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Ottonian Notions of *imperium* and the Byzantine Empire

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ABSTRACT: This study re-examines the Ottonian Empire's self-conception and its relationship with its eastern counterpart in the context of the empire's re-establishment in the West. Building on earlier Roman, Byzantine, and Carolingian precedents, the Ottonians redefined their empire as a continuation of the Frankish realm, placing comparably little emphasis on Byzantine or ancient Roman models. The coronation of Otto I, which took place without direct Byzantine involvement, marked a significant moment in the establishment of the western empire, with recognition by the Byzantine emperor regarded as a retroactive consideration rather than an immediate concern. The study argues that, unlike Charlemagne, the Ottonian emperors viewed their empire as a distinct entity, one that did not aim to merge with or mirror the eastern empire, despite their shared heritage. This distinction was also reflected in ethnic and territorial terms, with the Ottonians cultivating a unique imperial identity based on their Frankish inheritance. The collapse of the Carolingian empire and the subsequent interregnum played a critical role in the separation of the western and eastern empires, fostering a growing divergence in their respective political and cultural trajectories. However, Byzantine influence was not absent. Empress Theophanu, who brought a Byzantine presence to the Ottonian court, and her son Otto III, demonstrated the persistence of eastern traditions in their rulership. Nevertheless, Otto III's reign also highlighted a distinctively western identity, as he balanced his Roman legacy with his Greek heritage, firmly placing the empire within the context of the western Christian world. This study thus presents the Ottonian empire as a uniquely western political entity, shaped by its Frankish roots and a pragmatic approach to its imperial heritage.

In 800, the coronation of Charlemagne († 814) as “Augustus crowned by God, great and pacific emperor governing the Roman empire”¹ gave birth to a Carolingian empire closely related to what had remained of the Roman empire in the East. This event marked the zenith of Frankish power. However, the empire quickly lost its significance and cohesion after Charlemagne's death in 814. While Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious († 840), and his successors, such as Charles the Bald († 877) and Charles the Fat († 888), maintained a semblance of imperial unity, their reigns were largely the result of the dynastic circumstances defined by biological succession rather than the strength of imperial authority. The Treaty of Verdun of 843, which divided the empire among

¹ Diplomata Karoli 198, in: Diplomatum Karolinorum, vol. 1: Pippin, Carlomanni, Caroli magni diplomata, ed. ENGELBERT MÜHLBACHER (MGH DD Karol. 1), Hanover 1906, p. 266: *Karolus serenissimus augustus, a deo coronatus magnus pacificus imperator, Romanum gubernans imperium, qui et per misericordiam Dei rex Francorum et Langobardorum*.

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Charlemagne's grandsons, marked the beginning of the disintegration of the Frankish empire. By the mid-ninth century, doubts about the legitimacy of Charlemagne's heirs as 'emperors' became apparent. The imperial authority of figures like Louis II († 875) in Italy, and later Guy II of Spoleto († 894), was increasingly confined to small territories inside the peninsula. Consequently, the once universal claims of the emperor were reduced to the protectorate over the apostolic see, leading contemporaries to refer to these rulers derisively as "emperors of Italy" (*imperator Italiae*), a title first attested with Louis II. This decline culminated in the vacancy of the imperial throne following the death of the emperor Berengar in 924, leaving the role of emperor vacant for nearly four decades². This paper aims to explore the development of the concept of *imperium* during the century after Charlemagne's death and its changing relationship with the Byzantine world, culminating in the revival of imperial authority under the Ottonian dynasty.

In the early tenth century, the Frankish empire had sunk into irrelevance. This did not prevent claims to imperial status from persisting beyond Berengar's death in 924. This is evidenced by epitaphs of the Carolingian kings Louis IV Outremer († 954), referred to as *augustus*, and relating to Lothar of France († 986), characterised as the "kin of the Caesars" and "consul and augustus"³. The empire itself only resurfaced with the first Saxon emperor, Otto I († 973). Comparable to the events of 751 and 800, when the Carolingians offered military help to the pope and received his support for their rise to kingship and, respectively, emperorship, the Ottonian aid for the young Pope John XII († 964) against his local enemy, the king of Italy Berengar II († 966), was repaid with the papal confirmation of a new status of secular power⁴:

² For a detailed discussion of related events and processes of change, see LAURY SARTI, *Orbis Romanus. Byzantium and the Legacy of Rome in the Carolingian World*, New York 2024, pp. 7–50.

³ Epitaph 8, in: Grabinschriften. Die Familie der Ottonen, ed. KARL STRECKER (Die lateinischen Dichter des deutschen Mittelalters. Poetarum latinorum medii aevi / MGH Poetae 5.1), Leipzig 1937, pp. 281–90, at p. 287, ll. 3–4: *Dum sibi ter denos et tres floreret in annos / Augustum nomen, rex Loduvicus erat*; Epitaph 9, p. 287, ll. 1–2: *Caesaree stirpis, generosae nobilitatis / Consul et augustus hic iacet expositus*.

⁴ Liutprand, *Historia Ottonis* 1–3, in: *Livdprandi Cremonensis. Opera omnia*, ed. PAOLO CHIESA (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis 156), Turnhout 1998, pp. 167–183. See also WERNER MALECZEK, *Otto I. und Johannes XII. Überlegungen zur Kaiserkrönung von 962*, in: JÜRGEN PETERSON (ed.), *Mediaevalia Augiensia. Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, Stuttgart 2001, pp. 151–203, at p. 202; GIOVANNI ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung. Die Darstellung des Verhältnisses zwischen Otto I. und Johannes XII. in den Berichten über die Kaiserkrönung in zeitgenössischen italienischen und deutschen Quellen*, in: CHRISTIAN JÖRG – CHRISTOPH DARTMANN (eds.), *Der „Zug über Berge“ während des Mittelalters. Neue Perspektiven der Erforschung mittelalterlicher Romzüge* (Trierer Beiträge zu den historischen Kulturwissenschaften 15), Wiesbaden 2014, pp. 71–92, at pp. 85–86, stressing that according to the 'Chronicle of Benedict of Monte Soratte', two representatives of the Roman Curia invited Otto I to receive the imperial crown who should make sure that the current would be replaced by a more suitable pope, see Benedict, *Chronicon* 35, in: *Il Chronicon di Benedetto Monaco di S. Andrea del Soratte e il Libellus de Imperatoria Potestate in Urbe Roma*, ed. GIUSEPPE ZUCCHETTI, Rome 1920, p. 174: *Iohannes diaconus et Azzo [...] ut Romanum imperium in Saxonum regem concedere, ut Ecclesie sancte in presulis benigni preesset. miserunt legatos ad Otto primus Saxones*

Otto I was crowned emperor in 962 during his second visit to Rome. Five years later, in 967, his son Otto II (born 955) was raised to the status of co-emperor⁵. However, Otto II died prematurely, in 983, leaving his three-year-old son Otto III († 1002), who was crowned emperor in May 996⁶. The last of the Ottonian dynasty to hold the imperial title was Henry II († 1024), Otto III's successor, who was crowned emperor in 1014.

While the Carolingian empire drew on ancient Roman and Byzantine models, the establishment of the Ottonian empire necessitated a reframing and redefining of related notions of *imperium* in light of both its Roman and Carolingian predecessors. The present study demonstrates that the concept emerging from this was crafted to adapt to current circumstances and to meet the contemporary requirements of a renewed, comparably large imperial domain⁷. The study aims to provide a source-based examination of relevant Ottonian notions of *imperium*, the empire's relationship to its eastern counterpart, and their evolution up to the early eleventh century. It focuses on Otto I's ascension to emperorship and the period under Otto III and his Byzantine mother Theophanu, during which the empire's nature and its relation to its imperial past and contemporary rivals were both defined and redefined. Following the examination of evidence surrounding Otto I's rise to emperorship, the study addresses relevant Byzantine involvement, Ottonian concepts of *imperium*, and how these developed under the influence of Theophanu and Otto III.

regem, ut veniret et possideret Italia et Romanum imperium. See also JOHANNES KUNSEMÜLLER, *Die Chronik Benedikts von S. Andrea*, Diss. Erlangen-Nürnberg 1961. The chronicle is not very reliable as a source of information.

⁵ Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* 3.70, 3.76, in: *Widukindi monachi Corbeiensis rerum gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres*. *Die Sachsengeschichte des Widukind von Korvei*, ed. PAUL HIRSCH – HANS-EBERHARD LOHMANN (MGH SS rer. Germ. 60), Hanover 1935, at pp. 147 and 153–154.

⁶ Thietmar, *Chronicon* 4.27, in: *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi chronicon*, ed. ROBERT HOLTZMANN (MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S. 9), Berlin 1935, p. 165: *ab eodem unctionem imperialem percepit et advocatus ecclesie sancti Petri efficitur. Post hec vero imperium illud priorum suorum more gubernavit, etatem suam moribus industriaque vincens*. On Otto III, see GERD ALTHOFF, *Otto III. (Gestalten des Mittelalters und der Renaissance)*, Darmstadt 1996; KNUST GÖRICH, *Otto III. Romanus, Saxonicus und Italicus. Kaiserliche Reformpolitik und sächsische Historiographie (Historische Forschungen 18)*, Sigmaringen 1993.

⁷ Similar MALECZEK, *Otto I. und Johannes XII.* (as note 4), p. 202.

OTTO I'S RISE TO EMPERORSHIP

Evidence explicitly referring to Otto's imperial coronation on 2nd February 962 is comparably sparse⁸, and entries that do mention the event remain short⁹. While there are signs of a growing imperial consciousness before this event, such as references to his royal coronation in Aachen in 936 and the fact that he issued a capitulary in 951¹⁰ – an act usually associated with imperial authority since the Carolingians – there is no cogent evidence for a long-term strategy prior to the time around 960¹¹. It therefore appears that Otto I's way to emperorship was less concerted compared to what we know of Charlemagne in the late 790s¹². Our prime source is the eyewitness report by Liutprand of Cremona († 972), which is contained in his 'Ottonian History' completed in early 965. It is a brief description noting that Otto was welcomed in Rome with great magnificence, where he was anointed as emperor by Pope John XII.

⁸ See e.g. Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 3.73, p. 150, speaking of the *Francorum imperium*; WERNER OHNSORGE, *Byzanz und das Abendland im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert. Zur Entwicklung des Kaiserbegriffes und der Staatsideologie* (1954), in: *Id.*, *Abendland und Byzanz. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte der byzantinisch-abendländischen Beziehungen und des Kaisertums*, Darmstadt 1958, pp. 1–49, at p. 36. Comparable to the establishment of a Carolingian *imperium* and related concepts, the Ottonian empire as a subject has a vast history of research, the majority being in German, which can only be treated here on an exemplary basis. For further discussions and literature, see e.g. HAGEN KELLER, *Das Erbe Ottos des Großen. Das ottonische Reich nach der Erweiterung zum Imperium*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 41, 2007, pp. 43–74; GERD ALTHOFF, *Die Ottonen. Königsherrschaft ohne Staat* (Urban-Taschenbücher 473), Stuttgart 2012, and the contributions in HARALD ZIMMERMANN (ed.), *Otto der Große (Wege der Forschung 450)*, Darmstadt 1976; HARTMUT LEPPIN et al. (eds.), *Kaisertum im ersten Jahrtausend. Wissenschaftlicher Begleitband zur Landesausstellung „Otto der Große und das Römische Reich. Kaisertum von der Antike zum Mittelalter“*, Regensburg 2012. On Otto's imperial coronation, see, e.g., HERBERT GRUNDMANN, *Betrachtungen zur Kaiserkrönung Ottos I.*, in: ZIMMERMANN, *Otto der Große* (this note above), pp. 200–217; MALECZEK, *Otto I. und Johannes XII.* (as note 4); STEVEN ROBBIE, *Can Silence Speak Volumes? Widukind's Res Gestae Saxonicae and the Coronation of Otto I Reconsidered*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 20, 2012, pp. 333–362; ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung* (as note 4).

⁹ The sparseness of evidence related to Otto's time as emperor is already noted in the tenth-century Hrotsvitha, *Gesta Ottonis*, praefatio 3–5 and 7, in: *Hrotsvit. Opera omnia*, ed. WALTER BERSCHIN (*Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*), Munich – Leipzig 2001, pp. 271–305, at pp. 271–272: *Id quidem oneris mihi imposuistis ut gesta cæsaris augusti quæ nec auditu unquam affatim valui colligere metrica percurrerem ratione [...] quia hæc eadem nec prius scripta repperi nec ab aliquo digestim sufficienterque dicta elicere quivi*, although she assumes that *facundissimis disertissimorum sententiis quas vel modo scriptas vel otius de his rebus non dubito fore scribendas*. See also ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung* (as note 4), p. 82, relating the mention of accounts currently under progress on the works of Liutprand and Adalbert.

¹⁰ *Constitutio Ottonis I*, n. 8, in: *Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum* (MGH LL 4.1), vol. 1: 911–1197, ed. LUDWIG WEILAND, Hanover 1893, p. 17.

¹¹ The thesis that Otto I had already requested Pope Agapet II in 951 to be raised to imperial status is not confirmed by the evidence, as already stressed by WALTHER HOLTZMANN, *Das mittelalterliche Imperium und die werdenden Nationen* (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Geisteswissenschaften 7), Wiesbaden 1953, pp. 12–13, n. 14.

¹² MALECZEK, *Otto I. und Johannes XII.* (as note 4), p. 153; SARTI, *Orbis Romanus* (as note 2), pp. 12–19.

A particular detail in Liutprand's report is the addition that, after an exchange of lavish gifts, the pope swore never to conspire with King Berengar II ¹³.

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim († 968), a secular canoness and author of several extant poems and other works, provided another early account. Her report on the events of 962, found in her 'Life of Otto I', is, however, fragmentary due to the loss of an entire leaf from the sole surviving manuscript, which dates to the late tenth century ¹⁴. The final part describes how the *augustus* Otto and his wife Adelheid were crowned with the diadem, anointed, and adorned with the imperial sceptre and attire ¹⁵. In 965 or shortly thereafter, Archbishop Adalbert of Magdeburg († 981) wrote his 'Continuations' of Regino of Prüm's († 915) 'Chronicle', reporting that Otto was acclaimed "emperor and augustus" by the Roman population, the clergy, and the pope, who was rather unusually characterised as Alberich's son ¹⁶. Another short report by Benedict of St. Andrea († 1025), written before the turn of the millennium – likely closer to 972 – confirms that Otto was called *augustus* by the Roman populace and pontiff. It also adds that the latter was subjugated by the Saxon king to the Italian realm and the "empire of the Romans" ¹⁷. Although scholars like Hagen Keller argued that the Ottonians had always aimed towards a 'Roman' empire ¹⁸, the record mentioned is the

¹³ Liutprand, *Historia Ottonis* (as note 4), 3, p. 170: *Ubi miro ornatu novoque apparatu susceptus, ab eodem summo pontifice et universali papa Iohanne unctionem suscepit imperii, solum propria non restituit, verum etiam ingentibus gemmarum auri argentique muneribus honoravit. Iusiurandum vero ab eodem papa Iohanne supra preciosissimum corpus sancti Petri atque omnibus civitatis proceribus, se numquam Berengario atque Adelberto auxiliaturum accepit.*

¹⁴ Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14485, between fol. 149v and fol. 150r. Access via daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0004/bsb00046309/images, last accessed: 20/10/2024. On Hrotsvit, see in particular the contributions in PHYLLIS RUGG BROWN – STEPHEN L. WAILES (eds.), *A Companion to Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (fl. 960). Contextual and interpretive approaches (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition), Leiden 2012.

¹⁵ Hrotsvitha, *Gesta Ottonis* (as note 9), p. 304, ll. 1473–1476: *Aequae ferens sceptrum capitis diademaque pulchrum/ Atque sui cultus omnes regalis amictus./ Ornatus sed maioris suscepit bonoris/ Augusto summo pariter mox conbenedicta.* This immediately follows the mentioned lacuna, at fol. 150r.

¹⁶ Adalbert, *Continuatio a. 962*, in: *Continuatio Reginonis. Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, ed. FRIEDRICH KURZE (MGH SS rer. Germ. 50), Hanover 1890, pp. 154–179, at p. 171: *indeque progrediens Romae favorabiliter susceptus acclamatione totius Romani populi et cleri ab apostolico Iohanne, filio Alberici, imperator et augustus vocatur et ordinatur.*

¹⁷ Benedict, *Chronicon* (as note 4), 36, pp. 175–176: *Otto rex veniente Italico regno [...] adlatum est ei populus Romanus simul cum pontifice, et honorifice susceptus, et in ecclesia apostolorum principis missas celebrata, et laudibus abstolis honorifice laudatus, et augustus est appellatus; factus est ergo Italico regno vel Romanorum imperium a Saxonum regem subingatum.*

¹⁸ HAGEN KELLER, *Das Kaisertum Ottos des Großen im Verständnis seiner Zeit*, in: ZIMMERMANN, *Otto der Große* (as note 8), pp. 218–295, already argued that the Ottonians were rather favourable towards Roman imperialism, also supporting that the Ottonians aimed for a 'Roman' empire, see, e.g., ERNST-DIETER HEHL, *Kaisertum, Rom und Papstbezug im Zeitalter Ottos I.*, in: BERND SCHNEIDMÜLLER – STEFAN WEINFURTER (eds.), *Ottonische Neuanfänge*, Mainz 2001, pp. 213–235, at p. 235; or KELLER, *Das Erbe Ottos* (as note 8), stressing that "Die Ottonen und ihre Zeitgenossen haben das erneuerte Kaisertum 'römischer' verstanden als die Karolinger" (p. 48).

first reference in this context to a ‘Roman’ empire. The slightly later ‘Life of Mathilda (antiquior)’, relating to the abbess of Quedlinburg and daughter of Otto I, recounts that the Roman pontiff referred to her father as emperor, who, by God’s command, received the crown together with his wife in the Church of St. Peter. The ‘Life’ adds that Otto subsequently conquered Italy, which was part of his wife’s dowry, and that, since his coronation, Otto had been holding the “Roman empire” in the “Ausonian towns”, a Virgilian term referring to central Italy¹⁹.

The latest account that may still be characterised as roughly contemporary was written around 1012/1018 by Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg († 1018). He stressed that Otto was invited to Rome by John XII and confirmed that the king’s wife, Adelheid, was ordained empress alongside her husband. Otto’s new role was qualified as *patronus* of the Church, a designation probably added to explain his subsequent conquest of Benevento, Calabria, and Puglia. The author also explained that the coronation marked the beginning of a “Golden Age”²⁰. Other contemporary sources, like Ruotger’s († after 969) ‘Life of Brun of Cologne’ written in 965/969 and, most prominently, Widukind of Corvey’s († after 973) ‘History of the Saxons’ completed in 973, do not explicitly relate to the event²¹.

Even though Widukind’s ‘History of the Saxons’ does not refer to Otto’s imperial elevation in 962, it is the only source that mentions another potentially imperial ceremony, dating before this event in Rome. Widukind prominently reported that, following the king’s major victory over the Hungarians at the Battle of Lechfield in August 955, his army called Otto “father of the fatherland” and “emperor” in the

¹⁹ Vita Mathildis antiquior 11 (13), in: Vitae Mathildis reginae, ed. BERND SCHÜTTE (MGH SS rer. Germ. 66), Hanover 1994, pp. 107–142, at pp. 131–132: *Interea regem Ottonem papa Romam vocante imperialem, ut credimus, dei iussu accipere coronam, Italiam adipiscendi gratia peciit, quam prius regina Adelheid in dotem possederat. [...] Deinde augustus sancti Petri ad cathedram cum uxore coronatus, Romanum tenens imperium per Ausonias urbes summa potestate regnabat.* See Vergil, Aeneis 7, ll. 102–106, in: Aeneis. Lateinisch-deutsch, ed. NIKLAS HOLZBERG (Sammlung Tusculum), Berlin – Boston 2015, p. 354: *haec responsa patris Fauni monitusque silenti / nocte datos non ipse suo premit ore Latinus, / sed circum late volitans iam Fama per urbes / Ausonias tulerat, cum Laomedontia pubes / gramineo ripae religavit ab aggere classem.* The term was also used in Liutprand, Legatio 57, in: Livdprandi Cremonensis. Opera omnia (as note 4), pp. 185–218, at p. 213, l. 950: *Praesul ab Ausonia Liudprandus in urbe Cremona.* According to Benedict, Chronicon (as note 4), 36, Adelheid’s elevation to the imperial status took place during a subsequent stay in Rome.

²⁰ Thietmar, Chronicon (as note 6), 2.13, p. 53: *Insuper benedictionem imperialem a domno apostolico Iohanne, cuius rogatu buc venit, cum sua coniuge anno regni eius vicesimonono promeruit ac patronus Romane effectus ecclesie Beneventum, Calabriam atque Apuliam, ducibus eorum devictis, sibi vindicavit. Temporibus suis aureum illuxit seculum.*

²¹ Ruotger, Vita Brunonis 41, in: Ruotgeri vita Brunonis archiepiscopi Coloniensis. Ruotgers Lebensbeschreibung des Erzbischofs Bruno von Köln, ed. IRENE OTT (MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S. 10), Weimar 1951, p. 43, who only referred to Otto I as *Cesar ipse futurus*. Note the use of the word *cesar* instead of *imperator*. Referring to Widukind, Rerum gestarum (as note 5), it is interesting that the only coronation mentioned in the presence of a pope is made in connection to the renewed acclamation of Otto II following his father’s death in c. 3.76, see below. See also the discussion in ISABELLA, Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung (as note 4), pp. 73–76.

manner of late Roman emperors²². Researchers have been pondering intensively the significance of this report. Steven Robbie suggested that Widukind already finished a first version of his work at some point after 961, implying that an initial redaction may have already been completed prior to Otto's coronation in Rome, and that any sections on later events represent subsequent additions. In his view, the 955 episode mainly served a narrative function, while the coronation of 962 itself was either only a future event or it was omitted due to an unforeseen interruption in Widukind's writing process²³.

Widukind's treatment of Otto I's father, Henry I, calls for caution in interpreting comparable references with regard to Otto. Widukind reports that Henry was already acclaimed as *imperator* after defeating the Hungarians at the Battle of Merseburg in March 933, when his army hailed him as "father of the home country" (*pater patriae*) and "lord and emperor" (*dominus imperatorque*)²⁴. Widukind also referred to Henry I as "lord and greatest king of Europe"²⁵ and "favourite of the world and head of the entire *orbis* [...] whose dignity of power not only holds Germania, Italy and Gaul, but almost entire Europe"²⁶. However, Henry never sought or assumed imperial status. Although Robbie already noted relevant parallels in the depiction of Otto I and his father, Henry I²⁷, he did not consider the implication of the fact that Henry was already referred to as *imperator* without ever holding the relevant title for any interpretation of similar statements referring to Otto I. The fact that Widukind obviously did not limit imperial designations to those authorities who actually held an emperor's title proves that the author did not necessarily regard every ruler as emperor simply because he used appropriate terminology.

It is unlikely that, as Robbie suggested, Widukind failed to mention the imperial coronation of 962 due to ignorance. Although the evidence does not allow for an argument that Otto was considered an emperor as early as 955 based solely on the acclamation mentioned by Widukind, the fact that the same author consistently characterised Otto as emperor when referring to events that post-date the 955 accla-

²² Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 3.49, p. 128: *Triumpho celebri rex factus gloriosus ab exercitu pater patriae imperatorque appellatus est*; ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung* (as note 4), p. 74. Widukind at 1.39 and 2.1 also used the term *pater patriae* in reference to Otto's father, King Henry I. See also CHRISTOPH MAUNTEL, *Beyond Rome. The Polyvalent Usage and Levels of Meaning of "Imperator" and "Imperium" in Medieval Europe*, in: WOUTER BRACKE et al. (eds.), *Renovatio, inventio, absentia imperii. From the Roman Empire to Contemporary Imperialism*, Turnhout 2018, pp. 69–92, at p. 70, suggesting that Widukind therewith developed a "concept of empire based on military merits".

²³ ROBBIE, *Can Silence Speak Volumes?* (as note 8).

²⁴ Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 1.39, p. 58.

²⁵ Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 1.41, p. 60: *dominus et regum maximus Europae*.

²⁶ Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 1.34, p. 48: *ut videmus in amore mundi et totius orbis capite, patre tuo, cuius potentiae maiestatem non solum Germania, Italia atque Gallia, sed tota fere Europa non sustinet*. The second *non* appears to be redundant.

²⁷ ROBBIE, *Can Silence Speak Volumes?* (as note 8), pp. 338–346.

mation²⁸ – in contrast to Henry, for whom relevant terminology was only used on specific occasions – strongly suggests that the author was indeed aware of Otto's imperial elevation in 962. It does not suffice, however, to assume that Widukind believed Otto had already become emperor seven years before his imperial coronation in Rome. The author never included an account of Otto's imperial coronation during his later revisions and additions²⁹. It is therefore more likely that Widukind had other reasons why he did not refer to this key event and instead brought it back to 955.

Giovanni Isabella suggested that the reason for Widukind's omission of the 962 coronation may have been the pope himself. Although Pope John XII played a key role in performing the imperial coronation, the sources do not emphasise his involvement, and some even omit any mention of papal participation³⁰. Isabella convincingly argued that this was not due to a general anti-Roman attitude but rather because the very young Pope John XII – he was around 25 to 30 years at the time of the coronation and reportedly led an immoral life – was personally regarded as unworthy of his position by a large majority of the authors in question³¹. Hence, Isabella suggested that Widukind's decision to omit the Roman coronation ceremony and instead link Otto's elevation to the victory at the Lechfeld was probably not due to his rejection of the concept of a 'Roman' empire, as Carl Erdmann had proposed, but rather because Widukind did not consider the pope worthy of elevating Otto I to his new status³².

Like the Carolingians, the Ottonians emphasised their position as pious rulers fulfilling the will of God³³. The report by Adalbert of Magdeburg on the coronation ceremony of Otto II of 967 confirms that papal involvement in such a ritual did not pose a general issue. Adalbert described how Otto I and his son arrived near Rome, where they were greeted by a large number of *senatores* holding crosses, singing, and how the following day Pope John XIII († 972), successor to John XII, ordained Otto II "Cesar and Augustus". This ritual elevating Otto II as his father's co-emperor

²⁸ At one point, when discussing the bridal arrangements of the year 972, Widukind referred to the Byzantine emperor as *rex*: Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 3.73, pp. 149–150: *Constitutus autem rex continuo captivos absolvit, puellam cum magno exercitu et claris muneribus ad imperatorem destinavit.*

²⁹ Similar ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung* (as note 4), p. 76.

³⁰ See also JOHN WILLIAM BERNHARDT, *Concepts and Practice of Empire in Ottonian Germany (950–1024)*, in: BJÖRN WEILER – SIMON MACLEAN (eds.), *Representations of Power in Medieval Germany, 800–1500*, Turnhout 2006, pp. 141–163, at pp. 144–145.

³¹ ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung* (as note 4), in particular p. 87. The only exception being Adalbert, who had personal motives not to criticise John XII too much. See also MALECZEK, *Otto I. und Johannes XII.* (as note 4), pp. 153 and 195. When referring to Otto II, even Widukind unmistakably portrayed the pope as the primary actor, see Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 3.70, 3.76.

³² CARL ERDMANN, *Die nichtrömische Kaiseridee*, in: ID., *Forschungen zur politischen Ideenwelt des Frühmittelalters*, Berlin 1951, pp. 1–51, at pp. 43–45; ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung* (as note 4). See also JAMES A. BRUNDAGE, *Widukind of Corvey and the "Non-Roman" Imperial Idea*, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 22, 1960, pp. 15–26; SIEGFRIED EPPERLEIN, *Über das romfreie Kaisertum im frühen Mittelalter*, in: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte* 2, 1967, pp. 307–342. Similar OHNSORGE, *Byzanz und das Abendland* (as note 8), p. 38.

³³ See the evidence discussed in ISABELLA, *Eine problematische Kaiserkrönung* (as note 4), pp. 78–79.

was accompanied by the acclamation of the Roman population in front of the *confessio* of St. Peter, “bringing together the two emperors and the pope”³⁴. Herwig Wolfram argued that Ottonian co-emperorship was rooted in their rivalry with Byzantium, although handled more flexibly by using designations like *iunior* or *coimperator* in contemporary documents³⁵, while Constantine Zuckerman stressed that the latter term corresponded to the Greek *συμβασιλεύς*³⁶. Although co-emperorship was already common among the Carolingians, who raised their own sons to the status of co-emperor as young adults, the Ottonian procedure of elevating Otto II at the young age of only twelve years may have been directly inspired by the Byzantine model³⁷. Comparable procedures are known to have been adopted, for example, in the early tenth century by the Macedonian imperial dynasty, with whom the Ottonians exchanged several embassies³⁸. The elevation of a co-ruler proved very helpful in securing Otto II’s succession after his father’s death in 973, as the final chapter of Widukind’s ‘Saxon History’ confirms by explicitly reminding its readers that the eighteen-year-old boy had already been crowned co-emperor prior to his acclamation in 973. It is also only here that Widukind characterised the deceased monarch as emperor “of the Romans” (*imperator Romanorum*)³⁹. This reference further confirms that the Saxon author had no problem with referring to his ruler’s ‘Roman’ empire, supporting the impression that Widukind’s omission of the 962 event was not motivated by a more general objection

³⁴ Adalbert, *Continuatio* (as note 16), a. 967, p.179: *tercio ab urbe miliario maximam senatorum multitudinem cum crucibus et signis et laudibus obviam habuerunt. Dominus autem papa in gradibus beati Petri residens eos honorifice suscepit et sequenti die Ottonem regem acclamatione totius Romane plebis ante confessionem beati Petri cesarem et augmentum ordinavit; factaque est non modica nostratum et Romanorum leticia de iocundissima duorum augustorum cum domno papa conventionne.*

³⁵ HERWIG WOLFRAM, Lateinische Herrschertitel im neunten und zehnten Jahrhundert, in: KARL BRUNNER – ANTON SCHARER et al. (eds.), *Intitulatio*, vol. 2: Lateinische Herrscher- und Fürstentitel im neunten und zehnten Jahrhundert (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Suppl. 24), Vienna et al. 1973, pp. 19–178, at pp. 87–90.

³⁶ CONSTANTIN ZUCKERMAN, On the Title and Office of the Byzantine Basileus, in: *Travaux et mémoires* 16, 2010, pp. 865–890, in particular p. 888. See also NORBERT MARIA BORENGÄSSER, Byzantinisches Erbfolgerecht und ottonische Thronerhebungen, in: REIMUND HAAS et al. (eds.), *Im Gedächtnis der Kirche neu erwachen. Studien zur Geschichte des Christentums in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Festgabe für Gabriel Adriányi zum 65. Geburtstag* (Bonner Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte 22), Cologne 2000, pp. 609–620.

³⁷ LAURY SARTI, Roman Culture in the Ottonian World, in: *Royal Studies Journal* 10, 2023, pp. 81–119, here pp. 87–88. Cf. OHNSORGE, *Byzanz und das Abendland* (as note 8), p. 37.

³⁸ See OTTO KRESTEN – ANDREAS E. MÜLLER, Samtherrschaft. Legitimationsprinzip und kaiserlicher Urkundentitel in Byzanz in der ersten Hälfte des 10. Jahrhunderts, Vienna 1995, pp. 7–16.

³⁹ Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 3.76, pp. 153–154: *Mane autem iama facto, licet iam olim unctus esset in regem et a beato apostolico designatus in imperatorem, spei unice totius ecclesie, imperatoris filio, ut initio certatim manus dabant, fidem pollicentes et operam suam contra omnes adversarios sacramentis militaribus confirmantes. [...] Itaque defunctus est Nonis Maii, quarta feria ante pentecosten, imperator Romanorum, rex gentium.* On this particular section, see HELMUT BEUMANN, *Imperator Romanorum, rex gentium. Zu Widukind III 76*, in: *Id.*, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1966–1986. Festgabe zu seinem 75. Geburtstag*, Sigmaringen 1987, pp. 324–340.

against a 'Roman' emperorship and that he should not be considered the promoter of a 'Rome-free' empire. Personal repugnance towards John XII thus indeed appears to be the more plausible explanation.

Several points emerging from this short survey of the relevant evidence on Otto I's accession to the imperial throne should be noted. As Otto's investiture reportedly involved either coronation, acclamation and/or ordination, the different testimonies do not coincide and thus rather appear to complement each other. In 800, Charlemagne was invested according to Byzantine tradition, with the Roman population acclaiming him as "Roman emperor" through the *laudes* (public praises), *adoratio* (public approval), and coronation – a ceremony probably previously discussed with both Empress Irene and Pope Leo III. The pope's initiative to prepone the coronation, in his role as the western patriarch, had a significant impact on the papal role and importance in this and all future imperial coronations performed in the West⁴⁰. The Ottonian ritual, as discussed so far, differed primarily in several ways: First, the Roman character of Otto's empire was less explicit and was only added relatively late. Second, the Carolingians never elevated an empress, as was the case for Adelheid: Adelheid, widow of King Lothar II of Italy († 950), was crowned empress alongside her second husband, Otto I, as reported by Hrotsvit of Gandersheim and Thietmar of Merseburg. Considering Adelheid's former status as Queen of Italy implies that it was not primarily the pope, but Otto's wife, who was meant to legitimise the emperor's role as ruler over Italy, emphasising Adelheid's political weight⁴¹. Third, there is no evidence suggesting that the eastern emperor was involved in any prior negotiations. Another distinctive feature of the Ottonian ritual was the early age at which the successor was raised as co-emperor alongside his father, a practice also known from the imperial East.

OTTONIAN NOTIONS OF *IMPERIUM*

So what does the evidence reveal about the Ottonian understanding of *imperium*? The term's original meaning referred to authority over an army⁴². In the very early Middle Ages, it was often used to denote royal authority and the political domain under

⁴⁰ On the Carolingian ceremony and my argumentation that the empress Irene had taken a significant role in the elaboration and preparation of Charlemagne's *imperium*, see SARTI, *Orbis Romanus* (as note 2), pp. 15–33.

⁴¹ On the origins and significance of Ottonian female power, see SIMON MACLEAN, *Ottonian Queenship*, Oxford 2017.

⁴² See MARTIN DREHER, *Grundzüge des römischen Kaisertums*, in: LEPPIN et al., *Kaisertum im ersten Jahrtausend* (as note 8), pp. 95–116, at pp. 100–103, specifying that "Imperator war ursprünglich, in republikanischer Zeit, die Bezeichnung für den kommandierenden Feldherrn, bald auch ein Ehrentitel für den siegreichen Feldherrn, der von den Soldaten und vom Senat zum Imperator ausgerufen wurde". See also STEPHAN FREUND, *Traditionslinien des Kaisertums von der Antike zum Mittelalter*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 211–228, at p. 212.

governance, particularly in the context of a higher-level sovereignty that unified multiple realms or peoples⁴³. Both notions persisted into the Carolingian era, when the term *imperium* could denote either the concept of overarching sovereignty over smaller entities, particularly in reference to the Byzantine or Frankish empire, or supreme power and authority in a broader sense⁴⁴. Referring to the year 688, for example, the early-ninth-century ‘Annales Mettenses priores’ explain that the Merovingian king Theuderich III († 691) “ruled the empire (*imperium*)” with the help of his mayor of the palace Ebroin⁴⁵, and the mid-tenth-century ‘Life’ of the Merovingian queen Clotilde († 545) mentions a prophecy according to which her progeny would hold *imperium* over Romans and Franks⁴⁶.

The Ottonian sources still attest to a complex set of related notions, with differing opinions and concepts prevailing at the same time⁴⁷. In his ‘Antapodosis’, probably written shortly before Otto I’s coronation in 962, Liutprand of Cremona rarely used the noun *imperium*. When he did so, the term either referred to the Byzantine Empire or to the Kingdom of Italy⁴⁸. Liutprand’s ‘Ottonian History’, written in 964/965, uses the same term *imperium* only twice in reference to Otto’s empire. He does use the designation *imperator*, however, which is regularly accompanied by the adjectives *sanctus* or *sanctissimus*⁴⁹. Thietmar of Merseburg, who also only occasionally referred to the Ottonian empire as *imperium*⁵⁰, for example, on one occasion explained that

⁴³ STEVEN FANNING, *Emperors and Empires in Fifth-Century Gaul*, in: JOHN DRINKWATER – HUGH ELTON (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul. A Crisis of Identity?*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 288–297; ID., *Clovis Augustus and Merovingian Imitatio Imperii*, in: KATHLEEN MITCHELL – IAN N. WOOD (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours (Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions 8)*, Leiden 2002, pp. 321–335, at pp. 329–332.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion, see SARTI, *Orbis Romanus* (as note 2), pp. 13–19. See also WERNER OHNSORGE, *Neue Beobachtungen zum Kaisertitel Karls des Großen*, in: *Archiv für Diplomatik* 21, 1975, pp. 1–14, at pp. 4–6, and the elaborate analysis of the term *imperium* in DORINE VAN ESPELO, *A Testimony of Carolingian Rule? The Codex epistolaris carolinus, its Historical Context, and the Meaning of Imperium*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 21, 2013, pp. 254–282, at pp. 270–277.

⁴⁵ *Annales Mettenses priores*, a. 688, in: *Annales Mettenses priores accedunt additamenta annalium Mettensium posteriorum*, ed. BERNHARD DE SIMSON (MGH SS rer. Germ. 10), Hanover – Leipzig 1905, p. 5: *Eodem tempore Theodericus rex occidentalium Francorum, quos illi Niustrios dicunt, regebat imperium, habens maiorem domus Ebroinum nomine.*

⁴⁶ *Vita sanctae Chrothildis* 2, in: *Fredegarii et aliorum chronica. Vitae sanctorum*, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. 2), Hanover 1888, pp. 342–348, at p. 342: *Deus enim futurorum previderat ex Chrothilde semen regum nasciturum, eorumque propagine Romanorum Francorumque imperium gubernaturum.*

⁴⁷ Cf. BERNHARDT, *Concepts and Practice of Empire* (as note 30), pp. 114–117.

⁴⁸ Byzantine empire, e.g., Liutprand, *Antapodosis* 1.5, 1.6 (*Grecorum imperii*), 1.12, 2.45 (*Constantinopolitanum imperium*), 3.26, 5.23, 6.2; kingdom of Italy, *ibid.*, 1.15, 1.32, in: *Liutprandi opera*, ed. JOSEPH BECKER (MGH SS rer. Germ. 41), Hanover – Leipzig 1915, pp. 1–158. Liutprand’s work was probably completed already shortly before Otto I’s imperial coronation. Cf. MALECZEK, *Otto I. und Johannes XII.* (as note 4), p. 157, suggesting that *imperium* always referred to the Byzantine empire.

⁴⁹ Liutprand, *Historia Ottonis* (as note 4), 3, 15 (*imperium*); *imperator sanctus* or *sanctissimus*, e.g. *ibid.*, 4, 6, 8.

⁵⁰ For example Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 6), 3.21, 4.8, 4.68.

Otto I used his new role as emperor and patron of the Roman Church to take control of southern Italy⁵¹. Widukind, in his ‘Saxon History’, on his part, reported that when Henry I fell ill in 936, he raised his son Otto I, “who was the greatest and the best, and ruled over his brothers and the *imperium* of all the Franks”⁵². Referring to Charlemagne, Widukind explained that his rise to the status of emperor would have entailed that those people who until then had been confederates and friends became brothers, united as one people through the Christian creed⁵³. This statement has brought forward the thesis that, according to Widukind, the conquest and Christianisation of the Saxons entailed the merging of the latter with the Franks to become one people entitled to head the *imperium*⁵⁴. Apart from this, Widukind’s use of *imperium* was complex, ranging from the notion of governance in general to referring to the Frankish and Ottonian empire, with the latter occasionally being referred to as *Francorum imperium*. *Imperium* could also relate to Frankish and Ottonian kingship or even the kingdom of the Hungarians⁵⁵. A comparable spectrum of meanings is attested for the same term in the work of the monk Ekkehard of Saint Gall († ca. 1057). In his monastic history, he used *imperium* to refer to the emperor, imperial or regal authority, but also to relate to authority more in general, including the authority emerging from monastic rules⁵⁶. This brief survey of Ottonian concepts of *imperium*, based on key narrative sources, shows that its meaning had not changed significantly by the Ottonian period and continued to encompass the broad range already established in Antiquity. The term’s sporadic use in Ottonian historiography suggests that it was not seen as essential for describing contemporary rulership. This is noteworthy because it implies that the prior existence of the Frankish empire had not notably influenced the use of *imperium* or narrowed its meaning to solely refer to the said empire.

⁵¹ Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 6), 2.13, p. 52.

⁵² Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 1.41, p. 60: *Oddonem, qui maximus et optimus fuit, fratribus et omni Francorum imperio prefecit*. See also *ibid.*, 2. praef., p. 61, to Otto I’s daughter Mathilde: *domina esse dinosceris iure totius Europae, quamquam in Africam Asiamque patris tui iam potestas protendatur*.

⁵³ Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 1.15, p. 25: *ob id qui olim socii et amici erant Francorum, iam fratres et quasi una gens ex Christiana fide, veluti modo videmus, facta est*. A comparable notion is attested in Liutprand, *Historia Ottonis* (as note 4), 2, p. 169–170: *Bonus itaque rex dispersa congregans et fracta consolidans, quod cuique proprium fuit, restituit; dein Romam similia facturum adivit*, succeeded by a report on Otto I’s imperial coronation.

⁵⁴ BENJAMIN ARNOLD, *Medieval Germany 500–1300*, London 1997, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Governance: Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 1.9; Frankish and Ottonian empire: *ibid.*, 1.15, 3.57; *francorum imperium*: *ibid.*, 3.58, 3.63, 3.70; kingship: 1.16, 1.19, 1.22, 1.33, 1.41, 2.1, 2.3, 2.6, 2.17, 2.20; kingdom of the Hungarians: *ibid.*, 1.38. In *ibid.*, 1.28, Lothar’s imperial rulership was referred to as *regnum*, while the kingship of his brother Louis the German was characterised as *imperium*.

⁵⁶ Ekkehard, *Casum*, in: Ekkehart IV. *St. Galler Klostergeschichten. Casus sancti Galli*, eds. HANS F. HAEFELE et al. (MGH SS rer. Germ. 82), Wiesbaden 2020, pp. 114–542, e.g., c. 9, 75, 81, 96, 129 (the emperor or imperial authority), *ibid.*, 95 (regal authority), *ibid.*, 11, 93 (authority more in general), *ibid.*, 68: *Relicti sunt circa ambusta et cineres Galli senes cum iunioribus non adeo ad imperia parentibus* (monastic rules).

The second diplomatic mission to Constantinople, led by Bishop Liutprand of Cremona, offers a valuable lens through which to examine the Ottonian understanding of *imperium*. This journey, undertaken in 968, was aimed at meeting the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas († 969) on behalf of Otto I. Five years earlier, in 963, Nikephoros had deposed the Macedonian infant co-emperors Basileios II († 1025) and Constantine VIII († 1028), the grandsons of Constantine VII († 959). The latter had, in 949, welcomed Liutprand with a friendly reception during his first diplomatic mission to Constantinople. The primary aim of the 968 embassy was to request the hand of a princess “born in the purple” (*πορφυρογέννητη*), a designation likely referring to Constantine VII’s granddaughter Anna, born during the reign of her father, Romanos II († 963). This request was made in anticipation of her marriage to Otto II – a proposal that, according to modern scholars, implied the formal recognition of the Ottonians as emperors⁵⁷. Shortly after his return, the bishop wrote an impassioned account of his journey, which detailed several notable disputes with the emperor and his advisers⁵⁸. The arguments presented in his report are significant for both parties. Assuming the accounts loosely reflect the discussions that took place during Liutprand’s mission, they in fact reveal a keen Byzantine interest in the Roman name⁵⁹, the city of Rome⁶⁰, Ravenna⁶¹, and the other Italian provinces, in particular the southern Duchies of Capua and Benevento. The regents of the Duchy, Pandulf and Landulf, had recently sworn loyalty to Otto I⁶². Liutprand rejected the Byzantine critique by emphasising, for instance, that the Italian provinces rightfully belonged to the Latin-

⁵⁷ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 7, p. 190; HENRY MAYR-HARTING, Liudprand of Cremona’s Account of his Legation to Constantinople (968) and Ottonian Imperial Strategy, in: *The English Historical Review* 116, 2001, pp. 539–556, at pp. 551–552; GEORGI KAPRIEV, Vier Arten und Weisen, den Westen zu bewältigen, in: ANDREAS SPEER – PHILIPP STEINKRÜGER (eds.), *Knotenpunkt Byzanz. Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen*, Berlin 2012, pp. 3–32, at p. 6; SIMON GROTH, Kaisertum, italisches Königtum und Papsttum. Zur (temporären) Fixierung eines Dreiecksverhältnisses durch Otto den Großen, in: *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 96, 2017, pp. 88–137, at pp. 120–121. See also WOLFRAM BRANDES, Liudprand von Cremona (*Legatio* Cap. 39–41) und eine bisher unbeachtete west-östliche Korrespondenz über die Bedeutung des Jahres 1000 A.D., in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 93, 2000, pp. 435–463, at p. 445, arguing that the mentioned source was “keineswegs unmittelbar nach der Rückkehr von der Gesandtschaft – oder gar noch während der Gesandtschaft selbst – verfaßt [...] und daß es sich nicht um den eigentlichen Gesandtenbericht handelt”.

⁵⁸ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 40, pp. 204–205. On Liutprand’s mission, see MAYR-HARTING, *Liudprand of Cremona* (as note 57), pp. 539–556, with a discussion of the related history of research and the historical background, arguing that, alongside Otto I and his son, Liutprand particularly addressed the Lombard dukes of Capua and Benevento. This specific work of Liutprand has only survived in an early modern edition, as no medieval manuscript has been preserved.

⁵⁹ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 12 and 51.

⁶⁰ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 5, 15 and 18.

⁶¹ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 15.

⁶² Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 7 and 15. See also *ibid.*, 25, p. 188: *Vis maius scandalum, quam quod se imperatorem vocat, imperii nostri themata sibi usurpat?* See also MAYR-HARTING, *Liudprand of Cremona* (as note 57), pp. 543–544.

speaking kingdom of Italy, both by lineage and language⁶³, and he further argued that the Byzantine emperors had ceased to be true Roman emperors once they failed to maintain authority over the city of Rome. Otto I would have assumed this responsibility, notably by applying Roman law to prosecute those who desecrated the city⁶⁴.

In August, while Liutprand was still in Constantinople, a letter written by Pope John XIII reached the emperor. It solicited the “Greek emperor” to comply with the request for a bride from the “Roman emperor” Otto I, which put Liutprand into major trouble. Although the author claimed that he would remain “dumb as a fish” about why he had been spared capital punishment⁶⁵, he recounted that the letter led to a discussion with the *patricius* Christophorus, who assumed that the papal terminology had been used on Otto I’s advice. Liutprand claimed that he had, rather tauntingly, suggested that the pope must have assumed that the Roman title would displease the Byzantines, given that they had abandoned the Roman language, customs, and attire. His neck was finally spared, as it seems, by a second papal letter, which the bishop and diplomat had previously announced, now addressing the emperor in the desired manner⁶⁶. Although this dispute is inadequate for speculating about more general tendencies at both courts, it is noteworthy that it revolved around arguments already put forward in the ninth century during a letter exchange between Louis II of Italy († 875) and Emperor Basileios I († 886) in 871⁶⁷. Here, Louis explained that the Franks had come to govern the Roman empire due to their piety and orthodoxy, replacing the ‘Greeks’ who had lost their right to rule the Romans because of their heresy (*kacadosia*) and their abandonment of the ancient capital, its people, and its

⁶³ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 7.

⁶⁴ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 5, p. 189.

⁶⁵ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 47, p. 208: *apostolici et universalis papae Iobannis nuntii cum litteris quibus rogabant Nicephorum imperatorem Grecorum, ut parentelam firmanque amicitiam faceret cum dilecto spiritualique filio suo Ottone Romanorum imperatore augusto. Quae vox, quae inscriptio secundum Grecos peccatrix et temeraria quomodo latorem non occiderit, cur, priusquam legeretur, non oppresserit, qui in aliis rebus saepe videor spermologus et multisonus, in hac ut piscis videor insonus.*

⁶⁶ Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19), 51, pp. 209–210: *sed quia linguam, mores vestesque mutastis, putavit sanctissimus papa ita vobis displicere Romanorum nomen, sicut et vestem. Quod in futuris vita comite ostendetur epistolis, quarum superscriptio haec erit: ‘Iohannes papa Romanus Nicephoro, Constantino, Basilio magnis Romanorum imperatoribus atque augustis’.* Cf. *ibid.*, 12, where Liutprand claimed that in the West calling someone ‘Roman’ would be considered an insult.

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion, see SARTI, *Orbis Romanus* (as note 2), pp. 40–42. See Louis II, *Epistola ad Basilium I. imperatorem Constantinopolitanum missa*, in: *Epistolae Karolini aevi* 5, ed. WALTER HENZE (MGH Epp. 7), Berlin 1928, pp. 385–394. The letter was transmitted as part of chapter 107 of the ‘Chronicon Salernitanum’, which only survived in a single thirteenth-century manuscript. The letter is located at fols. 60r–67v. See *Chronicon Salernitanum* 107, in: *Chronicon Salernitanum. A Critical Edition with Studies on Literary and Historical Sources and on Language*, ed. ULLA WESTERBERGH (Studia Latina Stockholmensia 3), Stockholm 1956, pp. 107–121. The manuscript is Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Lat. 5001 (digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.5001, last accessed: 10/03/2025). For an excellent English translation, see CHARLES WEST, *The Fall of a Carolingian Kingdom. Lotharingia, 855–869*, Toronto 2023, pp. 186–200.

language⁶⁸. These similarities suggest that related arguments remained pertinent almost a century later.

Like the Carolingians, the Ottonians referred to their empire as ‘Roman’ only sporadically, a designation that became more common under Otto III and Henry II⁶⁹. Even the inscriptions on Otto II’s sarcophagus did not include the term ‘Roman’ in his imperial title⁷⁰. Intriguing are also Otto I’s occasional designations as *Romanorum et Franc(h)orum imperator augustus* or *imperator augustus Romanorum ac Francorum*⁷¹. They imply that his empire was not conceived as universal or inclusive, as would be the case if the Roman name was meant to refer to Rome or the Christian Church, but rather as one divided into a Roman and a Frankish sphere – the latter including the Saxon people. The title “emperor of the Franks” corresponds to what the Byzantines had suggested in the ninth century as an alternative designation for the western emperors⁷², raising the question of whether this title was intended to appease the Byzantines by emphasising that the newly founded empire was restricted to the Franco-Ottonian and

⁶⁸ Louis II, Epistola (as note 67), p. 390: *nobis propter bonam opinionem, orthodoxiam, regimen imperii Romani suscepimus; Graeci propter kacodosiam, id est malam opinionem, Romanorum imperatores existere cessaverunt, deserentes videlicet non solum urbem et sedes imperii, set et gentem Romanam et ipsam quoque linguam penitus amittentes atque ad aliam urbem sedem gentem et linguam per omnia transmigrantes*.

⁶⁹ For example, Concilia aevi Saxonici 29.B (Ravenna 967), in: Die Konzilien Deutschlands und Reichsitaliens 916–1001, vol. 1: 916–961, eds. ERNST-DIETER HEHL – HORST FUHRMANN (MGH Conc. 6.1), Hanover 1987, p. 274: *Angusto Ottone [I] a deo coronato magno imperatore [...] Romani imperii feliciter gubernante*; Diplomata Otto II 320 (Utrecht a. 975), in: Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae, vol. 2.1: Die Urkunden Otto des II. (MGH DD. Die Urkunden der deutschen Könige und Kaiser 2.1), Hanover 1888, p. 377: *Otto divina clementia Romanorum imperator augustus*; Concilia aevi Saxonici (this note above) 57 (Rome a. 998), p. 555: *Ego Otto dei gratia Roman<orum> imperator augustus subscripsi*; *ibid.*, 58 (Pavia 998), p. 562: *Otto dei gratia Romanorum imperator augustus consulibus*. See also CARL ERDMANN, Das ottonische Reich als Imperium Romanum, in: Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters 6, 1943, pp. 412–441, at pp. 412–413; ECKHARD MÜLLER-MERTENS, Frankenreich oder Nicht-Frankenreich? Überlegungen zum Reich der Ottonen anhand des Herrschertitels und der politischen Struktur des Reiches, in: CARLRICHARD BRÜHL – BERND SCHNEIDMÜLLER (eds.), Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Reichs- und Nationsbildung in Deutschland und Frankreich (Historische Zeitschrift. Beihefte 24), München 1997, pp. 45–52, at p. 51.

⁷⁰ See WERNER OHNSORGE, Die Anerkennung des Kaisertums Ottos I. durch Byzanz, in: Byzantinische Zeitschrift 54, 1961, pp. 289–352, at p. 50.

⁷¹ For example Diplomata Otto I 326 (a. 966), in: Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae, vol. 1: Die Urkunden Konrad I., Heinrich I. und Otto I., ed. THEODOR VON SICKEL (MGH DD. Die Urkunden der deutschen Könige und Kaiser 1), Hanover 1879–1884, p. 441: *Otto divina favente clementia Romanorum et Francorum imperator augustus*. For *imperator augustus Romanorum ac Francorum*, *ibid.*, 318, p. 432; 322, p. 436; 324, p. 439; 325, p. 440; 329, p. 443, the last dating to July 966. A somewhat comparable title is already attested in reference to Louis the Pious in Notker, Gesta Karoli 2.11, in: Notkeri Balbuli. Gesta Karoli magni imperatoris, ed. HANS F. HAEFELE (MGH SS rer. Germ. 12), Munich 1980, p. 37: *Hludowicus, rex vel imperator totius Germanie Rhetiarumque et antieque Francie nec non Saxonie, Turingie, Norici, Pannoniarum atque omnium septentrionalium nationum*.

⁷² For example Theophanes, Chronicle a. m. 6304 (a. 811/812), in: Theophanis chronographia, 2 vols., ed. CARL DE BOOR Leipzig 1883/1885; Louis II, Epistola (as note 67), p. 389.

Italian (i.e. ‘Roman’) territories. Liutprand’s insistence on the Roman nature of the Ottonian empire, along with the arguments he used in his report, however, makes this interpretation less likely.

Another possible interpretation is that the mentioned title referred to the two legitimating peoples or authorities: the Franks – perhaps in reference to Otto’s initial acclamation by the Frankish army in 955 – and the Romans. Herwig Wolfram noted that the title in question was primarily used in and around Lotharingia, suggesting that it may have been tied to a more local tradition⁷³. This implies that the title may be primarily an adaptation related to current necessities and should not be overinterpreted as referring to a broader contemporary understanding of *imperium*. A comparable use is attested in a singular title known from a potential forgery from Gembloux dated to 979, which refers to Otto II as emperor *augustus Lottariensium et Fransigenum*. In this instance, *Fransigenum* seems to refer to the western Frankish realm, while *Lottariensium* appears to relate to Lotharingia⁷⁴. Also somewhat comparable is Otto III’s singular designation in a diploma from January 1001: *Otto tercius Romanus Saxonicus et Italicus apostolorum servus* (‘Otto III, Roman, Saxon and Italian, servant of the Apostles’)⁷⁵, which has been interpreted as a triumphal title⁷⁶. According to Herwig Wolfram, the Roman title here was not meant to refer to the Ottonian empire as a whole but only to the province of Rome, i.e. those regions to which the early Carolingian title *patricius Romanorum* had been applied⁷⁷. If so, the emperor here identified himself as ruler of three main groups allegedly inhabiting his empire: the Romans of the province of Rome, the Saxons, and the Italians.

The substitution of the ‘Franks’ by the ‘Saxons’ as the eponymous people of the empire is striking⁷⁸. While the prepended *Romanus* likely referred to papal Rome, *Italicus* may have applied to the inhabitants of the Lombard and remaining southern territories. It is also worth noting that when the same emperor issued diplomas north of the Alps, he styled himself as the servant of Jesus Christ (rather than the Apos-

⁷³ WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), pp. 90–93.

⁷⁴ *Diplomata Otto II* (as note 69), 187, p. 213: *Otto divina favente clemencia imperator augustus Lottariensium et Fransigenum*. The document may be related to three other documents, likely forged within the same context, dated to the pre-imperial Ottonian era. See the discussion in WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), pp. 135–137.

⁷⁵ *Diplomata Otto III* 390, in: *Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, vol. 2.2: *Die Urkunden Otto des III.* (MGH DD *Die Urkunden der deutschen Könige und Kaiser* 2.2), Hanover 1893, p. 821. See also related comments in WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), p. 159.

⁷⁶ WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), p. 159; MÜLLER-MERTENS, *Frankenreich* (as note 69), p. 51. Similar already ALEXANDER CARTELLIERI, *Die Weltstellung des Deutschen Reiches, 911–1047* (Weltgeschichte als Machtgeschichte 2), Munich – Berlin 1932, p. 255, suggesting that the three names refer to the “beherrschten Völker”.

⁷⁷ WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), p. 160.

⁷⁸ Cf. Constantine, *De Administrando Imperio* 30, in: Constantine Porphyrogenitus. *De administrando imperio*, eds. GYULA MORAVCSIK – R.J.H. JENKINS (Corpus fontium historiae byzantinae), Washington, D.C. 1985, p. 142: “Ὡς τῷ μεγάλῳ ῥηγὶ Φραγγίας τῆς καὶ Σαξίας.

ties)⁷⁹. In both instances, Otto III presented himself as directly subordinated to God's closest confidants, thereby challenging the pope's role as an intermediary, as Matthew Gabriele argued⁸⁰. However, these titles again were used in specific contexts, whereas from 982 onward, under Otto II and his son Otto III, titles referring to the ruler as *imperator augustus*⁸¹ and, increasingly, *Romanorum imperator augustus* became the norm⁸². Still, considering that only thirteen out of 317 diplomas issued under Otto II carry the prepended *Romanorum*, and that ten or eleven of these were issued in Italy⁸³, the Roman addition seems to reflect a regional preference rather than a general policy of that emperor.

These varying notions of *imperium* help explain the difficulties scholars face in defining the Ottonian understanding of empire. Early twentieth-century scholars like Carl Erdmann argued for an expansive notion of *imperium* that emerged from the late Carolingian situation, where emperorship was confined to Italy, towards a more general understanding developed by Otto III, which encompassed the entire Ottonian realm⁸⁴. This concept would have coexisted alongside the ancient universal idea now strongly linked to the notion of a Christian empire⁸⁵. Although the pope played a role in its creation, he was unimportant in defining the empire⁸⁶. Ernst-Dieter Hehl argued that after Otto I, the empire became closely focused on papal Rome, with the apostolic see remaining significant. This was evident in 967, when Otto II was designated as his father's successor in Rome, and in 972, when his marriage to a Byzantine princess called Theophanu was celebrated in the same city⁸⁷. Scholars like Eckhard Müller-Mertens and Simon Groth also highlighted the importance the Ottonians placed on

⁷⁹ For example Diplomata Otto III (as note 75), 353, p. 783: *Otto tercius servus Iesu Christi et Romanorum imperator augustus secundum voluntatem dei salvatoris nostrique liberatoris*.

⁸⁰ MATTHEW GABRIELE, Otto III, Charlemagne, and the Pentecost A.D. 1000. A Reconsideration Using Diplomatic Evidence, in: MICHAEL FRASSETTO (ed.), *The Year 1000. Religious and Social Response to the Turning of the First Millennium*, New York 2016, pp. 111–132, at p. 121, adding that Otto III “styles himself as a quasi-hieratic ruler over all Christendom, essentially the ideal of a Byzantine *Basileus* (or idealised Charlemagne)”.

⁸¹ ERDMANN, *Das ottonische Reich* (as note 69), p. 417, supposed that “Otto I. war für das lateinische Abendland nicht ein Kaiser, sondern der Kaiser, und gerade deshalb konnte ihm der Titel *imperator augustus* ohne Beiwort genügen”.

⁸² See the summary in WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), p. 173.

⁸³ WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), p. 94.

⁸⁴ ERDMANN, *Das ottonische Reich* (as note 69), pp. 412–414.

⁸⁵ ERDMANN, *Das ottonische Reich* (as note 69), p. 441. Erdmann stressed that the emergence of such diverging notions was facilitated by the fact that the vernacular term *daȝ rīche* (“the realm”) could be used to refer to both the empire and the kingdom and thus did not distinguish between *regnum* and *imperium*. See also KARL FERDINAND WERNER, *Das hochmittelalterliche Imperium im politischen Bewusstsein Frankreichs (10.–12. Jahrhundert)*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 200, 1965, pp. 1–60, arguing for a persisting Capetian notion of a Frankish hegemony of imperial character.

⁸⁶ ERDMANN, *Das ottonische Reich* (as note 69), p. 440.

⁸⁷ ERNST-DIETER HEHL, *Kaisertum, Rom und Papstbezug im Zeitalter Ottos I.*, in: SCHNEIDMÜLLER – WEINFURTER, *Ottonische Neuanfänge* (as note 18), pp. 213–235, at p. 235.

Italy and the Roman name, associating it with their assertion that their status should be regarded as equal to that of the Byzantine emperor. This aim was emphasised by claiming authority over Italy, including Rome, Ravenna, and the southern provinces⁸⁸. Comparable to Carolingian Aachen, the Ottonian city of Magdeburg was intended to equal Constantinople⁸⁹. Thus, the Ottonian concept of empire appears as a notion that, although based on the ancient empire founded by Augustus, Christianised by Constantine, and renewed by Charlemagne, developed in the context of exchange with the Byzantine empire, as Johannes Irmscher suggested⁹⁰. As emerges from the above, and comparable to the Carolingian notion, it is not possible, however, to define a more specific Ottonian concept of empire beyond such general characterisations, as several understandings of empire and related opinions appear to have prevailed at the time, a circumstance that certainly also offered useful flexibility to adapt it to specific situations and requirements⁹¹.

OTTO I AND THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS

How did the emperors in the East perceive the re-emergence of an empire in the West? The first Western emperor of the medieval period, Charlemagne, had been acknowledged in 812 by a Byzantine embassy sent to him in Aachen by Emperor Michael I († 813) who, according to the 'Frankish Annals', sang Greek laudations and addressed the emperor as *imperator et basileus*⁹². This appellation corresponded to the usual acclamation of emperors in the East, implying his full recognition by his eastern counterpart⁹³. However, there is no comparable evidence confirming that the Byzantines also formally recognised the Ottonian emperors⁹⁴. Such a recognition is lacking after Charlemagne's death in 814. Hence, scholars have pondered whether Charlemagne's 812 recognition was a singular event, confined to the first Frankish emperor, or whether it

⁸⁸ MÜLLER-MERTENS, *Frankenreich* (as note 69), pp. 50–51; GROTH, *Kaisertum* (as note 57), pp. 116–23. Similar BERNHARDT, *Concepts and Practice of Empire* (as note 30), p. 155; WOLFGANG HUSCHNER, *Kaiser der Franken oder Kaiser der Römer? Die neue imperiale Würde Ottos I. im euromediterranen Raum*, in: MATTHIAS PUHLE – GABRIELE KÖSTER (eds.), *Otto der Große und das Römische Reich. Kaisertum von der Antike zum Mittelalter. Ausstellungskatalog*, Regensburg 2012, pp. 519–528.

⁸⁹ See GROTH, *Kaisertum* (as note 57), p. 120, with further evidence.

⁹⁰ JOHANNES IRMSCHER, *Otto III. und Byzanz*, in: EVANGELOS KONSTANTINOU (ed.), *Byzanz und das Abendland im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert*, Cologne 1997, pp. 207–229, at p. 223.

⁹¹ Cf. BERNHARDT, *Concepts and Practice of Empire* (as note 30), p. 154, arguing that the Ottonians "reflected seriously on imperial notions in such a way that they envisioned an emperorship in which the territorial boundaries would remain intact but that the dignity of the emperor, on the basis of an elevated responsibility for Christendom, would overarch these boundaries".

⁹² *Annales regni Francorum a. 812*, in: *Annales regni Francorum inde a. 741 usque ad 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, eds. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ – FRIEDRICH KURZE (MGH SS rer. Germ. 6), Hanover 1895, p. 136: *Nam Aquisgrani, ubi ad imperatorem venerunt, scriptum pacti ab eo in ecclesia suscipientes more suo, id est Greca lingua, laudes ei dixerunt, imperatorem eum et basileum appellantes*.

⁹³ For a full discussion and further evidence, see SARTI, *Orbis Romanus* (as note 2), pp. 34–38.

⁹⁴ *Annales regni Francorum* (as note 92), a. 812.

was tacitly extended to his successors⁹⁵. In this latter case, the Byzantine recognition seems to have been revoked prior to a letter exchange between Louis II and Basileios I in 871, which clearly attests to disagreement on this particular matter⁹⁶.

In his ‘De administrando imperio’, written around 948/952, the emperor Constantine VII († 959) still characterised Charlemagne as a ruler over all the kingdoms and as “being emperor” (ἐβασίλευσε) over “Great Francia”. The designation of Otto as “great king of the Franks and the Saxons” (Ὅτω τῷ μεγάλῳ ῥηγὶ Φραγγίας, τῆς καὶ Σαξίας) seems to reflect a certain Byzantine acknowledgment of the growing influence of the Ottonians in the West⁹⁷. Around the time of Otto I’s rise to the status of emperor, exchanges with the Byzantine empire were not very frequent. Nevertheless, five diplomatic missions are attested for the 940s and until 955, with a subsequent exchange in the year 967⁹⁸. This was the first Byzantine legation known to have reached Otto I in his role as emperor. It is recorded by Adalbert of Magdeburg noting that, five years after the event and only after some Ottonian advances towards Capua and Benevento⁹⁹, an embassy from the ‘Greek’ emperor Nikephoros II († 969) finally met Otto I in Ravenna, where they concluded peace and friendship. There is no indication

⁹⁵ As follows above, this would mean that it was revoked no later than 871, as suggested by the correspondence exchanged between Louis II and Basileios. Louis II, Epistola (as note 67), pp. 129–130, also suggests that the absence of an official Byzantine recognition of the western emperors stemmed from the Carolingians’ decision, since 813, not to seek such acknowledgment, as they deemed it unnecessary, believing their authority to be granted directly by God. See also the now outdated assessments in GERHARD LAEHR, Vom mittelalterlichen Imperium Romanum, in: Die Antike. Zeitschrift für Kunst und Kultur des klassischen Altertums 7, 1931, pp. 120–134, at p. 126; WERNER OHNSORGE, Otto I. und Byzanz, in: ID., Konstantinopel und der Okzident. Gesammelte Aufsätze, Darmstadt 1966, pp. 208–226. PREDRAG KOMATINA, The “King of Francia” in De cerimoniis II, 48, in: Byzantinische Zeitschrift 108, 2015, pp. 157–168, convincingly argues that Constantine, De cerimoniis 2.48, in: Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos. The Book of Ceremonies, eds. ANN MOFFATT – MAXEME TALL (Byzantina Australiensia 18), Leiden – Boston 2017, p. 691: ἡμῶν ἀδελφῷ ὁ δεῖνα τῷ εὐγενεστάτῳ περιβλέπτῳ ῥηγὶ Φραγγίας did not refer to Otto I – mentioned a little further above as ῥῆγα Σαζωνίας, p. 689 – but to King Hugh of Italy. Against DANIEL NERLICH, Diplomatische Gesandtschaften zwischen Ost- und Westkaisern 756–1002 (Geist und Werk der Zeiten 92), Bern – Berlin 1999, pp. 57–58, who related this address to Otto I. Cf. JEAN-MARIE MARTIN, L’Occident chrétien dans le Livre des cérémonies II 48, in: Travaux et mémoires 13, 2000, pp. 617–645.

⁹⁶ Louis II, Epistola (as note 67).

⁹⁷ Constantine, De administrando imperio (as note 78), 31, p. 142. See also the interpretation of the prophecy in Liutprand, Legatio 40 by OHNSORGE, Die Anerkennung (as note 70), pp. 44–45, who on this basis also concluded that Romanos II must have acknowledged the Ottonian empire. Cf. EVANGELOS K. CHRYSOS, Otto der Große aus byzantinischer Sicht, in: MATTHIAS PUHLE (ed.), Otto der Große. Magdeburg und Europa, Mainz 2001, pp. 481–488, who on p. 481 assumed that this text relates to the time after 962 and thus shows that Otto’s emperorship was not recognised.

⁹⁸ The closest exchange of 960, according to NERLICH, Diplomatische Gesandtschaften (as note 95), pp. 295–298, is only insufficiently attested by the only evidence, Liutprand, Antapodosis (as note 48), 3.1, p. 68: *Coeptus quippe in Frankenenvurd, qui est XX miliaris locus Magontia distans, in Paxú insula, nongentis et eo amplius Constantinopólim miliaris distans, usque bodie exaratur.*

⁹⁹ See NERLICH, Diplomatische Gesandtschaften (as note 95), pp. 58–59 and 296–299.

here of any prior recognition. On their return journey, the Byzantine ambassadors were accompanied by an Ottonian legation tasked with requesting the daughter of Romanos II as a bride for Otto II. This mission was followed by Liutprand's unsuccessful journey with the same purpose in 968¹⁰⁰. The endeavour was only concluded in 972, after further Ottonian interventions in southern Italy. Shortly thereafter, Nikephoros II was deposed by John I Tzimiskes († 976), who subsequently sent his relative, the mentioned Theophanu († 991), to Rome as a bride for Otto II¹⁰¹.

Scholars have often argued that the agreement to send a bride for Otto II implied Byzantine recognition of the Ottonian position of power, if not their role as emperors, considering Otto I's alleged willingness to accept an emperorship devoid of the Roman name¹⁰². Although this is possible, it should be noted that comparable requests for regal brides had been relatively frequent during the Carolingian period. On those occasions, such demands mostly originated in the East and were declined in the West – and no scholar has ever suggested that Byzantium was seeking Carolingian recognition¹⁰³. Werner Ohnsorge referred more specifically to two passages in the mid-eleventh-century 'Synopsis Historion' of George Kedrenos, calling the Ottonian rulers "emperor of the Franks"¹⁰⁴, to argue, with good reasoning, that the Ottonian empire was indeed acknowledged by the eastern empire, an attitude he dated to the reign of Emperor Romanos II. This recognition would have been revoked by Nikephoros II, given the tense relation emerging from Liutprand's report about his embassy of 968 already discussed above, and renewed by John I Tzimiskes when he sent Theophanu to the Ottonian court in 972. Ohnsorge also suggested that Otto I himself never aimed for a Roman *imperium*, which would have been Pope John XIII's suit, arguing that this was why the emperor was content with his recognition as "emperor of the Franks" (βασιλεὺς τῶν Φράγκων)¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁰ Adalbert, *Continuatio* (as note 16), a. 967; Liutprand, *Legatio* (as note 19). The Ottonian legate of 967 returned back to his emperor the same year. The 967 embassy may be identical with the one referred to in Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 3.70.

¹⁰¹ Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 6), 2.15.

¹⁰² For example OHNSORGE, *Otto I. und Byzanz* (as note 95), pp. 217–224. See also Franz Dölger, arguing that the Byzantines would have been most reluctant to support any Ottonian pretension towards a 'Roman' empire. FRANZ DÖLGER, *Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner*, in: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 56, 1937, pp. 1–42, at pp. 10–11.

¹⁰³ For a more detailed discussion and references, see SARTI, *Orbis Romanus* (as note 2), pp. 72–75.

¹⁰⁴ George Kedrenos, *Synopsis Historion* P 640.B, in: Georgius Cedrenus [et] Ioannis Scylitzae opera, 2 vols., ed. BARTHOLOMÄUS NIEBUHR (*Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae* 34–35), Bonn 1838/1839, vol. 2, p. 335: καὶ τὴν τῶν ἐσπερίων Ῥωμαίων ἐκκλησίαν ἰθύνειν ἔλαχεν Ἰωάννης ὁ τοῦ Ἀλβερτίχου υἱός, πρὸς πᾶσαν ἀσέλγειαν καὶ κακίαν ὑπάρχων ἐπιρρηπής· ὃν ὡς ὁ τῶν Φράγγων βασιλεὺς ἀπελάσας ἕτερον ἀντεισήγαγε τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ποιμένα. Similar *ibid.*, P 636.D, p. 328.

¹⁰⁵ OHNSORGE, *Die Anerkennung* (as note 70), pp. 29–44. See also the discussion of the evidence in NERLICH, *Diplomatische Gesandtschaften* (as note 95), p. 60, n. 197. The thesis of a prior recognition and subsequent derecognition was based on the imperial title used in the twelfth century in the 'Synopsis' by John Skylitzes, see most recently CHRYSOS, *Otto der Große* (as note 97), pp. 486–487. On the princess and her role as empress, see the papers in ADELBERT DAVIDS (ed.), *The Empress Theophano. Byzan-*

The recognition by Romanos II suggested by Ohnsorge should have happened between Otto's elevation in 962 and Romanos' death only one year later. Our sources do not mention an embassy exchanged during this period, which means that either there was another exchange that remained unrecorded or the acknowledgement took place no earlier than 967, the date of the first embassy known after Otto had become emperor mentioned above, when Otto and Nikephoros II concluded peace and friendship in Ravenna. This would indeed have been a good occasion for such a mutual recognition, regardless of the fact that the Franko-Byzantine relationship appears to have worsened after this. Ohnsorge's suggestion that Otto I already sought recognition of his prospective emperorship around 950 is neither sufficiently corroborated by the evidence, although we do have records of different embassies exchanged until 955¹⁰⁶.

As the sources remain unspecific, the question of Byzantine recognition must remain open. It is striking, however, that the marvellously preserved contemporary copy of the donation of the *imperator augustus* Otto II to his Byzantine wife, Theophanu, issued on the occasion of their marriage in Rome in April 972, condescendingly referred to her kin, Emperor John I Tzimiskes, as "emperor of Constantinople"¹⁰⁷. This designation not only deprived the emperor of the Roman attribute, but also symbolically reduced his sphere of authority to his capital¹⁰⁸. As it is unlikely that this divestment of John's Roman name was unintentional, and given that Otto II was called *imperator augustus* without the Roman epithet, the designation mentioned may be interpreted as a critique of the emperor's violent accession to his throne. However, it remains unexpected to find such a demotion of the emperor who had just sent a bride to the West in this very document, especially as this downgrading could also be applied to the young bride.

THEOPHANU AND OTTO III

After the unexpected death of Otto II, in December 983, his wife Theophanu and his mother Adelheid took regency for his only three-year-old son, Otto III. The transition seems to have been relatively smooth, not only because the boy Otto had been

tium and the West at the Turn of the First Millennium, Cambridge 1995, and the studies in GUNTHER WOLF (ed.), *Kaiserin Theophanu. Prinzessin aus der Fremde – des Westreichs große Kaiserin*, Cologne 1991; RÉGINALD GRÉGOIRE, *Theofano. Una bizantina sul trono del Sacro Romano Impero (958–991)* (*Donne d'Oriente e d'Occidente* 10), Milan 2000. See also MACLEAN, *Ottonian Queenship* (as note 41).

¹⁰⁶ OHNSORGE, *Die Anerkennung* (as note 70), pp. 217–222.

¹⁰⁷ *Diplomata Otto II* (as note 69), 21, p. 29: *Iohannis Constantinopolitani imperatoris*. The copy is now preserved as Wolfenbüttel, Staatsarchiv, 6 Urk 11. Similar in a letter of 968 to the Saxon dukes and prefects preserved in Widukind, *Rerum gestarum* (as note 5), 3.70, p. 146: *nuntii Constantinopolitani regis*, although here the Byzantine emperor was further degraded to the status of 'king'.

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion of relevant terminology, see LAURY SARTI, *From Romanus to Graecus. The Identity and Perceptions of the Byzantines in the Frankish West*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 44, 2018, pp. 131–150, here pp. 146–149.

crowned king shortly before his father's passing¹⁰⁹, but also because his mother Theophanu – comparable to Otto I's wife Adelheid – had been crowned as her husband's co-equal empress¹¹⁰. Both arrangements appear to have been made, with wise foresight, to ensure continuity in the occurrence of such a calamity. Theophanu was referred to as 'co-empress Augusta as well as consort of the empire's reigns' in a charter dated April 974¹¹¹. The significance attributed to the joint coronation of the emperor and his empress is confirmed by contemporary depictions of the couple, one of which is a famous ivory now preserved in Paris. It portrays the couple at the same height¹¹².

Theophanu was indeed successful in asserting herself as a ruler. This is confirmed by a charter issued in Rome several years after Otto II's death, in January 990, in which she referred to herself as *imperatrix augusta*¹¹³. In a diploma issued in Ravenna in April of that same year, she even called herself "Theophanius by divine grace emperor augustus", thus using the masculine version of the imperial title¹¹⁴. A comparable procedure is attested for the Byzantine empress Irene († 803), who already called herself *basilissa* (βασίλισσα) and, on rare occasions, *basileus* (βασιλεύς)¹¹⁵. Theophanu may have followed Irene's example, thereby positioning herself and the Ottonian dynasty as heirs to the Roman empire's wider imperial traditions. The use of both masculine and feminine forms by these female rulers also demonstrates the flexibility with which imperial titles could be handled within this socio-political context.

The relationship of Theophanu's son Otto III to the empire was exceptional, as he descended from parents of both western and eastern origins. Unsurprisingly, the young emperor attributed particular significance to the eternal city of Rome, as Thietmar of Merseburg already noted¹¹⁶. No emperor before or after Otto III spent

¹⁰⁹ Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 6), 3.26.

¹¹⁰ Vita Mathildis antiquior (as note 19), 16, p. 508: *Et cum fecisset ambos imperiali decorari nomine, tunc demum coniuge simul comitante filioque pariter cum uxore, patriam Saxonum revisit*; Benedict, *Chronicon* (as note 4), 38, p. 183: *placuit verba imperator Grecorum; gaudebundus effectus, aurum et argentum infinitum cum puella transmiserunt in terra Romania, in ecclesia apostolorum principi corona capitis impositis, et nuptias celebrate, et laudibus decorata, imperatrix Romana effecta est, et secundum Grecorum lingua Pyphanii vocitabatur*.

¹¹¹ Diplomata Otto II (as note 69), 76, p. 92: *dilectissimae coniugi nostrae Theophanu coimperatrici augustae nec non imperii regnorumque consorti*.

¹¹² BERNHARDT, *Concepts and Practice of Empire* (as note 30), p. 150, and fig 2, p. 151.

¹¹³ Diplomata Theophanu 1, in: Diplomata Otto III (as note 75), p. 876: *Theophanu divina gratia imperatrix augusta*.

¹¹⁴ Diplomata Theophanu 2, in: Diplomata Otto III (as note 75), p. 876: *Theophanius gratia divina imperator augustus*. On Theophanu and her role as regent, see HANS H. KLEIN, *Theophanu coimperatrix*, in: *Der Staat. Zeitschrift für Staatslehre und Verfassungsgeschichte, deutsches und europäisches öffentliches Recht* 32, 1993, pp. 219–244; AMALIE FÖSSEL, *Imperatrix Augusta et imperii consors. Die Königin als Mitherrscherin im hochmittelalterlichen Reich*, in: MATTHIAS PUHLE (ed.), *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation 962–1806*, Dresden 2006, pp. 87–97.

¹¹⁵ LIZ JAMES, *Men, Women, Eunuchs. Gender, Sex, and Power*, in: JOHN F. HALDON (ed.), *The Social History of Byzantium*, Chichester 2009, pp. 31–50, at pp. 45–46.

¹¹⁶ Thietmar, *Chronicon* (as note 6), 4.48, p. 186: *Omnes regiones, quae Romanos et Longobardos respiciebant, suae dominacioni fideliter subditas, Roma solum, quam pre caeteris diligebat ac semper excolebat, excepta, habebat*.

more time in the apostolic city, and no medieval emperor came as close to making it his residence¹¹⁷, which he occasionally declared “head of the world”¹¹⁸. This designation hardly referred solely to Rome as a centre of the Ottonian empire; it must also have implied the city’s role as the apostolic see and, therefore, as the centre of western Christendom, which Otto III considered himself to be ruling¹¹⁹. The significance Otto III attributed to his role as emperor, after his elevation in 996, is confirmed by the fact that a large majority of the diplomas he issued in Italy were dated solely by reference to his imperial years¹²⁰.

Otto III was particularly interested in adhering to late Roman and Byzantine models, for example, in matters of material culture and iconography¹²¹. His affinity for all things Roman or Byzantine has often been attributed to his maternal descent. Herwig Wolfram, for example, argued that Otto III’s Byzantine origins enabled him to “naturally” bear the Roman name. Wolfram also connected the addition of *Romanorum*, which had become common since the time of Otto II, to the latter’s marriage to Theophanu¹²². However, we should be cautious not to attribute too much importance to the emperor’s marital alliance and the princess’s influence alone. While both certainly strengthened the empire’s connections with the Byzantine present and the Roman past, such an effect would not have been possible without the prior approval of the emperors. Furthermore, the Frankish understanding of Romanness, which encompassed a broader range of meanings related to ethnicity, religious affiliation, and law¹²³, significantly differed from the Byzantine concepts of Roman identity tied directly to the empire. There is no indication that the Ottonians, after 972, embraced such an Eastern understanding of Roman identity. Thus, their empire’s nature was ‘Roman’ – a term associated in the West with the ancient Roman and Carolingian heritage, papal Rome, and Christian identity – not Byzantine. This is likely what the future Pope Sylvester II,

¹¹⁷ See GERD TELLENBACH, Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio. Ein Beitrag zu einem großen Thema, in: NORBERT KAMP et al. (eds), *Tradition als historische Kraft. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Geschichte des früheren Mittelalters*, Berlin – New York 1982, pp. 231–253, particularly pp. 235–236. On the necessity for the Ottonians to be present in Italy, see KELLER, *Das Erbe Ottos* (as note 8), pp. 73–74.

¹¹⁸ For example *Diplomata Otto III* (as note 75), 26, p. 55: *Romam caput mundi profitemur, Romam ecclesiam matrem omnium ecclesiarum esse testamur*.

¹¹⁹ Otto III was particularly interested in religious matters, including eschatological questions, see, e.g., LEVI ROACH, *Emperor Otto III and the End of Time*, in: *The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6, 2013, pp. 75–102.

¹²⁰ See GROTH, *Kaisertum* (as note 57), pp. 118–119, with the necessary references and exceptions in n. 214.

¹²¹ OTTO TREITINGER, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell. Vom oströmischen Staats- und Reichsgedanken*, Darmstadt 1956, p. 236; SAURO MARZOCCHI, *Renovatio imperii Romanorum. Quando Crescentius decollatus suspensus fuit. An Analysis of the Meaning of Otto III’s first Lead Bulla*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 43, 2017, pp. 1–19.

¹²² WOLFRAM, *Lateinische Herrschertitel* (as note 35), pp. 94 and 154. Similar GABRIELE, *Otto III* (as note 80), at p. 120.

¹²³ See, e.g., LAURY SARTI, *Frankish Romanness and Charlemagne’s Empire*, in: *Speculum* 91, 2016, pp. 1040–1058.

Gerbert of Reims († 1003), sought to underline in 996/997 when he stressed in a letter that Otto III was “of Greek descent” but “Roman by rulership [*imperio*]”¹²⁴. It was the empire, not the emperor, that defined its Romanness. The prevalence of the genitive use of *Romanus*, which was unlikely chosen merely to align with the title *rex Francorum*, implies that it referred to an empire inhabited by people regarded as ‘Romans’. Thus, the Roman name referred to the empire’s people, not its emperor.

This does not mean that there has been no Byzantine influence since the time of Otto I. His imperial representation on seals did not follow the Carolingian model of depicting the ruler in profile with shield, lance, and diadem. Instead, he was shown as a hieratic, bearded frontal figure carrying liturgical regalia, including the crown, sceptre, and globe. This portraiture, attested since 966, followed Byzantine tradition and mirrored depictions of Christ and ecclesiastical dignitaries¹²⁵. Ernst-Dieter Hehl interpreted this as a demilitarised portrait intended to counter the military emperor Nikephoros II¹²⁶. Otto I’s grandson Otto III later used a comparable iconography by depicting himself seated on his throne, a representation, which, on the other hand, was related to both Byzantine depictions of Christ¹²⁷ and Carolingian precedents¹²⁸.

A well-known inscription relates to the Roman nature of Otto III’s empire. Following Charlemagne’s model, who had already issued a lead *bullā* with the inscription *RENOVATIO ROMAN(i) IMP(erii)/ ROMA’* on the reverse¹²⁹, Otto III began issuing lead *bullae* attached with a cord to his diplomas from 998, in accordance with

¹²⁴ Gerbert of Reims, Epistola 187, in: Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit, vol. 2: Die Briefsammlung Gerberts von Reims, ed. FRITZ WEIGLE (MGH Briefe d. dt. Kaiserzeit 2), Weimar 1966, p. 225: *cum homo genere Grecus, imperio Romanus*.

¹²⁵ BERNHARDT, Concepts and Practice of Empire (as note 30), pp. 148–149, with fig 1; KELLER, Das Erbe Ottos (as note 8), pp. 72–73; ERNST-DIETER HEHL, Zwei christliche Kaiser im mittelalterlichen Europa. Eine problematische Geschichte, in: LEPPIN et al., Kaisertum im ersten Jahrtausend (as note 8), Regensburg 2012, pp. 271–296, here pp. 288–289, with figs. 5 and 6.

¹²⁶ HEHL, Zwei christliche Kaiser (as note 125), pp. 289–290.

¹²⁷ 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. 421–422; HEHL, Zwei christliche Kaiser (as note 125), p. 293. See also Aachener Domschatzkammer, Inv.-nr. 25, fol. 16r, bildindex.de/document/obj20460194, last accessed: 13/03/2025.

¹²⁸ BERNHARDT, Concepts and Practice of Empire (as note 30), p. 150. Compare Otto III’s depiction in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4453, fol. 24r, daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0009/bsb00096593/images/index.html?id=00096593&groesser=&fip=qrsqwxdsydxdsydxdsydweneyaya&no=8&seite=21 (last accessed: 13/03/2025), to that of Charles the Bald in the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14000, fol. 5v, digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb00096095?page=10 (last accessed: 13/03/2025). See also SARTI, Roman Culture (as note 37), pp. 88–90.

¹²⁹ Cited after PETER CLASSEN, Romanum gubernans imperium. Zur Vorgeschichte der Kaisertitulatur Karls des Großen, in: Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters 9, 1952, pp. 103–121, at p. 119. See also PERCY ERNST SCHRAMM, Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio. Studien zur Geschichte des Römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des Karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit, Darmstadt 1957 (reprint of 1929), p. 42 with n. 2.

the Byzantine custom. These *bullae* bore the words *RENOVATIO IMPERII ROMANORUM*, encircling an armed figure typically interpreted as an allegory of either Rome or Victory. The inscription *OTTO IMPERATOR AUGUSTUS* was accompanied by a bearded man. From the second half of the year 1000, the *bulia* featured the inscription *AUREA ROMA* with the emperor's bust on the obverse. The reverse bore the emperor's name and title: *ODDO I[M]PERATOR ROMANOR[UM]* ¹³⁰. Discussions on the meaning of the Ottonian *RENOVATIO* inscription have produced various interpretations, though no conclusive consensus has been reached. Percy Ernst Schramm, in 1929, argued that this inscription referred to a specific program of renovation aimed at encompassing the entire Ottonian domain ¹³¹, a thesis supported in 2002 by Heinrich Dormeier, who emphasised the significance Otto III and his inner circle attributed to Antiquity and ecclesiastical politics ¹³². Schramm further posited an opposition between 'Saxon' and 'Roman' politics and elites implying that Otto III's shift of emphasis towards Rome and his Roman policy were poorly received north of the Alps ¹³³. Knut Görich, in 1993, rightly stressed that the evidence does not support a particular agenda as supposed by Schramm and that any reference to *RENOVATIO* was primarily related to a specific situation. Görich further argued that neither contemporaries nor the young emperor saw a strict antagonism between 'Saxons' and 'Romans', and that the emperor's understanding of a Roman empire and its *renovatio* were primarily focused on Rome and rooted in contemporary notions of apostolic, rather than ancient Roman, concepts of Romanness ¹³⁴. Gerd Althoff largely agreed with Görich by emphasising the significance of the Carolingian predecessors and Rome as the apostolic capital ¹³⁵. John W. Bernhardt more recently returned to the idea that the inscription may have implied a more general statement, although with less emphasis than Schramm or Dormeier, by suggesting that: "Otto's concept of *Renovatio* definitely

¹³⁰ MARZOCCHI, *Renovatio imperii* (as note 121), pp. 1–2. On Roman reminiscence under Otto III, see also JOHANNES FRIED, *Römische Erinnerung. Zu den Anfängen und frühen Wirkungen des christlichen Rommythos*, in: MATTHIAS THUMSER et al. (eds.), *Studien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*. Jürgen Petersohn zum 65. Geburtstag, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 1–41, at pp. 33–41. BERNHARDT, *Concepts and Practice of Empire* (as note 30), p. 155, suggests that the figure represents Charlemagne.

¹³¹ SCHRAMM, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* (as note 129), pp. 87–187. See also MATHILDE UHLIRZ, *Das Werden des Gedankens der "Renovatio Imperii Romanorum" bei Otto III.*, in: E. GIUSEPPE (ed.), *I Problemi comuni dell'europa post-Carolingia* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 2), Spoleto 1955, pp. 201–219, stressing the significance of political concerns in southern Italy and eastern Europe in this context.

¹³² HEINRICH DORMEIER, *Die Renovatio Imperii Romanorum und die "Außenpolitik" Ottos III. und seiner Berater*, in: MICHAEL BORGOLTE – BENJAMIN SCHELLER (eds.), *Polen und Deutschland vor 1000 Jahren. Die Berliner Tagung über den "Akt von Gnesen"* (Europa im Mittelalter 5), Berlin 2002, pp. 163–192, who also focusses on Otto III's trip to Gnesen in Poland.

¹³³ SCHRAMM, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* (as note 129), pp. 93–177.

¹³⁴ GÖRICH, *Otto III. Romanus* (as note 6), pp. 185–281. See the critical discussion in DORMEIER, *Die Renovatio Imperii* (as note 132), pp. 166–172.

¹³⁵ ALTHOFF, *Otto III.* (as note 6), pp. 114–125.

included three aspects: spending more time in Italy and Rome, closer cooperation with the popes, and imitating the Byzantine emperors in various ways”¹³⁶.

Hannes Möhring presented a different argument against the earlier thesis of a more general political-religious program: he suggested that Otto III’s *bullā* meant to refute the opinion of the impending Antichrist by stressing the continuance and renewal of the Roman empire¹³⁷. A similar approach was taken by Levi Roach, who argued that Otto III’s interest in eschatological questions and the Roman events of his own time led him to emphasise the imperial nature of his own authority by connecting the notion of *renovatio* to the emperor’s reverence for Charlemagne¹³⁸. These different assessments and the persistence of significantly diverging interpretations of this same inscription show that, even if there were a consensus among scholars, its Ottonian significance will probably never be known beyond reasonable doubt. What the inscription does attest is the significance that the Roman nature of the Ottonian *imperium* had gained by the time of Otto III. The inscription’s vagueness again may have been intentional in order to allow different suitable interpretations¹³⁹.

A reverberation of the words *RENOVATIO IMPERII ROMANORUM* is preserved in the chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg, which mentions that Otto III, during his stay in Rome, intended to renew (*renovare*) the ancient customs of the Romans that had largely vanished by taking several measures, adding that some had been more popular than others¹⁴⁰. Unfortunately, he does not provide any specific example or further explanation. Instead, after adding one sentence on the emperor’s dining habits, Thietmar mentioned that Otto III had Charlemagne’s tomb opened and that he removed the deceased’s golden necklace with a cross and some well-preserved garments¹⁴¹. Sauro Marzocchi here translated the term *renovare* with “renewal” in the sense of “bringing something back ex novo”, and, in reference to the word’s only occurrence in one of Otto III’s documents, with “to reiterate”, “replicate”, or “to do again”¹⁴². Marzocchi further argued that the *bullā* was first issued in 998 to commemorate the execution of the rebel prefect of Rome, Crescentius II Nomentano. This challenges the more common interpretation of the *bullā* as a “renewal” or “reform” of the Roman empire in its ancient form, which Schramm saw as part of a broader politi-

¹³⁶ BERNHARDT, Concepts and Practice of Empire (as note 30), pp. 155–156.

¹³⁷ HANNES MÖHRING, Die renovatio imperii Kaiser Ottos III. und die Antichrist-Erwartung der Zeitgenossen an der Jahrtausendwende von 1000/1001, in: Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 93, 2011, pp. 333–350, at p. 345.

¹³⁸ ROACH, Emperor Otto III (as note 119), pp. 83–100.

¹³⁹ Similar IRMSCHER, Otto III. (as note 90), p. 211. BENJAMIN ARNOLD, Medieval Germany 500–1300, London 1997, pp. 75–125, suggested that the Ottonian *renovatio* referred to Charlemagne’s empire.

¹⁴⁰ Thietmar, Chronicon (as note 6), 4.47, p. 185: *Imperator antiquam Romanorum consuetudinem iam ex parte magna deletam suis temporibus cupiens renovare, multa faciebat, que diversi diverse sentiebant.*

¹⁴¹ Thietmar, Chronicon (as note 6), 4.47, p. 186: *Crucem auream, quae in collo eius pependit, cum vestimentorum parte adhuc imputribilium sumens, caetera cum veneratione magna reposuit.*

¹⁴² MARZOCCHI, Renovatio imperii (as note 121), p. 11.

cal-religious programme¹⁴³. Marzocchi does so to suggest translating the inscription as “the renewal of the empire of the Romans” in the sense of “the restoration of the will of the Romans”. If he is right, his thesis might be understood as a concretisation of Gerd Althoff’s prior suggestion that the *bullā* referred to the intention to take control on an imperial level by eliminating all opposition and grievance¹⁴⁴.

Henry II, who was crowned emperor in Rome in February 1014, did not continue Otto III’s Roman and Italian path. Although he used the title of *Romanorum rex* prior to his rise to the status of emperor, he resorted to a more Frankish notion of *imperium* and concentrated on the territories north of the Alps. His metal *bullā* now referred to a *renovatio regni Francorum*. Concurrently, he further emphasised his divine ordination within the framework of a Christian empire and strengthened his relationship with the pope¹⁴⁵. This shift marks a departure from Otto III’s vision of *imperium*, which focused on Rome and the legacy of Charlemagne, by introducing a more Francocentric notion characterised by a stronger regional focus on his Christian *imperium*.

RESULTS

The Ottonians, as emperors, primarily saw themselves as heirs to Charlemagne and his successors¹⁴⁶. Otto I’s coronation in Rome did not involve direct Byzantine participation. The Roman nature and heritage of his empire and the recognition of the western *imperium* by the eastern emperor were of secondary importance. The latter was seemingly sought only retroactively, after the Ottonian rise to emperorship had already occurred. This empire thus was primarily conceived as a continuation of the Frankish empire. Moreover, there is evidence of a distinction between Roman and Frankish or Saxon identities, particularly in ethnic and territorial terms. The eastern and western empires thus appear as distinct entities, rather than two halves of a single body, as was still the case in the Carolingian era¹⁴⁷. Although connected by a shared heritage, they were not directly linked. The gradual decline of the Carolingian empire, followed by four decades of interregnum, seemingly played a significant role in the detachment of the empire in both regions. The Ottonian empire was thus less a final revival of a

¹⁴³ SCHRAMM, Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio (as note 129), in particular pp. 116–134.

¹⁴⁴ MARZOCCHI, Renovatio imperii (as note 121), p. 15; ALTHOFF, Otto III. (as note 6), p. 125. On the notion of renovation, see also JOHANNES FRIED, Die Erneuerung des Römischen Reiches, in: ALFRIED WIECZOREK et al. (eds.), Europas Mitte um 1000 (Beiträge zur Geschichte, Kunst und Archäologie), Stuttgart 2000, pp. 738–744. TELLENBACH, Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio (as note 117), pp. 235–236, emphasised the significance of Italy and Rome for the Ottonians.

¹⁴⁵ BERNHARDT, Concepts and Practice of Empire (as note 30), pp. 158–162. On this title more in general, see HELMUT BEUMANN, Der deutsche König als “Romanorum rex” (Sitzungsberichte der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main 18.2), Wiesbaden 1981, more specifically pp. 34–43.

¹⁴⁶ See the discussion in HAGEN KELLER, Die Ottonen und Karl der Große, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 34, 2000, pp. 112–131.

¹⁴⁷ See SARTI, Orbis Romanus (as note 2), pp. 13–50.

'Roman' imperium competing with the Byzantines, as implied in the works of Eckhard Müller-Mertens, Johannes Irmscher, and Simon Groth, but rather already represented a notable shift away from the ancient heritage and its pan-Mediterranean context towards a more regionalised entity under eastern Frankish – or Saxon – authority, a process that was further intensified under the Salian rulers.

This does not imply absence of Byzantine influence, as seen in the introduction of early-age co-emperorships or the titles used by the empress Theophanu. While she brought a strong Byzantine presence to the Ottonian court, the evidence suggests that both ancient Roman and Carolingian influences remained just as significant under her son, Otto III. This emperor exemplified a twofold identity, as a Roman ruler with partly 'Greek' origins. Although Otto III's origins certainly help explain his enhanced affinity for Roman or Byzantine traditions, the significance attributed among the Ottonians to the ancient roots of the empire and to Rome as the apostolic see and head of Christendom, was distinctly western.