's death was known, the balance of power in Germany shifted rapidly. The leading Ottonian adult male was the oft-rebellious Duke Henry the Quarrelsome, who had been held in exile in Utrecht since 978²⁴. Released from captivity, he made his way down to Aachen and was immediately given custody of Otto III²⁵.

²⁰ Regesta Imperii II, vol. 2: Die Regesten des Kaiserreiches unter Otto II 955 (973) – 983, ed. HANS LEO MIKOLETZKY (hereafter RI II, 2), Graz 1950, n. 874b. Amongst the extensive literature on this subject, see GUNTHER WOLF, Kaiser Otto II. (973–983) und die Schlacht von Cotrone am 13. Juli 982, in: ID. (ed.), Kaiserin Theophanu. Prinzessin aus der Fremde – des Westreichs Große Kaiserin, Cologne 1991, pp. 155–161. DIRK ALVERMANN, La battaglia di Ottone II contro i Saraceni nel 983, in: Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania 62, 1995, pp. 115–130. EKKEHARD EICKHOFF, Theophanu und der König Otto III. und seine Welt, Stuttgart 1996, pp. 64–79. JACEK BANASZKIEWICZ, Ein Ritter flieht oder wie Kaiser Otto II. sich vom Schlachtfeld bei Cotrone rettete, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 40, 2006, pp. 145–166.

²¹ Thietmar, Chronicon (as note 2), cap. 3.25, pp. 128–129.

²² *Ad Athelheidam imperatricem Papiam civitatem veniens, magno suscipitur luctu caritativoque lenitur solacio*, *ibid.*, cap. 4.1, pp. 130–131.

²³ *Ibid.*, cap. 3.26, pp. 130–131.

²⁴ See note 3.

²⁵ Thietmar, Chronicon (as note 2), cap. 3.26, pp. 130–131.

However, Otto III was not the only one of the late king's children who was in Henry's control: two of Otto III's sisters had also fallen under his power. The six-year-old Adelheid was held in Count Egbert of Hastfalagau's fortress of the Alaburg and Adelheid's younger sister, Sophia, had been placed by her parents in the monastery of Gandersheim for her education and upbringing in 979, an abbey ruled by Abbess Gerberga, Henry's sister²⁶. Not one, but three of Theophanu and Otto II's children were in the hands of the Bavarian branch of the Ottonian family while their mother, grandmother and aunt were still in Italy²⁷.

As Adelheid, Theophanu, and Mathilda gathered their forces in Pavia and prepared to travel north, Henry went on the offensive. His former *fideles*, including Count Egbert of Hastfalagau (also known as 'the One-Eyed') and Count Boleslav II of Bohemia, quickly rallied to support Henry's bid to secure custody of Otto III and, consequently, control of the Ottonian court. Henry likewise endeavoured to persuade ecclesiastical and secular magnates both inside the Ottonian kingdom and further afield as the letter collection of Gerbert of Aurillac demonstrates²⁸. It is important to note that while Thietmar of Merseburg, Gerbert of Aurillac, and other sources underscore Henry's repeated efforts at persuasion and posturing as a king, no diplomas issued either in the name of Otto III nor any charter issued in Henry's own name survive from the end of 983 to the autumn of 984²⁹.

In the midst of making overtures to King Lothar of West Francia, dukes and bishops of Lotharingia and other magnates to support his claim to royal power, Henry arrived at Magdeburg, the great archbishopric at the heart of Otto I's reign³⁰. He then

²⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 4.2–4.3, pp. 132–135. On the siege of Alaburg and Adelheid, see SARAH GREER, *The Disastrous Feast at Werla. Political Relationships and Insult in the Succession Contest of 1002*, in: *German History* 37:1, 2019, pp. 1–16, here p. 6. For the dating of Adelheid and Sophia's birth, see WOLFGANG WAGNER, *Das Gebetsgedenken der Liudolfinger im Spiegel der Königs- und Kaiserurkunden von Heinrich I. bis zu Otto III.*, in: *Archiv für Diplomatik. Schriftgeschichte, Siegel, und Wappenkunde* 40, 1994, pp. 1–78, here pp. 22–27. Karl Leyser suggests that the Billung family were holding Adelheid and a 'treasure' at the Alaburg as pawns for Henry. KARL LEYSER, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society. Ottonian Saxony*, London, 1979, p. 12.

²⁷ The fourth of Otto and Theophanu's children, Mathilda, was likely in the monastery of Essen at this point under the care of Otto II's cousin, Abbess Mathilda of Essen; she later left the monastery in 993 to marry Ezzo, Count Palatine of Lotharingia. Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 4.60, pp. 200–201; trans. in: DAVID A. WARNER, *Ottonian Germany. The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, Manchester 2001, p. 194.

²⁸ For more on Henry's supporters, see GERD ALTHOFF, *Zur Frage nach der Organisation sächsischer *coniurationes* in der Ottonenzeit*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 16, 1982, pp. 129–142.

²⁹ Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 4.2–4.5, pp. 132–137. Gerbert of Aurillac, *Letters* 34, 67 (as note 2), pp. 82–87, 148–153.

³⁰ The letter collection of Gerbert of Aurillac not only provides evidence of Duke Henry II's overtures to King Lothar of Francia, but also points to the instability of many alliances with either camp. For instance, Gerbert questions Bishop Notker of Liège's fidelity to Otto III, rhetorically asking: "Are you watchful, O father of the country, for that onetime famed fidelity to the camp of Caesar, or do blind fortune and ignorance of the times oppress you? [...] Behold, openly deserted is he to whom you have

travelled to Quedlinburg, without Otto III, where the community (in the absence of Abbess Mathilda) sang the royal *laudes* for him³¹. In effect, Henry himself was received like a king, which indeed seems to have prompted the foreign dukes, Miesco of Poland, Mistui, and Boleslav of Bohemia to swear “oaths confirming their support for him as king and lord”³². The recitation of the divine *laudes* coupled with these public oaths evidently struck fear into the hearts of a significant number of the Saxon elite. They formed a *coniuratio* in opposition to Henry and asked to meet him to discuss his intentions. When he failed to arrive, the group then stormed Alaburg and retrieved the young Adelheid³³.

Due in large part to the letters transmitted through the epistolary collection of Gerbert of Aurillac, intense negotiations occurred throughout the Ottonian Empire and in Francia³⁴. In conjunction with Archbishop Adalbero of Reims, Gerbert, a devoted *fidelis* of Empress Adelheid and Theophanu, worked constantly for the empresses’ cause. He travelled through Francia to meet with the Frankish kings, Lothar and his son Louis, and sent missives to several members of the Frankish, Lotharingian, and Saxon clerical and secular elite, all in an effort to determine who remained loyal to the imperial *dominae* and who stayed in the camp of Duke Henry the Quarrelsome.

On June 29th, 984, Adelheid, Theophanu and Mathilda, “with all the leading men of Italy, Gaul, Swabia, Franconia, and Lotharingia” traveled to Rohr, where they were met by Duke Henry as well as “the Saxons, Thuringians, and Slavs”³⁵. A series of intense deliberations occurred, although what was said during these proceedings has not survived. According to the ‘Quedlinburg Annals’ these negotiations concluded with Henry, who the anonymous author claimed was “rightly deprived of the name and kingdom he had usurped”, being compelled to surrender Otto III to Adelheid, Theophanu and Mathilda³⁶. With Otto back in the care of his three female relatives, who the Quedlinburg Annalist describes as the *dominae imperiales*, they embarked on an

vowed your fidelity on his father’s account and to whom you ought to have preserve it once vowed”, Gerbert of Aurillac, Letter 39 (as note 2), pp. 94–96, trans. HARRIET LATTIN, Letter 67, in: *The Letters of Gerbert with his Papal Privileges as Sylvester II* (Records of Civilization. Sources and Studies 60), New York 1961, p. 62.

³¹ Quedlinburg Annals ad a. 984, ed. MARTINA GIESE (MGH SS rer. Ger. 72), Hanover 2004, p. 473.

³² *Huc Miseco et Mistui et Bolizlou duces cum caeteris ineffabilis confluebant, auxilium sibi deinceps ut regi et domno cum iuramentis affirmantes*, Thietmar, Chronicon (as note 2), cap. 4.2, pp. 132–133.

³³ *Ibid.*, cap. 4.4, pp. 134–137.

³⁴ The most recent edition of Gerbert’s letters can be found in Gerbert d’Aurillac Correspondence, ed. RICHER – CALLU (as note 2). For overviews on Gerbert of Aurillac’s political, religious, and intellectual life, see PIERRE RICHER, Gerbert d’Aurillac, pape de l’an mil, Paris 1987. PATRIZIA STOPPACCI, *Clavis Gerbertiana. Gerbertus Aureliacensis* (Quaderni di CALMA 3), Firenze 2016.

³⁵ *Regesta Imperii II*, vol. 3: Die Regesten des Kaiserreiches unter Otto III. 980 (983)–1002, ed. MATHILDE UHLIRZ (hereafter RI II, 3), Graz 1956, n. 956q2.

³⁶ *Heinricus praefatus usurpato nomine et regno iure privatus*, in: Quedlinburg Annals (as note 31), ad a. 984, p. 473.

iter moving throughout the Ottonian heartland, finally arriving at Mühlhausen at the start of 985, where our duplicate diplomas were issued³⁷.

However, the dispute with Henry was in no way settled at this point. The letters in Gerbert's collection repeatedly encourage important magnates, such as Bishop Notker of Liège and Countess Mathilda of Verdun, to maintain their fidelity to Empress Theophanu and the imperial *dominae* with the threat of prospective attacks from King Lothar or Duke Henry³⁸. Indeed, Gerbert wrote to his (unknown) recipient that he was "not unmindful of those persons faithful to Caesar [i.e. Otto II]. A plot either has been formed or is being formed against the son of Caesar and against you not only by the princes, among whom Duke Charles [of Lotharingia] appears, but also by such knights as it is possible to entice by hope or fear"³⁹. Gerbert's letters dated to this period vividly reflect the anxiety of the political elite across western Christendom, with alliances constantly shifting and rumors abounding of who would govern over the Ottonian Empire.

A further meeting had been arranged to take place in Frankfurt in the summer of 985. Here, the dispute between Henry and the party of Otto III would finally be resolved: the *dominae* would eventually pardon Henry for his treason through the intervention of the 'leading men', led by Adelheid's brother and Henry's father-in-law, King Conrad of Burgundy⁴⁰. In the lead-up to this final confrontation with Henry in June 985, Otto III began to issue a swathe of new diplomas reflecting the concerns of the group of regents and advisers surrounding him: Adelheid, Theophanu, Mathilda and their supporters Archbishop Willigis of Mainz and Bishop Hildebald of Worms⁴¹. These diplomas, it must be emphasised, originate from a position of great instability felt throughout the Ottonian Empire and beyond. Although the extant epistolary and narrative sources hint at these tensions, several rounds of deliberations and negotiations must have occurred, but are now lost. The harsh bolt of Otto II's sudden death still threatened to tear the Ottonian imperial family asunder; it was the responsibility of those who reigned in the stead of the child king, Otto III, to prove that they had the political skill and correct governance to bind the empire together again.

³⁷ RI II, 3, n. 956n2, n. 956a3, n. 957a, n. 963a, *inter alia*.

³⁸ Gerbert of Aurillac, Letters 47, 49, and 50 (as note 2), pp. 116–123.

³⁹ [...] *ego fidelium caesaris non immemor. Conjuratio in filium Caesaris ac in vos et acta est et agitur non solum a principibus, inter quos Carolus dux jam non in occulto est, sed etiam, ex militibus, quos spe aut metu allici possibile est.* Gerbert of Aurillac, Letter 59 (as note 2), pp. 149–150, trans. LATTIN (as note 31), Letter 67, p. 108.

⁴⁰ RI II, 3, n. 9691. Quedlinburg Annals (as note 31), ad a. 984, p. 473.

⁴¹ In addition to the charters issued at Mühlhausen at the beginning of 985, see for instance D O III 3, pp. 396–398 (in which Empress Theophanu and Empress Adelheid intervened for St. Paul Abbey, Verdun on October 20, 984 at Worms), D O III 4, pp. 398–399 (in which Empress Theophanu and Count Conrad of Swabia intervened for Einsiedeln Abbey on October 27, 984 at Ingelheim), or D O III 6, pp. 400–401 (in which the empresses Theophanu and Adelheid, Archbishop Willigis, Bishop Hildebald, interceded for Abbot Saleman for his abbey of Lorsch on November 28, 984).

3. TWO SINGLE SHEETS. A CLOSE ANALYSIS OF D O III 7A AND D O III 7B

The charters central to this article – D O III 7a and D O III 7b – were issued in the interregnum between the time the *dominae imperiales* left Quedlinburg in October of 984 and their subsequent *conventus* at Frankfurt in the summer of 985⁴². The diplomas were composed in late January and early February of 985, in or around Mühlhausen, and have striking similarities to one another: most obviously, the two documents both confirm the grant of estates at Walbeck, Berge, Wallhausen and Siuseli to Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg. Both diplomas remain extant on single sheets of parchment; both diplomas were written in clear, evenly-spaced diplomatic minuscule by the same scribe identified as Hildibald B, with the chrismon and *litterae elongata* along the first line of each document⁴³. Both diplomas begin with the same arenga: *Iusta regiae sublimitatis dominatio est piis petitionibus fidelium devota adimpletione assensum exhibere*. (“The just rule of royal sublimity is to deliver assent to the pious petitions of *fideles* with devoted fulfilment”)⁴⁴. While the ideological thrust behind this arenga is not unusual, its linguistic arrangement is striking, as it only occurs in two other charters, both issued in Mühlhausen during this same period. The arenga highlights a crucial element of Ottonian rule at large, and a particularly important emphasis for a new regime: the exhibition of just rule through the ruler’s assent to the pious petitions of his *fideles*. The effect of the arenga is to situate the virtues of *iustitia* and *pietas* as the bedrock of Ottonian governance: the *iustitia* of Otto III’s rulership depends upon his acknowledgement and assent to the right petitions – the pious petitions – brought forth by those most loyal to him, namely his grandmother Empress Adelheid⁴⁵.

⁴² Although discussed below, it is important to note here that these charters were issued alongside two other diplomas (D O III 8 and D O III 9, pp. 404–406). Together, these diplomas point to the Ottonian court’s larger reorganisation of land.

⁴³ Many thanks to Levi Roach for his remarkably insightful comments on this point. For more on Hildibald B, see LEVI ROACH, *Forgery and Memory at the End of the First Millennium*, Princeton 2021, pp. 30–50.

⁴⁴ D O III 7a and D O III 7b, p. 402.

⁴⁵ In general, see SILKE SCHWANDT, *Virtus. Zur Semantik eines politischen Konzepts im Mittelalter* (Historische Politikforschung 22), Frankfurt a. M. 2014. EAD., *Virtus as a Political Concept in the Middle Ages*, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 10, 2015, pp. 71–90. For the Carolingian cultivation of a virtuous court through education, see MATTHEW INNES, ‘A Place of Discipline’. Carolingian Courts and Aristocratic Youth, in: CATHERINE CUBITT (ed.), *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages. The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, Turnhout 2003, pp. 59–76. For the intimate connection between the liturgy and Carolingian mirrors for princes, see JANET L. NELSON, *Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World*, in: JAMES H. BURNS (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 211–251, revised and reprinted in: ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK (ed.), *Carolingian Culture. Emulation and Innovation*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 52–67. See JOANNA STORY, *Cathwulf, Kingship, and the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, in: *Speculum* 74, 1999, pp. 1–21 and ROB MEENS, *Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible. Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 7, 1998, pp. 345–357, here p. 354. For a comprehensive analysis of virtues in the Carolingian age, see SIBYLLE MÄHL, *Quadriga Virtutum. Die Kardinaltugenden in der Geistesgeschichte der Karolingerzeit*, Cologne 1969. For the broader context, see ISTVÁN BEJČZY, *Cardinal Virtues in the*

Despite the similarities between these two documents, it is how they differ in framing this grant of land to Mathilda that has drawn the attention of scholars⁴⁶. The first discrepancy between these two charters occurs in the lengthy *narratio* of D O III 7a, which situates Otto's grandmother, Empress Adelheid, as the driving force behind this grant⁴⁷. She, the diploma states, came to Otto to discuss the future of the properties that had been granted to Adelheid by her husband, Otto I, from his own property *in dotem*⁴⁸. Adelheid asks for some of these properties to be given to the Church, for the benefit of Adelheid's soul, the soul of Otto I, and the soul and the *bonae commemorationis* of their son Otto II⁴⁹. Afterwards, she wished to divide up her dotal lands between her daughter, Mathilda, and her grandson, Otto III⁵⁰. She wanted to ensure that Mathilda would *inuste et legaliter* receive this inheritance, but Adelheid did not want Otto to be deprived of her property nor to make another heir without Otto's consent⁵¹. The diploma thus confirms Adelheid's wish, granting these properties to Abbess Mathilda with all the relevant rights⁵². The scribe then reiterated Adelheid's control of these properties, as Abbess Mathilda should therefore take these lands "from the aforementioned property of her mother, our beloved grandmother"⁵³.

Middle Ages. A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 202), Leiden 2011. The standard work on the *arenga* remains HEINRICH FICHTENAU, *Arenga. Spätantike und Mittelalter im Spiegel von Urkundenformeln* (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 18), Graz 1957.

⁴⁶ One of the missing elements is the location of this charter, although it could be presumed to be at Mühlhausen. For an extensive description of these two charters in the context of the Quedlinburg *Stiftsarchiv*, along with black-and-white photographs of these charters, see SCHULZE, *Quedlinburger Urkundenstudien* (as note 18), pp. 66–74 (and Abbildung 1 and 2).

⁴⁷ Throughout this section, the scribe situated Adelheid as the main actor, with her *nomen* in the nominative case, e.g. *dilecta avia nostra Adalheida videlicet imperatrix augusta ad nos venit, petens*. This is a significant change to D O III 7b, in which her *nomen* changes from the nominative to the genitive modifying her *votum et petitionem* (*dilectissimae aviae nostrae Adalheidis videlicet imperatricis augustae votum et petitionem*), p. 402.

⁴⁸ *Dilecta avia nostra Adalheida videlicet imperatrix augusta ad nos venit, petens ut praedia sua quae avus noster beatae memoriae Otto imperator augustus suis praeceptionibus in dotem ei tradidit*, D O III 7a, p. 402.

⁴⁹ [...] *inprimis quae ecclesiis dei pro sua et anima illius unde ei venerunt, ac pro remedio animae genitoris nostri bonae commemorationis Ottonis imperatoris augusti donari condixit*, *ibid.*, p. 402.

⁵⁰ *Et postea quae inter nos (i.e. Otto III) et filiam eius Mathbiltam amitam videlicet nostram Quitilineburgensis ecclesiae venerabilem abbatissam dividi etiam sibi complacuit*, *ibid.*, pp. 402–403.

⁵¹ *quamvis enim inuste et legaliter praefatae filiae eius amitae nostrae proprietates sua inbaeredari debuisset, nos tamen noluit proprii sui esse expertes nec alios pro firmamento nostrae dilectionis sine nostro consensu et voto facere haeredes*, *ibid.*, p. 403.

⁵² *Unde etiam superius iam dictae carissimae aviae nostrae voluntatem ac petitionem sequendo, scientibus fidelibus nostris praesentibus atque venturis, praenotae filiae illius Mathbiltae carae amitae nostrae sua comprobatione dedimus curtes* [...], *ibid.*, p. 403.

⁵³ [...] *per hanc nostrae dominationis auctoritatem et preceptionem sibi tradidimus, ea videlicet ratione ut eadem iam dicta Mathbilita honorabilis abbatissa cara nobis admodum amita nostra de praefata proprietate a matre sua dilecta avia nostra*, *ibid.* p. 403.

The second diploma, D O III 7b, grants the exact same lands in Mühlhausen, yet is dated to February 5th, 985, eight days later than D O III 7a. Furthermore, the entire section noting Adelheid's motivation and ownership of the land within her dower was excised. Instead, the diploma is presented without any discussion of motivation: here, the diploma is in response to the *votum et petitionem* of "our most beloved grandmother, Adelheid, the august empress", that because of Otto III's love for Adelheid, he should grant Mathilda land from *his* property at Wallhausen, Berge, Walbeck and Siuseli⁵⁴. Furthermore, the later reference to Mathilda's new lands deriving from Adelheid's *proprietas* was replaced with a simple *de prefata proprietate sibi a nobis*.

The visual dimension of these two documents is striking. Both texts are written up in diplomatic style as prestige documents, conforming to the expected visual semiotics of a royal Ottonian diploma. This is quite different from a draft diploma, such as D O III 24a in which Otto III approved the subordination of Heeslingen *Kanonissenstift* to the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen, at the request of Archbishop Adaldag⁵⁵. Issued on March 17th, 986 at Grone, there are immediately recognisable visual and textual differences between these two charters. D O III 24a survives on a much smaller piece of parchment, with no chrism, no *litterae elongata*, no *invocatio*, no seal, nor even a dating clause. Furthermore, the scribe wrote in a clear late Caroline minuscule, with numerous abbreviations and one interlinear insertion.

In comparison with D O III 24a, it becomes clear that D O III 7a was not created as a draft. Rather, the scribe appears to have readied this charter for the possibility of its formal issuance and confirmation. However, it is missing several key elements. Spaces have been left empty for the names of the counts in whose jurisdiction each piece of land fell; in D O III 7b, these are filled in. It also has no seal, no location, and – perhaps most interestingly – the monogram of Otto at the bottom of the document lacks a crossbar to complete it. D O III 7b includes all of these elements. It is possible that D O III 7a had reached the form of a 'final draft', which did not quite make the stage of being confirmed⁵⁶.

The language of the first charter is almost anxious. It overflows with information to justify the grant of land, explaining in detail how Adelheid acquired these properties, what she wanted to do with them, what her legal justification was for her action, and how she was taking care to do it in a way that did not deprive the other heir, Otto III himself. The extensive justifications at each step comes across as a form of pre-emptive defence. As such, scholars have utilised these documents as evidence

⁵⁴ [...] *quomodo nos dilectissimae aviae nostrae Adalheidis videlicet imperatricis augustae votum et petitionem sequendo ob dilectionem illius* [...], D O III 7b, p. 402.

⁵⁵ D O III 24a, pp. 422–424. A complete version of this charter, D O III 24b, also exists. This document appears to be a copy of the eleventh or twelfth century, written onto a *Blankett* document from Otto III's reign, where the protocol, eschatocol and seal were written, with space for the rest of the charter's text to be added later. Our thanks to Levi Roach for his comments on this document.

⁵⁶ This stage is, of course, very important in terms of its legality; Schulze is correct to point out that D O III 7a "wurde nicht rechtskräftig". SCHULZE, *Quedlinburger Urkundenstudien* (as note 18), p. 71.

for an ongoing debate over whether or not Adelheid had the legal right to dispose of property within the Ottonian queenly dower lands⁵⁷.

Yet, by removing the lengthy rationale of D O III 7a, the second charter is transformed into a stronger document. The discussion around Adelheid's legal rights to give this land to Mathilda is elided: instead, we have a simple grant of royal land owned by the king to his aunt Mathilda. In legal terms, it is straightforward and clear. Adelheid's legal justification may have been removed, but her presence and her role as the pious petitioner is not. The entire grant is still cast as her idea, as a response to her request, performed out of Otto III's love for her, the "august empress". Though the way in which the diploma frames the grant of this land changes, Adelheid's *votum et petitionem* that ensures the grant's success remains. Consequently, it is difficult to support the idea that D O III 7b was created to elide Adelheid's involvement in this grant of land.

In fact, not only was this new diploma granted with Adelheid still firmly depicted as the petitioner behind it, another two diplomas were issued with her intercession on the 5th and 6th of February⁵⁸. The first, D O III 8 was yet another grant to Mathilda from Adelheid's dower land, namely, the Carolingian palace at Tribur, which was also a place where Otto II had recently issued diplomas with Theophanu's intervention⁵⁹. This diploma, issued on the same day as D O III 7b, featured identical phrasing in the arenga and *narratio*, obviously being intended to be paired with it⁶⁰. The final diploma with the same arenga, D O III 9, granted Duke Otto of Worms (Otto III's cousin, also known as Duke Otto of Carinthia) a forest and lands at Kaiserslautern along with its associated rights⁶¹. In this diploma, Adelheid acted as intercessor alongside Theophanu – with both women described collectively as the *imperatrices augustae* – as

⁵⁷ See note 6.

⁵⁸ SCHULZE, *Quedlinburger Urkunden* (as note 18), pp. 72–74.

⁵⁹ D O III 8, pp. 404–405. This diploma also survives on a single-sheet of parchment, now housed at Magdeburg, Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, MS Rep. U 9 Quedlinb. A I. a 22. The document was produced mainly by Hildibald A, with Hildibald B filling in the missing information in the gaps left, in a similar fashion to D O III 7a. Our thanks to Levi Roach for his comments on this document. For Otto II's diplomas issued at Tribur, see D O II 216, in: *Die Urkunden Ottos II.*, ed. THEODOR SICKEL (MGH DD Regum et Imperatorum Germaniae 2, 1), Hanover 1893, p. 243; D O II 229, p. 257; D O II 230, p. 258. One of these diplomas, D O II 216, contains Otto II's grant of property to Otto of Carinthia, with Theophanu's intervention. MICHAEL GOCKEL, *Die Bedeutung Treburs als Pfalzort*, in: *Deutsche Königspfalzen. Beiträge zu ihrer historischen und archäologischen Erforschung*, vol. 3 (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 11, 3), Göttingen 1979, pp. 86–110, here pp. 105–110.

⁶⁰ *Iusta regiae sublimitatis dominatio est piis petitionibus fidelium devota adimpletione assensum exhibere. Quapropter omnium fidelium nostrorum presentium scilicet ac futurorum notitiae patefacimus, quomodo nos dilectissimae aviae nostrae Adalheidis videlicet imperatricis augustae votum et petitionem [...]*, D O III 8, p. 404.

⁶¹ Kaiserslautern is about 85 kilometres from Tribur; both palaces are equidistant from Worms, the central lands owned by the Salian dynasty descended from Mathilda's half-sister, Liutgard. STEFAN WEINFURTER, *Herrschaft und Reich der Salier. Grundlinien einer Umbruchzeit*, Sigmaringen 1991, pp. 7–17. ID., *Herrschaftslegitimation und Königsautorität im Wandel. Die Salier und ihr Dom zu Speyer*, in: ID. (ed.) *Die Salier und das Reich*, Bd. 1: Salier, Adel und Reichsverfassung, Sigmaringen 1992, pp. 55–96, here pp. 62–64.

well with Archbishop Willigis of Mainz⁶². This is hardly what we would expect to see if Theophanu and her supporters had stamped out an attempt by Adelheid to exceed the boundaries of her role.

These subsequent charters prove that Theophanu acted in concert with Adelheid at Mühlhausen to rearrange the ownership of multiple Ottonian royal estates. After all, if the discrepancies between D O III 7a and D O III 7b solely revolved around the right of Adelheid to dispose of her dower properties, then one would expect either that the properties would change in the second document, or that Adelheid would be removed from her position as the intercessor driving the grant; neither of these changes occur. Therefore, the motivation behind the change in diplomatic rhetoric remains to be explained. To do so, we need to put back into the picture one of the main characters involved in these grants who has often been overlooked: Mathilda of Quedlinburg.

4. *IMPERIALIS FILLAE, MACHTILDIS ABBATISSAE*. ABBESS MATHILDA OF QUEDLINBURG AND THE OTTONIAN IMPERIAL FAMILY

The role of recipients in actively petitioning rulers for grants of specific privileges or properties is in no doubt⁶³. Any study of charters granting or confirming properties to an individual or institution must consider how and why that recipient may have advocated for this particular document to be issued at that point; recipients of diplomas are not passive figures benefiting from royal largesse without any involvement of their own. Thus, in order to understand the process behind the composition of D O III 7a and 7b, we must consider the role that Mathilda, the recipient of both diplomas, played in determining this grant.

Mathilda, after all, was a consummate Ottonian politician. She spent her entire life on the political stage, from her entry into Quedlinburg in her infancy down to her death as the Ottonian governor over Saxony during her nephew Otto III's campaign in Italy in 999⁶⁴. In her teens, Widukind of Corvey recognised Mathilda's burgeoning

⁶² [...] *quomodo nos dilactae aviae nostrae Adalbeidae ac carissimae genetricis nostrae Theophanu videlicet imperatricum angustarum nec non et fidelis nostri Vuilligisi Mogontianae sedis venerabilis archiepiscopi votum et petitionem* [...], D O III 9, p. 405. This diploma also survives on a single-sheet of parchment, now housed at Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv MS KS. n. 857.

⁶³ See especially MARK MERSIOWSKY, *Towards a Reappraisal of Carolingian Sovereign Charters*, in: KARL HEIDECCKER (ed.), *Charters and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Society* (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 5), Turnhout 2000, pp. 15–25, here pp. 22–24. Id., *Die Urkunde in der Karolingerzeit. Originale, Urkundenpraxis und politische Kommunikation*, 2 vols. (MGH Schriften 60), Wiesbaden 2015, vol. 2, pp. 543–556. TIMOTHY REUTER, *The 'Imperial Church System' of the Ottonian and Salian Rulers. A Reconsideration*, in: JANET L. NELSON (ed.), *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 325–354, here p. 339.

⁶⁴ The Quedlinburg Annalist describes Otto III giving his aunt the role of governing the *regna* during his Italian campaign: *Haec fratruale suo, largo scilicet Ottone, Romam proficiscente imperatoria vice commissa sibi regna non levitate foeminea gubernans barbarorum etiam induratos vertices regum artificioso aviti paternique ritu ingenii ita placabiles subiugabilesque reddiderat*, Quedlinburg Annals (as note 31), ad a. 999, pp. 500–501.

career as an Ottonian politician and dedicated his ‘Res Gestae Saxonicae’ to her: he described the text as a guide for this ‘*domina* of all of Europe’, which would serve to educate her on the deeds of Henry I and Otto I so that she may improve herself through their examples⁶⁵. Evidently, that education was successful: the ‘Quedlinburg Annals’ describe Mathilda as ruling over Saxony “not with feminine levity” but with the natural capacity of her father and grandfather⁶⁶.

Despite Mathilda’s active role in Ottonian politics, attention to her involvement in negotiating these duplicate grants in 985 has been lacking. Since Quedlinburg served as a favoured memorial institution for the Ottonian dynasty, scholars have assumed that Ottonian queens were ‘naturally’ inclined to grant their dower lands to Quedlinburg and to the Ottonian daughters – like Mathilda – who ruled it⁶⁷. Yet, at the time that these paired diplomas were issued, Adelheid had not interceded in any of the numerous diplomas issued by her husband and her son to Quedlinburg, nor in any of those granted to her daughter directly. Adelheid was not inevitably drawn to grant property to Quedlinburg or to her daughter. The grants issued in 985, therefore, mark a radical realignment of Mathilda and Adelheid’s relationship through the medium of diplomas.

Instead, prior to 985, Mathilda’s involvement as a recipient of royal diplomas was distinctive. Mathilda was primarily the recipient of grants by Ottonian rulers that sought to harness the symbolic potency of her monastery, her role as its abbess, and as a key member of the imperial family. This is particularly evident in Mathilda’s relationship with her brother, Otto II. Otto II’s first extant charter after his coronation as king confirms the donation of dower property from their grandmother, Queen Mathilda, to Quedlinburg, mirroring the charter issued by their father, Otto I, ten days earlier⁶⁸. Otto II repeatedly visited his sister’s monastery at important annual moments throughout his reign: the most well-known visits came at Easter, but he also arranged to be at Quedlinburg on other significant dates, such as the anniversary of their father’s death⁶⁹.

A string of such visits occurred soon after the death of Otto I in 973, and vividly illustrates how the Ottonians used the royal *iter* and the granting of diplomas to harness and secure their power. In the aftermath of his father’s death, Otto II faced the possibility that his older cousin, Duke Henry the Quarrelsome of Bavaria, could claim some form of Ottonian royal power for himself. Henry’s father and namesake,

⁶⁵ [...] *quae domina esse dinosceris iure totius Europae*, Widukind of Corvey, *Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum Libri Tres*, ed. PAUL HIRSCH – HANS-EBERHARD LOHMANN (MGH SS rer. Germ. 60), Hanover 1935, p.61.

⁶⁶ [...] *non levitate foeminea gubernans*, Quedlinburg Annals (as note 31), ad a. 999, p. 501.

⁶⁷ See, for example, LEYSER, *Rule and Conflict* (as note 26), pp. 83–123; GERD ALTHOFF, *Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung. Studien zum Totengedenken der Billunger und Ottonen* (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 47), Munich 1984, pp. 166–167, 171, 242.

⁶⁸ D O II 1, p. 10, issued in Wallhausen on 25 July 961. See also D O I 228, pp. 312–313, issued by Otto I at Quedlinburg on 15 July 961.

⁶⁹ RI II, 2, n. 652–655 (Easter 974); n. 658 (anniversary of Otto I’s death, May 974); n. 763a (Easter 978).

Henry the Younger, had repeatedly challenged his brother Otto I after the death of their own father Henry I in 936, rebelling several times against Otto I and allegedly plotting an assassination attempt against him⁷⁰. On the Easter after Otto I's death, Otto II visited Quedlinburg (April 12th 974) before travelling on to Mühlhausen, where he granted additional dower properties to his new wife and newly consecrated empress, the *dilectissima* Theophanu, *coimperatrici augustae nec non imperii regnorumque consorti*⁷¹. These properties included Mühlhausen itself and Tilleda, the next destination on his court's route. At Tilleda, on May 10th (just after the first anniversary of Otto I's death on May 7th), Otto granted the use of several properties to his sister Mathilda directly, in a charter filled with similar language of deep affection and veneration for her position as abbess⁷². The court then returned to Quedlinburg, where Otto II granted property to Quedlinburg on the feast day of the convent's patron saint, Servatius, featuring a memorial clause for the soul of his and Mathilda's father and his predecessors⁷³.

Considering the court's circular route beginning and ending at Quedlinburg, the properties granted and the individuals involved, this series of diplomas conveyed a clear set of messages designed to strengthen the position of Otto II and his immediate family. The emperor underscored his close bonds with the powerful women in his family, both his abbatial sister and his new *coimperatrix*. At the same time, these diplomas financially augmented and publicly broadcasted the political standing of Theophanu and Mathilda at significant Saxon places in the wake of his father's death. For Theophanu in particular, who had only recently entered the Ottonian family, these grants offered her a means to reinforce her power as an Ottonian ruler: these grants were negotiated and enacted at places that she now owned, a visible statement of her increasing power as a Saxon landholder. Crucially, this series of diplomas ended just a month before Henry the Quarrelsome launched his open rebellion against Otto II in June 974. These grants, with a transfer and diversification of landed wealth to both Theophanu and

⁷⁰ Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum* (as note 65), 2.15, p. 79. Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, *Gesta Ottonis 220–227*, ed. WALTER BERSCHIN (*Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*), Munich 2001, p. 283.

⁷¹ D O II 76, pp. 92–93, issued on 29 April 974.

⁷² *Mathildis videlicet venerabilis abbatissae, amoris instigante ardore quaedam nostrae proprietatis predia, curtem videlicet Bareboi [...] Zizzevi et Niunburg cum omnibus que Fridericus in beneficium visus est habere, nostra imperiali potentia eidem in perpetuae usum proprietatis donavimus firmiterque nostro ex iure in eiusdem carissimae sororis nostrae iura transfudimus [...] eadem cara nobis admodum soror teneat possideat ac liberam debinc dandi tradendi vendendi seu commutandi*, D O II 77, p. 93, issued on 10 May 974.

⁷³ [...] *deinde pro pro piissimi genitoris nostri imperatoris augusti ceterorumque antecedentium parentum remedio animarum*, D O II 78, p. 94, issued on 13 May 974. On this diploma see WOLFGANG HUSCHNER, *Kirchenfest und Herrschaftspraxis. Die Regierungszeiten der ersten beiden Kaiser aus liudolfingischem Hause*, Teil 2: Otto II. (973–983), in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 41, 1993, pp. 117–134, here p. 120. ULRICH REULING, *Quedlinburg. Königspfalz – Reichsstift – Markt*, in: LUTZ FENSKE (ed.), *Pfalzen – Reichsgut – Königshöfe. Deutsche Königspfalzen. Beiträge zu ihrer historischen und archäologischen Erforschung*, vol. 4, Göttingen 1996, pp. 184–247, here p. 212.

Mathilda, were surely an attempt to emphasise Otto II's strong political and personal support from his immediate family. Mathilda must have been party to the discussions within her brother and sister-in-law's court during their residence at Quedlinburg over Easter, advising how best to present a unified front against their rebellious Bavarian cousin⁷⁴. From May 974 onwards, she repeatedly interceded in Otto II's diplomas, clearly taking a prominent role in the diplomatic decisions within her brother's court during the rebellion. When Henry was finally defeated definitively in 978, Otto II arrived at Quedlinburg to celebrate Easter triumphantly with his sister in March before the court travelled – likely with Mathilda accompanying them – to Magdeburg to preside over Henry's trial which resulted in his exile to Utrecht⁷⁵. The closeness of Mathilda as a political adviser to her brother after the rebellion is confirmed both by her presence at his court during his Italian campaign in March 981 and by Thietmar's report that Otto II's will provided his sister with a quarter of his treasure⁷⁶.

Mathilda was a prominent figure in her brother's court who was intimately acquainted with the practices and processes of Ottonian rule. In particular, her experience in her brother's court illustrates her repeated involvement in the granting of diplomas, many to her own personal benefit as well as the benefit of her monastic institution. It is important to note here the differences between the two: we must be careful to distinguish between grants issued to Mathilda herself as an individual from those grants given to Quedlinburg as an institution. Moreover, rather than grants giving her the right of usufruct of the property in her lifetime, D O III 7a, 7b and 8 clearly state that the properties in question were passed into Mathilda's outright ownership, for her to dispose of as she wished⁷⁷. Though Mathilda almost certainly chose to

⁷⁴ Reuling suggests Mathilda was instrumental in arranging the date of Otto II's grant to Quedlinburg on St Servatius's feast day. REULING, Quedlinburg (as note 73), p. 210, n. 179.

⁷⁵ RI II, 2, n. 763 a–c. Mathilda later presided over the trial of recalcitrant Saxon noblemen in Magdeburg during her rule over Saxony in 997–999, perhaps drawing on her memory of this trial ten years earlier. See Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 4.41–4.42, pp. 178–182.

⁷⁶ RI II, 2, n. 840a. Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 3.25, pp. 128–129. Mathilda is the only individual recipient named by Thietmar: the other three quarters went to the churches, the poor, and his servants and warriors.

⁷⁷ D O III 7a, p. 403: *Matbiltae carae amitae nostrae sua comprobatione dedimus curtes Vualabuson et Bergae [...] per hanc nostrae dominationis auctoritatem et preceptionem sibi tradidimus [...] ut praelibatum est sibi tradita liberam debinc tenendi tradendi vendendi seu commutandi*. D O III 7b, pp. 402–403: *Matbiltae Quitlineburgensis monasterii venerabili abbatissae de nostra proprietate dedimus duas curtes Vualebuson et Berge [...] per hanc nostrae dominationis auctoritatem et preceptionem sibi tradimus [...] sibi a nobis tradita liberam debinc tenendi tradendi vendendi seu commutandi*. D O III 8, pp. 404–405: *Matbildae abbatissae Quitlineburgensis monasterii de nostra proprietate dedimus curtem Triburis vocatam [...] per hanc nostrae domitionis auctoritatem et preceptionem sibi tradidimus [...] a nobis sibi tradita liberam debinc tenendi tradendi vendendi seu commutandi*. The ability of canonesses in general to maintain personal usufruct of property is discussed in the *Institutio Sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis* 9, in: *Concilia aevi Karolini*, vol. 2, 1, ed. ALBERT WERMINGHOFF (MGH Conc. 2, 1), Hanover 1906, pp. 444–445. THOMAS SCHLIP, Norm und Wirklichkeit religiöser Frauengemeinschaften im Frühmittelalter. Die *Institutio sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis* des Jahres 816 und die Problematik der Verfassung von Frauenkommunitäten (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte

leave some estates to her monastery on her death, it is entirely possible that she bequeathed part of her lands to others, such as her nearest relative on her death in 999, her nephew, Otto III⁷⁸. Regardless, a grant to Mathilda as an individual rather than to Quedlinburg as an institution gave Mathilda different rights and a different form of economic power during her life. By the time of Otto II's death, Mathilda must have been phenomenally rich as an individual, in addition to governing an extremely wealthy and prestigious monastery.

Therefore, one must ask the rationale behind the decision in 985 to provide Adelheid's first-ever grant to her extremely wealthy daughter. Thus far, scholarly discussion tends to assume that this grant was intended to direct these lands to the memorial institution of Quedlinburg, reflecting the interest of royal Ottonian women in commemoration and the desire of royal widows to secure their dower land by placing it under the control of female monasteries. However, these arguments do not explain why both Adelheid and Mathilda would want these particular lands to be granted to Mathilda directly at this point, launching a new diplomatic relationship between them.

An answer appears when we move away from examining these lands as simply a block of dower lands to instead contemplating them as a group of different properties with their own individual associations to the grantor and recipient. Aside from Siuseli, which has unfortunately left no significant trace in the historical record, all the other properties granted to Mathilda in D O III 7a and D O III 7b have demonstrable ties either to Mathilda, to Quedlinburg or to the broader Ottonian family. Wallhausen was the site where Queen Mathilda and Henry I were married, making it a place of considerable memorial and symbolic importance to the Ottonian descendants of the couple who were now buried in Quedlinburg. Otto II's first royal diplomas were issued at Wallhausen in 961 after his coronation at Aachen, and he and Theophanu visited the site repeatedly as part of their itineraries through Saxony⁷⁹. Berge was the monastery founded by Otto I in Magdeburg with the monks from St Maurice after he converted Magdeburg into an archbishopric. St Maurice was founded by Otto I a year into his reign; it possessed strong associations with the only other monastery founded with Otto I's involvement, the convent at Quedlinburg, which was established a year earlier⁸⁰. Notably, both Abbess Mathilda and Empress Adelheid separately acted as

137. Studien zur Germania Sacra 21), Göttingen 1998, pp. 92–96. However, the grants to Mathilda by Otto III in 985 make no mention of usufruct, but rather give her ownership of property outright. On the ability of an abbess to own her monastery itself, see SUSAN WOOD, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West*, Oxford 2006, pp. 358–359.

⁷⁸ Reuling notes that Tribur, a property granted to Mathilda personally in D O III 8, returned into Otto III's control after her death. REULING, *Quedlinburg* (as note 73), p. 221.

⁷⁹ RI II, 2, n. 575–578, 785–787, 804, 822–823.

⁸⁰ D O I 1, 14, pp. 89–90, 101–102. The connections between St Maurice of Magdeburg and Quedlinburg under Otto I are detailed in SARAH GREER, *Commemorating Power in Early Medieval Saxony. Writing and Rewriting the Past at Gandersheim and Quedlinburg*, c. 852–1024, Oxford forthcoming 2021.

intercessors for Berge in diplomas in the 970s⁸¹. And, finally, Walbeck was a site that the Ottonian family had owned throughout the tenth century, which by 984 had fallen into the hands of Henry the Quarrelsome⁸². This link to Henry the Quarrelsome breaks open the broader purpose and intended effects of these documents, as it draws our attention to the significant events taking place in the immediate lead-up to the production of D O III 7a and D O III 7b: namely, the final stage of the succession crisis that had dominated Ottonian affairs from 983 down to 985.

5. PREPARING FOR FRANKFURT: D O III 7A AND 7B IN CONTEXT

These two diplomas should be read as part of the deliberations preparing for the Frankfurt meeting between the *dominae imperiales* and Henry the Quarrelsome in the summer of 985. Mathilda, Theophanu and Adelheid, along with their supporters, worked carefully to ensure they were in the best possible position ahead of this *conventus*. This meeting would involve negotiating a settlement with Henry the Quarrelsome, requiring some form of land exchange. Indeed, Thietmar mentions an earlier settlement, negotiated either shortly before or during the 984 hand over of Otto III at Rohr, as part of which Henry would be able to keep his properties in Walbeck, Frohse and Merseburg⁸³. In this light, D O III 7a and 7b attempted to secure the ownership of certain pieces of contested land, most of which had strong links to the Ottonian family and to Ottonian queens, by placing it directly into the control of Mathilda of Quedlinburg.

The queen's dower had been a source of some anxiety prior to 985: there had been periodic disputes over the rights of Ottonian queens to maintain control of their dower lands after the death of their husbands throughout the course of the tenth century⁸⁴. As such, in the aftermath of Otto II's death in 983, the legal ownership of these lands may well have been contested by others in the broader Ottonian family. Placing some of these estates into the ownership of Mathilda could have offered greater protection in the face of a possible challenge by Henry, who Thietmar claims was still attempting to push forward his own claim to some of these Ottonian properties. This could explain why so many of these properties from Adelheid's lands were granted

⁸¹ Adelheid appears in D O I 383, pp. 524–525, issued in 970; Mathilda appears in D O II 115, pp. 129–130, issued in 975.

⁸² Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 5.7, pp. 138–139. This Walbeck, which lies just to the south-east of Quedlinburg, is not the Walbeck on the River Aller, owned by the Counts of Walbeck. HELMUT LIPPELT, *Thietmar von Merseburg. Reichsbischof und Chronist* (Mitteldeutsche Forschungen 72), Cologne 1973, p. 49, n. 22. JOHN W. BERNHARDT, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936–1075* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th series 21), Cambridge 1993, pp. 145–146.

⁸³ Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 5.7, pp. 138–139.

⁸⁴ See note 6.

directly to Mathilda in one day, far more than would have been required if these charters were simply aimed at bolstering Mathilda's economic powerbase as an individual.

This motivation would account for the remarkably different *narrationes* recorded for the same grant of land. The anxious discussion present in D O III 7a, which carefully details the legal right that Adelheid had to give this land to Mathilda as part of her lawful inheritance, was put aside in favour of a more powerful, blunt statement of transfer from the property of the king to his aunt in D O III 7b. Yet, the anxiety that emanates out of that first, unauthenticated version could have been behind its retention by Mathilda and the abbey of Quedlinburg: if there was a challenge to Mathilda's rights over these lands in the future, the legal case laid out in the earlier diploma – which was helpfully written up in proper diplomatic form – could be useful to deploy.

Such concerns would also explain why D O III 7b and D O III 8 lack any form of memorial clause for Adelheid or Otto I, which are much more common for grants directed towards commemorative institutions such as Quedlinburg⁸⁵. D O III 7a does contain reference to memorial motivations, but these motivations pertained to other non-specified grants of property from Adelheid's dower lands in general, not the ones in question in this diploma⁸⁶. These lands in D O III 7b were not granted to fund the liturgical commemoration of Adelheid, Otto I or Otto II by the community of Quedlinburg, led by Adelheid's daughter. Instead, they functioned as an attempt to secure control of important lands that had symbolic and economic value to the Ottonian family by granting them to a powerful Ottonian daughter directly as part of her own inheritance. Notably, out of the three *dominae imperiales*, Mathilda is the only one descended from the family through birth. One wonders whether Mathilda, in fact, held the strongest claim out of all three when it came to defending her rights to own lands associated with the Ottonian family⁸⁷.

For more evidence that these were the concerns playing on the mind of the *dominae* and their supporters at this point, we can look at D O III 9, issued a day later on February 6th, 985⁸⁸. This diploma granted the Wasgau forest and lands at Kaisers-

⁸⁵ On memorial clauses in Ottonian diplomas, see ALTHOFF, *Adels- und Königsfamilien* (as note 67), pp. 172–179, 239. MICHAEL BORGOLTE, *Die Stiftungsurkunden Heinrichs II. Eine Studie zum Handlungsspielraum des letzten Liudolfingers*, in: KARL SCHNITH – ROLAND PAULER (eds.), *Festschrift für Eduard Hlawitschka zum 65. Geburtstag* (Münchener Historische Studien. Abt. Mittelalterliche Geschichte 5), Kallmünz 1993, pp. 231–250. WAGNER, *Das Gebetsgedenken* (as note 26), pp. 1–78. DANIELA MÜLLER-WIEGAND, *Vermitteln – Beraten – Erinnern. Funktionen und Aufgabenfelder von Frauen in der ottonischen Herrscherfamilie (919–1024)*, Kassel 2005, pp. 239–245.

⁸⁶ [...] *vellet tradere illi liceret, inprimis quae ecclesie dei pro sua et anima illius unde ei venerunt, ac pro remedio animae genitoris nostri bonae commemorationis Ottonis imperatoris augusti donari condixit et postea quae inter nos et filiam eius Mathildam amitam videlicet nostram Quitilineburgensis ecclesiae venerabilem abbatissam dividi etiam sibi complacuit*, D O III 7a, pp. 402–403.

⁸⁷ See the description of Mathilda's inheritance of Otto I's and Henry I's talents as rulers in Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum* (as note 65), Preface 1, pp. 1–2; *Quedlinburg Annals* (as note 31), ad a. 999, pp. 500–501.

⁸⁸ SCHULZE, *Quedlinburger Urkundenstudien* (as note 18), pp. 72–74.

lautern along with its associated rights to Duke Otto of Worms, and documented the *votum ac petitionem* of the *imperatricum angustarum*, Adelheid and Theophanu, alongside Archbishop Willigis of Mainz⁸⁹. Like D O III 7a, D O III 7b and D O III 8, the anxiety surrounding the upcoming Frankfurt meetings lay behind the creation of this diploma, which is an attempt to reshuffle lands amongst the various members of the Ottonian family in preparation for the final settlement⁹⁰. Thietmar reveals that one of the conditions Henry the Quarrelsome had negotiated for abandoning his claim to the throne was that he would regain his duchy of Bavaria, though this was met with some resistance by the Ottonian elite⁹¹. Henry's control over Bavaria had been stripped from him after he rebelled against Otto II in 978⁹². It had then eventually ended up in the control of a different Henry, 'the Younger', from the Liutpolding family, in 983⁹³. This Henry had originally been granted the duchy of Carinthia, but had been stripped of the region after his rebellion alongside Henry the Quarrelsome against Otto II. Carinthia had passed into the control of Otto of Worms (thus commonly known as Otto of Carinthia), the son of Otto I's eldest daughter, Liutgard⁹⁴. This complicated history of ducal transfers just before the succession crisis broke out meant that an equally complicated system of negotiations needed to occur in order for Henry the Quarrelsome to regain Bavaria. Carinthia would be given back to the Liutpolding Henry in compensation for his loss of Bavaria, and Otto would be left duchy-less⁹⁵. The grant of Kaiserslautern to Otto of Worms in January was evidently part of the compensation offered by the *dominae imperiales*. This group of diplomas, therefore, plainly illustrate that securing control of land, negotiating with supporters, and trying to anticipate and prepare for the demands of Henry the Quarrelsome were issues weighing heavily on the mind of the Ottonian court in February 985.

⁸⁹ [...] *quomodo nos dilaetae [sic] aviae nostrae Adalbeidae ac carissimae genetricis nostrae Theophanu videlicet imperatricum angustarum nec non et fidelis nostri Vuilligisi Mogontinae sedis venerabilis archiepiscopi votum et petitionem [...]*, D O III 9, p. 405.

⁹⁰ SCHULZE, *Quedlinburger Urkundenstudien* (as note 18), p. 72.

⁹¹ Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 4.7–4.8, pp. 138–141; for commentary, see GERD ALTHOFF, *Otto III*, translated by PHYLLIS JESTICE, University Park 2003, pp. 36–40. For the wider history of the *ducatus* of Bavaria, see HUBERTUS SEIBERT, *Zwischen regnum und ducatus – Grundlagen, Formen und Träger herzoglicher Herrschaft in Bayern um die Jahrtausendwende*, in: *Mitteilungen aus dem niederösterreichischen Landesarchiv* 16, 2014, pp. 42–67.

⁹² Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 3.7, pp. 104–105.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, cap. 3.24, pp. 128–129. Giese argues this passage was drawn from the now-lost section of the *Quedlinburg Annals*: GIESE, *Die Annales Quedlinburgenses* (as note 31), pp. 350–351.

⁹⁴ WEINFURTER, *Herrschaft und Reich* (as note 61), pp. 13–21.

⁹⁵ ALTHOFF, *Otto III* (as note 91), p. 37. Evidence of Henry the Younger's hostility to Henry the Quarrelsome retaking the duchy of Bavaria can be seen in the 'great discord' between the two at the Rohr meeting in 984. Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 4.8, pp. 140–141.

6. OTTONIAN SUCCESSION, DIPLOMATIC PRODUCTION, AND ESTABLISHING JUST RULE

The carefully crafted diplomas D O III 7a and 7b reveal the concern of the *dominae imperiales* about the succession and inheritance disputes revived by the death of Otto II, and their broader efforts to secure control of the Ottonian Empire. This perspective breaks open these documents and suggests complex dynamics at play surrounding Ottonian power relations. In particular, Ottonian empresses and abbesses skilfully negotiated with each other and with their *fideles* to create the consensus needed in these intense periods of potential discord and civil revolt caused by the death of the emperor.

Anxiety and concern surrounding dynastic transition had deep roots in the Ottonian Empire, and the events of 984 and 985 should be placed in the context of the previous moment of Ottonian succession spurred on by the death of Emperor Otto I on May 7th, 973⁹⁶. Otto II's first charters after his father's death confirmed the status and economic security of Otto I's major foundation at Magdeburg⁹⁷. Empress Adelheid, as a *pia domnae et carissimae genitricis*, intervened (*interventu*) in these charters and advised (*admonitione*) Otto II repeatedly⁹⁸. Despite this performative attempt to reaffirm Otto II's identity as his father's successor, the new king faced a challenge from within his own family⁹⁹. In 973, as in 984, Henry the Quarrelsome used the death of the king to push forward his own claims to share in the royal Ottonian legacy. A further set of charters issued in the months after Otto I's death reflect the Ottonian ruling family's attempts to placate Otto II's older cousin, Henry. In two diplomas issued on June 7th, Otto II granted property to the monastery of Gandersheim, which was led by Henry's sister, Abbess Gerberga. In these grants, a strong emphasis was laid on the *admonitio* of Empress Adelheid, for the soul of Otto I, and, crucially, for the stability of the empire¹⁰⁰. From June 16th of the same year, Otto II held an imperial assembly

⁹⁶ On the similarities between the 983 succession crisis and earlier successions, see TIMOTHY REUTER, *Germany in the Middle Ages c. 800–1056*, London 1991, pp. 184–186.

⁹⁷ Amongst the charters issued for Magdeburg, at Magdeburg, see D O II 29, D O II 30 and D O II 31, pp. 38–42.

⁹⁸ D O II 29: [...] *idcirca nos pia domnae et carissimae genitricis nostrae Adalbeidis admonitione*, p. 38; D O II 30: *idcirco nos rogatu et admonitione dilectissimae genitricis nostrae domnae Adalbeidis*, p. 40; D O II 31: *Unde rogatu et admonitione domne genitricis nostre Adalbeidis pia sollicitudine moniti*, p. 41.

⁹⁹ On the performative diplomatic acts of royal succession, see KOZIOL, *Politics of Memory* (as note 7), pp. 63–81.

¹⁰⁰ Without Adelheid, D O II 35a and 35b, p. 44–46. D O II 36: [...] *qualiter nos ab ammonitionem carissimae genitricis nostrae Adalbeide pro genitoris nostri omniumque debitorum nostrorum animabus nec non imperii nostri stabilitate*, p. 47. There are two fully-authenticated single-sheet versions of D O II 35 written by different scribes plus a twelfth-century copy. Sickel argues that 35b was copied directly from D O II 35a around 979 with a few changes, primarily in order to provide further details on the lands in question. As both copies of D O III 35 and 36 are apparently original documents, but D O II 36 was dated exactly a year later, Sickel suggests the grant of lands in question took place in 973 but the second diploma may have only been created the following year, possibly after a fire had destroyed part of the convent. See SICKEL, *MGH DD O II* (as note 59), pp. 44, 47. HANS GOETTING, *Das Bistum Hildesheim*,

at Worms¹⁰¹. Towards the end of the *conventus* on the 27th of June, Otto II issued two large grants of land to Niedermünster, the favoured monastery of the Bavarian branch of the Ottonians¹⁰². In this diploma, Henry's mother, Judith of Bavaria, acted as an intercessor alongside Adelheid¹⁰³. On the same day, Adelheid also interceded for Duke Henry the Quarrelsome himself in a charter which awarded the duke of Bavaria the city of Bamberg with Aurach¹⁰⁴.

The effect of all of these grants was a significant gain of property for the family of Henry the Quarrelsome and the monasteries associated with them. All of these diplomas pronounced their cooperation with, and acknowledgement of, Emperor Otto II and the dowager Empress Adelheid in the public political sphere. These charters, in effect, emphasise mutual support and affection as relatives, but also reify the hierarchy within the royal family and the correct avenues for the dispensation of lands and justice. It is possible that this program of grants was enacted on the advice of Adelheid: she had survived a catastrophic royal succession following the death of her first husband, King Lothar of Italy, which resulted in the seizure of her treasure as well as her capture and house arrest by a political rival¹⁰⁵. In Germany, Adelheid had also witnessed first-hand the civil war and negotiations between her late husband Otto I and her stepson Liudolf. In the end, these grants were not enough to quell Henry the Quarrelsome's rebellion against his younger cousin, but they do appear to show a pre-emptive attempt to use diplomas – and the performative opportunities they provided – to smooth the path of succession.

These grants further reveal that Henry the Quarrelsome had received a significant amount of property for his branch of the family after Otto I's death. Consequently, he may well have expected to receive more in the uncertain years between 983 and 985. As the most senior male figure in the Ottonian family, Henry was in an extremely

vol 1: Das reichsunmittelbare Kanonissenstift Gandersheim (Germania sacra. Historisch-statistische Beschreibung der Kirche des Alten Reiches. Neue Folge 7), Berlin 1973, pp. 87, 262–263. See also these diplomas as single-sheets at Wolfenbüttel, Staatsarchiv, MS Abt. 14 n. 1a (D O II 35a), MS Abt. 14 n. 1b (D O II 35b), MS Gandersh. n. 14 (D O II 36). There is also a twelfth-century copy of D O II 35a.

¹⁰¹ Gerhard of Augsburg, *Vita sancti Oudalrici episcopi*, cap. 26 and 27, in: *Annales, Chronica et Historiae aevi Carolini et Saxonici*, ed. GEORG WAITZ (MGH SS 4), Hanover 1841, pp. 411–414.

¹⁰² D O II 40 and D O II 41 (as note 59), pp. 50–51. Two months prior, on the 27th of April in Merseburg, Empress Adelheid interceded in one charter for Duchess Judith (over control of saltworks at Reichenhall), and both Adelheid and Judith interceded together for Niedermünster to receive Otto I's property at Beutelhausen. See D O I 431 and D O I 432 (as note 14), pp. 584–585.

¹⁰³ D O II 40 (as note 59), p. 50: [...] *qualiter nos ob interventum dilectissimae genitricis nostrae Adalheidae nec non venerabilis domnae Iuditae salubrem petitionem.*

¹⁰⁴ D O II 44 (as note 59), p. 54: [...] *ob interventum dilectissimae genitricis nostrae Adalheidae caro nepoti nostro Baioariorum duci quoddam nostri iuris predium.* This original charter remains extant (Bamberg, Staatsarchiv, Bamberger Urkunden 8).

¹⁰⁵ MICHEL PARISSÉ, Adélaïde de Bourgogne, reine d'Italie et de Germanie, impératrice (931–999), in: PATRICK CORBET et al., (eds.), Adélaïde de Bourgogne. Genèse et représentations d'une sainteté impériale. Actes du colloque international du Centre d'Études Médiévales – UMR 5594, Auxerre 10 et 11 décembre 1999, Dijon 2002, pp. 11–26, here pp. 14–16.

powerful position: he was able to seize custody of not only Otto III but also appears to have been in control of two of Otto II and Theophanu's daughters. He had negotiated the support of Lothar of West Francia, and as the frantic letters written by Gerbert of Aurillac reveal, Henry was a very real contender in this succession crisis¹⁰⁶. On the road from Magdeburg to Quedlinburg, Henry was clearly trying to present himself as a kingly figure. It is tempting to speculate about whether he was taking advantage of these venues to issue charters either in Otto III's name or in his own to his key supporters present throughout this period¹⁰⁷. Even though no such diplomas or charters survive, it is clear that Henry held the upper hand through most of 984: when he arrived at the meetings with the *dominae imperiales*, he could have expected significant reparations in return for making peace.

These past events from the decade prior must have played through the minds of Adelheid, Theophanu and Mathilda when they returned to Saxony in 984: many of the places that they chose to visit were the sites of these previous actions. Charters do not exist in temporal isolation, but rather look both backwards and forwards in time, drawing on memories of the past and anticipating events in the future. It is surely not an accident that the negotiations and issuing of D O III 7a and 7b took place at Mühlhausen: this is the property which Theophanu was granted by Otto II immediately before Henry's first rebellion in 974, at the point where Otto II, Theophanu and Mathilda (and possibly Adelheid too) were presenting a united front against Henry¹⁰⁸. Those present must have recalled memories of their past actions a decade ago in this place when they were preparing for yet another conflict with the same man in 985.

We can also look ahead to see the afterlife of this grant. In June 991, Theophanu unexpectedly died while in Nijmegen, prompting Adelheid to assume the care of her eleven-year-old grandson and his kingdom. On January 6th, 992 at Grone, Empress Adelheid and Abbess Mathilda led an impressive assembly of Ottonian clerics and magnates to petition Otto III to grant the estate of Walbeck, "from her *dos (suae dotis)*" to the church of Quedlinburg¹⁰⁹. Walbeck was one of the estates that D O III 7a claimed came from Adelheid's *dos*. However, the language in this diploma is different on two significant levels. First, the number of intercessors in this diploma is extraordinary: where D O III 7a and 7b both only list Adelheid as intercessor, this diploma overwhelms the reader with the sheer force of fourteen named clerics and magnates – *aliorumque complurimum* – who petitioned the young emperor under the direction of

¹⁰⁶ Gerbert of Aurillac, Letters 16–63 (as note 2), pp. 32–161.

¹⁰⁷ Thietmar noted the oaths Henry secured from his supporters in this period and the promises he made to them in return: Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 2), cap. 4.1–4.2, pp. 131–132. For more on the significance of Magdeburg as a site for the performance of Ottonian kingship and the issuance of charters, see DAVID A. WARNER, *Henry II at Magdeburg. Kingship, Ritual and the Cult of Saints*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 3, 1994, pp. 135–166.

¹⁰⁸ RI II, 2, n. 656.

¹⁰⁹ D O III 81, pp. 489–490.

Adelheid and Mathilda¹¹⁰. Second, this diploma focuses more directly on memorial concerns than in D O III 7a and 7b: here the grant specifically benefits the souls of Otto I, Otto II, Otto III himself, Adelheid and Mathilda¹¹¹. Intriguingly, Theophanu – recently deceased – is not included in the memorial clause.

Nevertheless, Theophanu's death must have been the spark for this grant: we should not underestimate how sudden deaths like this could evoke real fear and concern about the afterlife, the judgement of God and – in the case of royal deaths – the future security of the realm. Like Otto II's passing in 983, Theophanu's unexpected death must have sent shockwaves through the Ottonian court and raised concerns for the future. Rather than thinking about this grant as the first opportunity at which Adelheid could finally dispose of her dower lands, this diploma should be read with the weight of dynastic transition and political stability in mind. The elderly Adelheid and her daughter Mathilda faced yet another unexpected death within their family, and another potential opening for rival claimants to the regency to step forward. Surely, their thoughts would have turned to their own mortality and attempts to secure their own memories and position in the afterlife: this time by placing one of the empress' dower estates in the care of Mathilda's church. However, through this memorial gift, confirmed by the ecclesiastical and secular magnates of the Ottonian realm presented *en masse*, Adelheid and Mathilda also solidified their control over the Ottonian court, and projected themselves as the rightful leaders during Otto III's minority.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The granting of diplomas was not just a legal act but a performative one, a means by which Ottonian rulers expressed their form of ritualised, symbolic rulership over their kingdom. However, these diplomas usually only survive in a polished final version, which seeks to represent itself as authoritative and incontrovertible. Little trace, if any, remains of the processes of negotiation that took place beforehand to define precisely what the act would contain, particularly when those involved were major magnates determined to protect their own rights and honour. The preservation of D O III 7a

¹¹⁰ *Quapropter omnium fidelium nostrorum praesentium scilicet ac futurorum noverit industria, quomodo dilecta avia nostra Adalheid videlicet imperatrix augusta et cara amita nostra Mathilda Quitilini-burgensis ecclesiae venerabilis abbatisa ad nos venerunt, rogantes nostram clementiam ut pro divino amore et illarum petitione curtem suae dotis Vualbisci nominatam ad Quidilingeburgensem ecclesiam [...]. Nos vero fidelium nostrorum, Vuilligisi scilicet Moguntinae sedis archiepiscopi et Gisolbarii Magadiburgensis ecclesiae archipraesulis et Hildivuardi Haluerstedensis ecclesiae pontificis ac Hildibaldi Vuormaciensis ecclesiae sacerdotis atque Gerdagi Hildinesheimensis ecclesiae episcopi nec non et Bernhardi ducis, Egberti comitis, Eggibardi marchionis, Herimanni palatini comitis, Hvodonis marchionis, Deoderici palatini comitis eiusque fratris Sigeberti comitis, Herimanni comitis, aliorumque complurium, piis earum petitionibus assensum praebentes praefatae Quitilini-burgensi ecclesiae curtem predictam, D O III 81, pp. 489–490. RI II, 3, n. 1047.*

¹¹¹ [...] *pro remedio animarum beatae memoriae avi nostri Ottonis et eius aequivoci genitoris nostri imperatorum augustorum et pro nostra salute atque ipsius iam dictae aviae nostrae Adalheidis imperatricis augustae ac superius nominatae amitae nostrae in praedicto loco Vualbisci nominato monasterium monacharum regulam sancti Benedicti observantium faciat [...], D O III 81, p. 490. RI II, 3, n. 1047.*

and 7b, as a duplicate pair of charters, allows us to look behind the scenes at these negotiations taking place in a particularly fraught political context. These diplomas – like the majority of those issued by medieval rulers – were not the result of a single individual’s will, but rather reflected careful discussion and counsel by the leading figures in the Ottonian court.

Diplomas were not only a means of government in times of peace, but a key element in knitting back together the wounds inflicted by a succession crisis. A succession conflict was not just a dispute between members of the imperial family alone, but a breakdown of the old political consensus. The conflict running from 983–985 highlighted the same ruptures that Simon MacLean observed in a succession dispute a century earlier, where “tensions at the highest level created and resonated with rivalries among the aristocracy, sending fault lines down through the bedrock of the political community”¹¹². A crisis in royal succession was a moment fraught with possibility. These months in the aftermath of Rohr provided the opportunity for ambitious members of the political elite of western Christendom – archbishops, bishops, abbesses, counts, and duchesses alike – to revive disputes in the hopes of settling old scores and even make new fortunes.

The death of Otto II in 983 rocked the political foundations of the Ottonian Empire and its neighbours. In the wake of this ‘harsh bolt’, episodic crises tested loyalties, complicated by competing promises of future rewards of lands and privileges in return for backing one side over the other. In resolving this conflict, settling the ownership of lands – particularly those lands with contested claims – was paramount. Perhaps this may explain why no trace of any charter from Henry the Quarrelsome, or from Otto III’s reign while he was in his uncle’s custody, survive. Both the parties of Henry the Quarrelsome and the *dominae imperiales* skilfully negotiated with numerous members of a highly-interconnected aristocracy to try to gain the advantage. Before the final meeting at Frankfurt in 985, the *dominae imperiales* carefully considered the strongest strategy to combat Henry the Quarrelsome’s claims, while also securing the support of the wider Ottonian court. D O III 7a and 7b, when viewed with the other diplomas issued by Otto III before the final meeting with Henry in 985, reveal what must have been a constant discussion within the court of the *dominae imperiales* to soothe these rivalries, insulate themselves from attacks and secure the young king’s future rule.

In this conflict, it was the women of the Ottonian family who were finally victorious: this was in large part due to their skilful deployment of the forms of power available to them. All three of the *dominae imperiales* were experienced political actors and worked together in order to secure their collective future. It is no accident that the term used to describe these women collectively is one laden with ruling imagery: all three were imperial rulers. We have avoided translating *dominae* in this paper, as any

¹¹² SIMON 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, in: Millennium Jahrbuch 4, 2007, pp. 239–260, here p. 249.

English version fails to capture the full resonance of the term: rather than genteel ‘ladies’, the *dominae* here are the female correspondent of a lord or ruler, unmistakably evoking the use of *dominus* by their male contemporaries¹¹³. Together, these three women were a formidable political force.

When they prepared to face the duke of Bavaria, the *dominae* surely drew on their experience of conflicts negotiated through diplomatic acts in the past. As such, they knew that any misstep in how they presented their power through their actions could have calamitous consequences, just as Henry had encountered in the disastrous performance of the royal *laudes* for him at Quedlinburg. That Adelheid or Theophanu did not issue these charters in their own name during this period makes them no less powerful as Ottonian rulers. Instead these documents illustrate how focused the *dominae imperiales* and their supporters were on the need for extremely precise diplomatic rhetoric and form ahead of the final political resolution. Issuing charters in Otto III’s name allowed him to be presented as the heir and successor of his father and grandfather, assuming his role as an already-crowned king; these diplomatic acts established and affirmed his power as ruler – with the recognition of major magnates – despite the uncertainty of the times. Issuing charters in the names of Adelheid or Theophanu would not have achieved these goals. These finely-judged decisions of form and diplomatic practice were the levers of power that Adelheid, Theophanu and Mathilda expertly manipulated in order to resolve the succession dispute sparked by Otto II’s death.

¹¹³ For more on the translation and implications of the term *dominae* see SEAN GILSDORF, *Queenship and Sanctity. The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid*, Washington D.C. 2004, p. 66. MACLEAN, *Ottonian Queenship* (as note 4), p. 171. For this term as it applies to abbesses and nuns, see FIONA GRIFFITHS, *Nuns’ Priests’ Tales. Men and Salvation in Medieval Women’s Monastic Life*, Philadelphia 2018, pp. 104–105.