



Introduction

‘Since he was a man born and brought up to rule, he always showed a royal spirit in adversity, as was fitting in one of such descent, whose ancestors had held such high office and enjoyed such renown, and he preferred to die rather than be conquered. He considered it a matter of irremediable shame to allow an injury to go unpunished.’¹ Thus Henry IV is portrayed in the chronicle of Lampert, monk of Hersfeld, the apologist of his Saxon enemies. According to this chronicler, Henry’s ‘royal spirit’ deteriorated under the influence of low-born counsellors into a lust for power which threatened the property and the very freedom of his subjects. Another apologist of the Saxon rebels, Bruno, clerk of Merseburg, wrote that it was uncertain ‘which was the greater infamy, that of his incestuous lust or that of his boundless cruelty’.² Most narrative sources for the reign of Henry IV were written from an anti-Henrician point of view. Many were composed by supporters of Pope Gregory VII and the reform papacy with which Henry was in conflict for the last thirty years of his reign. These Gregorian chroniclers echoed the language of the Saxon apologists, portraying a king who ‘used to rage savagely against [his subjects] according to his whim’; whose ‘thoughts turned to tyranny and [who] planned to hold the kingdom not by justice but by violence’.³

Henry IV ‘wished there to be no lords in his kingdom, so that he might be the sole lord over all men’. He conceived ‘a great design such as none of his predecessors had ever attempted’: to deprive first the Saxons and later the rest of the nobility of their lands and their liberty.⁴ These polemics prompted some twentieth-century scholars to adopt a strikingly positive view of Henry IV’s regime in his German kingdom. He was ‘a state reformer of genius’, ‘the great, unfortunate king who was left with the tragic duty of building a new state out of the breakdown of the imperial constitution dominated by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the aristocracy’. This far-sighted statesman, wishing to found

¹ Lampert of Hersfeld, *Annales* 1076, p. 270.

² Bruno of Merseburg, *Saxonicum bellum* c. 10, p. 18. Cf. c. 5, p. 16.

³ Berthold of Reichenau, *Annales* 1077, p. 298; Bernold of St Blasien, *Chronicon* 1077, p. 434.

⁴ Bruno, *Saxonicum bellum* c. 60, p. 55; Lampert, *Annales* 1073, p. 147.

his ‘new royal state’ on a broader social basis, ‘had recourse, in his struggle with the nobility and the Church, especially to the social strata of the unfree servants and the towns’.⁵ The scholarship of the later twentieth century has become sceptical of this view of Henry IV as an enlightened centraliser of the German kingdom and ‘a revolutionary attacking the old constitution’. Recent studies of the government of the western empire in the eleventh century have above all emphasised the extreme limitations of the powers of the crown.

The empire, created in the tenth century by the great warlord Otto I, had none of the centralising characteristics of a modern state. Its three main component parts were the German, Italian and Burgundian kingdoms, which possessed a common ruler but no common institutional framework. These kingdoms were collections of autonomous provinces governed by secular and ecclesiastical princes. The princes had performed homage and sworn fealty to the king, on the occasion of his election or coronation or on his ceremonial journey around the kingdom. The successful assertion of royal authority depended largely on the cooperation of the princes and the obligation of service which resulted from their homage and fealty. The king possessed no special administrative machinery to enforce his will on the kingdom. There is no evidence that eleventh-century kings and their advisers ever formulated the concept of centralisation: certainly they lacked the material resources to make it a reality. The empire of the Ottonian and Salian emperors ‘was born particularistic’. ‘From the start the nobles possessed lordship and powers in their own right, outside the king’s reach.’⁶ The rights of lordship exercised by the princes in their own localities were part of the divinely ordained scheme of terrestrial government which it was the special duty of the king to protect. ‘We possess in the king and emperor the supreme defender on earth of our liberty’, declared the princes in an idealised mid-eleventh-century portrait of kingship, the biography of Conrad II, Henry IV’s grandfather.⁷ Royal and princely power were regarded not as competing with, but as complementing each other. The German kingdom, like the Italian and Burgundian kingdoms, was a collection of parallel lordships, some exercised by secular princes, dukes, margraves and counts; some by ecclesiastical princes.⁸

The office of duke (*dux*), the most exalted of the princely dignities in the German kingdom, was still essentially military in character in the reign of Henry IV. The dukes were the military commanders of the nobility in the German duchies (Bavaria, Swabia, Carinthia, Saxony, Upper and Lower Lotharingia), with the duty of leading the nobles of their duchy and the

⁵ Bosl (1950) 1:3, 12–16, 74–101. Cf. Hirsch (1922) 139–49, 150–7, 221–38.

⁶ Leyser (1968) 32. Cf. Arnold (1991) 11–60. ⁷ Wipo, *Gesta Chuonradi* c. 20, p. 40.

⁸ Lintzel (1929) 233–63; Werle (1956) 225–99; Keller (1982) 74–128; Goetz (1991) 253–71; Arnold (1991) 88–132.

knights in their retinues on royal expeditions. Within their duchies they were responsible for the maintenance of peace and they held regular assemblies of the nobility in which the most important political and judicial business of the duchy was transacted. Their authority over the nobility of the province derived partly from the ducal office, partly from the feudal relationship (some of the counts and other noblemen were their vassals) and partly from being great landowners. Dukes who were natives of their duchies disposed of extensive family lands; 'foreign' dukes enjoyed the use of some of the crown lands in their duchies. The duke was the representative of the people of his province at the imperial court and he seems to have been regarded by the king as the agent of the imperial court among his own people. The king invested dukes with their office and they performed homage and swore fealty to him. Many dukes, however, seem to have owed their titles as much to hereditary succession as to royal designation. Of the eighteen dukes appointed during the reign of Henry IV, nine were the sons or the nearest male relatives of their predecessors. The office of duke of Saxony had been held uninterruptedly by members of the Billung dynasty since 936.⁹ In designating dukes in the two Lotharingian duchies Henry respected the rights of the Châtenois (Upper Lotharingia) and the house of Verdun (Lower Lotharingia). It was in the south German duchies of Swabia, Bavaria and Carinthia that eleventh-century kings were able to appoint to ducal office newcomers who were not the hereditary successors of their predecessors. Of such newcomers in the reign of Henry IV two were kinsmen of the imperial dynasty: Conrad III and Liutold of Carinthia, respectively of the Ezzonid and Eppenstein families.¹⁰ In the cases of Rudolf of Swabia and his successor, Frederick I, the new duke was permitted to marry into the imperial family.¹¹ The hereditary principle was reasserted in the final years of the reign, when in each of the south German duchies the ducal newcomer was succeeded by his own heir.¹²

The office of margrave (*marchio*), like that of duke, was military in origin, signifying the command of a frontier or march. During the later eleventh century the duties of those margraves stationed on the vulnerable eastern frontier of Saxony, Bavaria and Carinthia were still mainly military. The march of the Billungs, the most northerly of the Saxon marches, involved the duty of maintaining surveillance over the Obodrite Slavs (who were at this time being converted to Christianity). The march was in the hands of the Billung duke of Saxony and constituted the basis of his authority in the duchy. The neighbouring march was the Saxon Nordmark, which confronted the Slav military

⁹ See below p. 70.

¹⁰ Otto, duke of Bavaria, was married to an Ezzonid. See below pp. 35, 66 n. 10.

¹¹ See below pp. 33, 189. ¹² See below pp. 297, 331.

confederation of the Liutizi, hostile and resolutely pagan. The vulnerable character of this march was demonstrated one month before Henry IV's accession, when Margrave William was defeated and killed by the Liutizi. His march was conferred on a kinsman of the imperial dynasty, Count Luder-Udo I of Stade, whose family retained it for the rest of Henry IV's reign.¹³ To the south of the Saxon Nordmark lay the march of Lower Lusatia and that of Meissen, bordering on the kingdom of Poland. In the early years of Henry IV's reign Lower Lusatia was in the hands of Dedi, a prince of the house of Wettin, while Meissen was held by the counts of Weimar-Orlamünde, firstly William and later his brother Otto. When Margrave Otto died, leaving three daughters (1067), the king conferred Meissen on his own kinsman, Count Ekbert I of Brunswick, of the dynasty of the Brunones.¹⁴ Ekbert I was succeeded by his young son, Ekbert II, who proved the most implacable of Henry's enemies in Saxony. Both Dedi and Ekbert II took part in the Saxon rebellion of 1073. The king's victory over the Saxons in 1075 enabled him to withdraw the marches from the rebel margraves and confer them both on his loyal ally, Duke Vratislav II of Bohemia.¹⁵ In 1088, however, Henry was reconciled with Dedi's son, Henry I of Eilenburg, who played a leading role in the campaigns against the lawless Ekbert II of Brunswick. Henry IV invested this valuable supporter not only with his father's march of Lower Lusatia but also with his enemy's march of Meissen.¹⁶ Henry of Eilenburg was able to transmit both marches to his son. The margraves of south-eastern Germany, like those of Saxony, were drawn from local families and usually owed their office to hereditary succession. The march of the Bavarian Nordgau was held by the Diepolds, descendants of Count Diepold of Augstgau. The Bavarian Ostmark (the core of the twelfth-century duchy of Austria) had since the late tenth century been in the hands of the Babenberg family. The Carinthian march was held by the Otakars, counts of the Chiemgau and the Traungau (this march being the basis for the later duchy of Styria).

The most frequent princely title was that of count (*comes*). In the eighth and ninth centuries that title had denoted an influential royal agent, charged with administrative, military and judicial duties in the specific area of his jurisdiction (*comitatus*, 'county'). The count had been responsible for the administration of crown lands and for military leadership when the nobility of his county was summoned on a royal campaign. Above all he presided over the law court to which the free men of his county brought their cases. By the end of the eleventh century, however, much of the count's original role of royal agent had disappeared. The administration of the crown lands had been

¹³ See below p. 74.¹⁴ See below p. 80.¹⁵ See below p. 102.¹⁶ See below p. 270.

placed largely in the hands of royal *ministeriales*, the unfree knights, servants of the crown who first come to prominence in the documents of the Salian period.¹⁷ The counts' jurisdiction had been greatly diminished throughout the kingdom by the royal practice of creating alternative jurisdictions: notably by exempting the lands of the churches from the interference of any secular power. While in the tenth and eleventh centuries the crown had diluted the counts' governmental functions, the counts themselves had ceased to regard service to the crown as the principal source of their authority and status. They treated the countship as an hereditary dignity which reflected their local pre-eminence, which was based on their family lands, military followings and castles. A countship seemed now to be so much a piece of family property that it could be inherited even by a distant kinsman or by a minor.

The office of count palatine, which in the eighth and ninth centuries had been the most important judicial office in the Frankish royal palace, survived into the reign of Henry IV in the provinces of Bavaria, Saxony and Lotharingia. It is not clear whether this was merely an honorific title, conferred on a prince in acknowledgement of his local greatness, for, as in the case of margraves and counts, the title was held by a succession of members of the same great landowning family. It is possible that the count palatine, unlike the count, continued to regard himself as a royal official, perhaps with responsibility for the defence and administration of crown lands in his province. Certainly the Bavarian and Lotharingian counts palatine maintained close links with the court during Henry IV's reign. The Bavarian count palatine Rapoto, count of Cham and Vohburg, was conspicuously loyal.¹⁸ In Lotharingia the title of count palatine belonged to the Hezeliid dynasty, kinsmen of the imperial family. The count palatine Henry I¹⁹ was succeeded by his son, Herman II, who was in turn succeeded by his nephew, Henry II, count of Laach, his closest kinsman. Count palatine Henry II was eventually succeeded by a stepson, the Saxon prince Siegfried of Ballenstedt.²⁰ In Saxony the title of count palatine was held for the first three decades of the reign by Count Frederick II of Goseck (brother of the great Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen). On his death the title was secured by his nephew, Count Frederick I of Sommerschenburg. Both played a prominent role in the Saxon rebellions against Henry IV, in marked contrast to their loyal Bavarian and Lotharingian counterparts.²¹

The administrative and judicial functions of secular princes throughout the kingdom had been eroded by granting immunity to the extensive lands of the

¹⁷ See below pp. 322, 357–60. ¹⁸ See below p. 305.

¹⁹ Considered a possible successor to Henry III in 1045; Steindorff (1874) 1:287.

²⁰ See below p. 314. ²¹ See below pp. 74, 181.

ecclesiastical princes, the archbishops and bishops and those abbots who were royal vassals. Since the tenth century the possession of an immunity had not only freed the immunist from the jurisdiction of the count but also permitted him to exercise the count's judicial and other powers within his own territories. In addition, from the reign of Emperor Otto III (983–1002) onwards kings conferred on churches whole counties with full comital rights. Fifty-four such grants are recorded between the reign of Otto III and that of Henry IV, nineteen of them in the reign of Henry IV himself.²² This practice of delegating secular office to churchmen, considered in the light of the well-documented royal control over the appointment of bishops and royal abbots, has prompted the notion of an Ottonian–Salian 'imperial Church system'. Otto I and his successors allegedly 'set about systematically developing the Church as the central institution of the empire'. 'The bishops were entirely at the king's disposal: in return they received extensive political rights.' 'The ecclesiastical magnates were to participate in government throughout the empire according to the king's will', while the monarch 'largely dispensed with the participation of the secular nobility'. The 'Investiture Contest' in the reign of Henry IV challenged the royal right to invest bishops with their office and cast doubt on the 'sacral aura' which supposedly surrounded the king. By destroying the 'harmony of the ecclesiastical and secular spheres' the Investiture Contest 'deprived the system of its internal justification'.²³ The most recent studies of Ottonian–Salian government and of the imperial Church present a more complex picture. They show that, although kings might depose individual secular princes on the grounds of rebellion or incompetence, it was never possible for them to 'dispense with the participation of the secular nobility' in the government of the empire. Recent scholarship confirms that, especially from the early eleventh century onwards, kings both controlled episcopal appointments and endowed bishoprics with lands and rights of government. There is, however, no firm evidence of any 'system', according to which kings replaced secular princes with bishops as their agents in local government, in order to bring the provinces under closer royal supervision.²⁴

It is indeed uncertain whether granting immunities and counties to bishoprics actually resulted in closer royal supervision of local government. Churchmen were forbidden by canon law to exercise criminal jurisdiction, because it involved bloodshed. Bishops who received immunities were, therefore, obliged to delegate their administration to advocates, who were members

²² Santifaller (1964) 36, 105–15; Arnold (1991) 77–87.

²³ Mitteis (1959) 117–18; Santifaller (1964) 27–49.

²⁴ Reuter (1982) 347–74; Fleckenstein (1985) 83–98; Schieffer (1989) 291–301.

of the secular aristocracy. The surviving accounts of the conflicts between churchmen and their advocates reveal that many of the noblemen entrusted with this office were by no means under the control of their ecclesiastical lords and used their position to aggrandise themselves at the expense of the churches.²⁵ As with immunities, so also with the counties which the king conferred on bishoprics: the bishops derived financial benefits from the grant but they could not administer the counties in person and were obliged to delegate them to secular princes. In most cases the recipient was the same man who had held the county before it was granted to the bishop. When, for example, in 1063 Henry IV granted to Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen 'the county of Margrave Udo' in the territory between the lower Elbe and the lower Weser, the archbishop conferred the county on the prince, Udo II of Stade, who had previously held it from the king. Udo was now the vassal of the archbishop and owed him service, but what is known of his later conduct suggests that his lord exercised no effective control over him.²⁶

Adam of Bremen, the historian of the archbishopric, described Adalbert's acquisition of Saxon and Frisian counties in a passage of particular importance for understanding the workings of the 'imperial Church system'. Adam wrote that the church of Bremen was so rich that the archbishop need not envy his colleagues of Cologne and Mainz. Nevertheless there was one bishop whom he envied. 'The bishop of Würzburg was the only prelate of whom it was said that he had no equal in his bishopric, since he himself holds all the counties of his diocese and, although a bishop, he governs the province as its duke. Our archbishop was moved to imitate him and he resolved to bring within the power of his church all the countships which appeared to involve any jurisdiction inside his diocese.'²⁷ The initiative in this acquisition of counties by the church came from the archbishop, not from a king anxious to replace secular princes with churchmen willing to serve as his agents in local government. There is no doubt that other prelates wished, like Adalbert, to strengthen their authority in their dioceses by the acquisition of rights of government and of the increased income which immunities and counties brought with them. Their petitions to the king were sympathetically received, because prelates performed for the crown valuable services which involved their churches in great expense.

The imperial government was, therefore, a partnership of many lords – dukes, margraves, counts palatine, counts, advocates representing ecclesiastical immunists – all performing governmental functions independently of the crown. The particular responsibility of the king himself was (according to the

²⁵ See below pp. 117, 313–14. ²⁶ *D H IV* 112. See below p. 74.

²⁷ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta III*.146, p. 187. See below p. 58.

biographer of Conrad II) 'to give the land judgement, justice and peace', to protect the rights of his secular and especially his ecclesiastical subjects and to defend the kingdom itself from enemies.²⁸ The most important political and judicial business of the crown was transacted in assemblies of bishops and secular princes. These assemblies met at irregular intervals in different regions of the kingdom, whenever the king saw fit to summon them. It was here that questions of war and peace were discussed and vacancies in secular and ecclesiastical offices filled; here also the king acted as judge in important local cases. As long as he remained in a particular area, the king's authority as supreme judge took precedence over that of any local official. The records of royal judicial proceedings show, however, that on these occasions the king reached a decision with the assistance of local princes and of advisers from his own entourage. In most of these cases the king was called on to act as umpire in the disputes of members of the local aristocracy. Less frequently the king introduced judicial business of his own into the assembly: the judgement of rebels and the confiscation of their offices and property.

The kingdom of Henry IV possessed no capital city. An eleventh-century king was accustomed 'to pursue his high vocation by wandering about'.²⁹ The king spent his whole reign in a constant journey (*iter*) through the provinces of his kingdom, a progress interrupted only by the need to conduct military campaigns or to suppress rebellions. He remained in one place sometimes only for a few days, rarely for more than a few weeks. Given the immense size of the German kingdom and the independent attitude of the provinces, such rapid mobility was the only means of making royal government effective. Recent scholarship has identified the royal *iter* as 'the most essential . . . institution' of the kingdom because it gave 'the best cohesion possible' to political society.³⁰ The princes enjoyed no such mobility because they could not afford the great expense which it entailed. Consequently kings possessed 'a near-monopoly of long distance communications', which served to make them 'the principal binding agents' of the kingdom. The royal *iter* was the more remarkable in that it involved the provision of food and lodging for the several hundred persons who usually accompanied the king. The royal entourage could be accommodated in one of the 'palaces' (*palatia*) associated with certain of the crown lands.³¹ The crown lands (or royal fisc) were not fixed units of property but constantly fluctuated in size. They were expanded by the confiscation of the lands of rebels and by the legal custom that the king inher-

²⁸ Wipo, *Gesta Chuonradi* c. 3, p. 23. ²⁹ Schulte (1935) 132.

³⁰ Leyser (1981) 746-7. Cf. Reinke (1987) 225-51; Reuter (1991) 208-11, 213, 214-15; Bernhardt (1993) 45-75.

³¹ Notably Aachen, Goslar, Kaiserswerth and Nuremberg: Rieckenberg (1942) 99-103, 110; Brühl (1968) 134, 158-9.

ited the property of noble families when there was no heir. They were diminished by acts of royal generosity (particularly, in the case of the Salians, towards the church of Speyer, the mausoleum of their dynasty). The eleventh-century monarchy increasingly relied less on the income of the fisc and more on alternative resources. The king could claim hospitality (*gistum*) and the provision of food (*servitium*) from the archbishoprics, bishoprics and royal abbeys.³² The heavy demands made by the royal *iter* on the material resources of the German churches serve to put into perspective the generosity of the eleventh-century kings towards the imperial Church. The transfer of land and profitable jurisdictional rights to bishoprics was in many cases the essential precondition for the increasing royal demands for *gistum* and *servitium*.

The kings of the first half of the eleventh century visited their palaces less and less frequently and put more and more pressure on the churches. During the reign of Henry IV this trend was intensified. The itinerary of Henry IV, the pattern of the king's journeys through the kingdom from year to year, at once reveals the crisis which overtook his government, forcing fundamental change on the regime. The royal journeys of the Ottonian kings had been concentrated in particular in eastern Saxony and northern Thuringia, the homeland of the Liudolfing (Ottonian) dynasty, where their lands and residences were most numerous. They had also often visited the Rhine and Main region and the Lower Lotharingian neighbourhood of Aachen, so closely associated with the Carolingian kingship. The royal journeys of their Salian successors, whose dynasty originated in the middle Rhineland and whose family lands were in the neighbourhood of Worms and Speyer, were rather more evenly spread over the whole kingdom. While the Ottonians preferred to celebrate the great Christian festivities and to hold their assemblies of princes within the triangular territory formed by Magdeburg, Ingelheim and Aachen, the Salians held their festive courts in Bavaria and Swabia, as well as Franconia, Lotharingia and Saxony. This change was made possible by demanding *gistum* and *servitium* from churches. The Salians preferred to celebrate the great festivals as the guests of their bishops. Nevertheless the first two Salian kings, Conrad II and Henry III, the grandfather and father of Henry IV, continued regularly to visit the old centres of Ottonian power in northeastern Germany.³³ The Salians seem to have inherited all the lands and rights of lordship of their Ottonian predecessors and consequently the material resources of the eleventh-century kingship remained heavily concentrated in eastern Saxony.

During the first two decades of the reign of Henry IV the pattern of the king's itinerary resembled that of the first two Salians. He perambulated all

³² Brühl (1968) 132–9, 157–8; Metz (1971) 257–91; Bernhardt (1993) 75–84.

³³ Rieckenberg (1942) 32–154.

the provinces of the kingdom but showed a marked preference for eastern Saxony, or at least for one particular royal palace in eastern Saxony, which had also been the favourite residence of his father. This was Goslar, described by the chronicler Lampert of Hersfeld as 'the town which the German kings were accustomed to treat as their homeland and their private residence', a 'very wealthy place, always most dear' to Henry IV.³⁴ During the years of his minority (October 1056 – March 1065) the royal itinerary included eleven recorded visits to Goslar; in the first decade of Henry's personal rule (1065–75) there were nineteen visits.³⁵ This decade 1065–75 witnessed an attempt by Henry IV to consolidate his lordship in eastern Saxony.³⁶ The royal itinerary after 1075 changed dramatically. Apart from visits in January and March 1076, Goslar disappeared from the itinerary. The king was driven from his favourite palace by the Saxon princes who had rebelled in 1073, demanding that 'he should not spend all his life exclusively in Saxony in sloth and indolence but should sometimes leave Goslar and travel round his kingdom'.³⁷ After the Saxon war broke out again in 1076 Goslar became the residence of anti-kings elected by Henry's enemies. Henry now appeared in the province not as the acknowledged ruler on a royal *iter* but as a military commander campaigning against rebels. After making peace with the Saxon princes in 1089, Henry did not set foot in the province again. For the remaining years of the reign information about the royal itinerary becomes steadily sparser, but the general trend is clear. During these three decades the court usually resided in episcopal cities and lived at the expense of the imperial Church.³⁸ It is this dependence on the material resources of the Church that explains Henry IV's determination to control ecclesiastical appointments, despite the vigorous opposition of the reform papacy.

The royal *iter* is one of the two best-documented and most thoroughly researched institutions of the eleventh-century German monarchy, the other being the royal chancery. The chancery had not yet developed into a separate department of government with its own personnel. As in every other western European kingdom, the task of writing the king's letters and diplomas belonged to royal chaplains, who were also responsible for the conduct of divine service in the royal household. The title of arch-chancellor for the German kingdom belonged in the eleventh century to the archbishop of Mainz and that of arch-chancellor for the Italian kingdom to the archbishop of Cologne, but these were purely honorific dignities. The actual direction of chancery business was in the hands of the chancellors for the German and

³⁴ Lampert, *Annales* 1066, 1071, 1075, pp. 100, 117, 225. See below pp. 79–80.

³⁵ See below p. 79. ³⁶ See below pp. 84–7.

³⁷ Lampert, *Annales* 1074, p. 178. See below pp. 78–9.

³⁸ Kilian (1886) 144–52; Kottje (1978) 131–57.