

CORONATION OF OTTO I WIDUKIND OF CORVEY (925–c. 973)

As Carolingian strength waned in East Francia in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, those who emerged as rulers were the tribal dukes, great landholders who consolidated their power over large regions. Although initially they preferred to elect a weak king, Magyar invasions from the east convinced them of the need for a strong leader. Henry the Fowler, Duke of Saxony (r. 919–936), founded a dynasty that ruled Germany until 1024. His son Otto I (r. 936–973) won a decisive victory over the Magyars at the Battle of the Lechfeld in 955, and in 962 was crowned emperor by Pope John XII (r. 955–964), whom he later deposed. Otto's conscious revival of Carolingian tradition is evident, not only in his designation as emperor—though of an empire that differed significantly from that of Charlemagne—but also in Widukind's richly detailed account of his coronation as king in 936.

936

After the death of Henry, the father of his country and greatest and best of all kings, the Franks and Saxons chose as their prince his son Otto, who had already been designated king by his father. They ordered the coronation to be held at the palace in Aachen, the place of universal election. . . .

And when they had arrived, the dukes and the great lords, with a force of the chief vassals, gathered in the portico of the basilica of Charlemagne. They placed the new ruler on the throne that had been constructed there, giving him their hands and offering fealty; promising their help against all his enemies, they made him king according to their custom. 5

While this part of the ceremony was being carried out by the dukes and other magistrates, Archbishop Hildibert of Mainz¹ awaited the procession of the new King with all the priestly order and the commoners in the basilica. The Archbishop awaited the procession of the King, holding the crozier² in his right hand and 10

¹Hildibert, Archbishop of Mainz (927–937)

²*Crozier*—shepherd's staff, which symbolized a bishop's position as shepherd of Christ's flock

Boyd H. Hill, *Medieval Monarchy in Action: The German Empire from Henry I to Henry IV* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1972), 113–15. All rights reserved.

wearing the alb, the pallium, and the chasuble.³ When the King came forward, he advanced to meet him, touching the King's right hand with his left. Then he led the King to the middle of the sanctuary and turned to the people standing about them (ambulatories⁴ had been constructed above and below in that round basilica so that all the people might have a good view).

5 "Lo," Hildibert said, "I bring before you Lord Otto, elected by God, formerly designated by Henry, now made King by all the princes. If this election pleases you, signify by raising your right hand to heaven." To this all the people raising their right hands on high loudly called down prosperity on the new ruler.

10 The King, dressed in a close-fitting tunic according to the Frankish custom, was escorted behind the altar, on which lay the royal insignia—sword with sword-belt, cloak with bracelets, staff with scepter and diadem....

When the question of who should crown the King arose, two bishops besides Hildibert were considered eligible: the Bishop of Trier because his city was the most ancient and had been founded by Saint Peter, and the Bishop of Cologne because the place of coronation—Aachen—was in his diocese. But both of these men who would have enjoyed the honor deferred to the pre-eminence of Archbishop Hildibert.

15 Going to the altar and taking from it the sword with sword-belt and turning to the King, he said, "Accept this sword, with which you may chase out all the adversaries of Christ, barbarians, and bad Christians, by the divine authority handed down to you and by the power of all the empire of the Franks for the most lasting peace of all Christians."

20 Then taking the bracelets and cloak, he clothed him saying, "These points [of the cloak] falling to the ground will remind you with what zeal of faith you should burn and how you ought to endure in preserving peace to the end."

25 Then taking the scepter and staff, he said, "With these symbols you may be reminded that you should reproach your subjects with paternal castigation, but first of all you should extend the hand of mercy to ministers of God, widows, and orphans. And never let the oil of compassion be absent from your head in order that you may be crowned with eternal reward in the present and in the future."

30 After having been sprinkled with holy oil and crowned with a golden diadem by the Bishops Hildibert and Wikfried [of Cologne] and all legal consecration having been completed, the King was led to the throne, to which he ascended by means of a spiral staircase. The throne of marvelous beauty had been constructed between two marble pillars, and from there the King could see and be seen by all....

³*Alb, chasuble*—priestly vestments. The pallium was a long narrow strip of woollen cloth embroidered with crosses that rested on the shoulders; it was blessed at the tomb of Saint Peter and conferred on archbishops as a symbol of their office.

⁴An ambulatory was generally a walkway or processional route that circled behind the high altar of a large church or cathedral to allow pilgrims access to side chapels and saints' shrines without disturbing services. Here the word seems to refer to aisles or galleries built around the walls on two levels, perhaps to allow people to visit the tomb of Charlemagne without entering the sanctuary itself.