

#### IV. Germany after the Frankish Union (843-)

##### A. The Breakdown of Central Authority and the “Problem of the Dukes”

1. To see how Germany eventually became the empire that started World War I and II, we need to look at how it became a nation.
2. It was started by great leaders like Clovis and Charlemagne.
3. Even a great leader like Charlemagne, however, had to *delegate* power to trusted family and clan members, and friends.
4. This special group that surrounds the king in any kingdom is known as an “aristocracy,” with its members possessing various roles and titles, such as “duke,” “count,” “baron,” and “margrave.”

5. In medieval times, such dukes and counts (or “lords” more generally) controlled each separate areas of land with full power, as long as they were loyal to the king.
6. The arrangement of such territories in Germany, involving “duchies” (territories of dukes) and “marches” (territories of margraves) after the Frankish split is shown on the map to the right.



The duchies and marches of Germany after the Frankish split.

7. As the Franks fought one another for control of the entire Frankish empire after **843 AD**, they ended up losing control of each of its separate regions to its lords, who then ruled it independently.
8. These lords still had to fight to defend themselves against the tribes of eastern Europe, and against the Vikings who raided from the north, so they decided to create a partnership where one of them was elected as the “*king*” of the whole country.
9. The king in this situation was an *elected* monarch, but was really just one member of a group of equals. This was not a satisfying position for a king, so the more ambitious kings of Germany worked to become *real* kings, like Charlemagne.
10. To do so meant solving the problem I call “*the problem of the dukes.*”

##### B. Otto “the Great” and the Ottonian “Holy Roman Empire”

1. The king who defined the German answer of how to gain more power over his fellow dukes in this system was Otto I of Saxony (see map above for the duchy of Saxony). Afterwards, he was known as Otto “*the Great.*”

2. Since the dukes swore an *oath of loyalty* to the king of the country in all matters relating to *the country*, if a king could trick a lord into being disloyal he would have the right to punish him and take his land.
3. Once this task was accomplished, the king was in the same position as the previous Carolingian rulers had been. He had to decide who to give it to. This is where Otto created a new approach that came to be known as the “Ottonian System.”
4. Otto gave newly claimed land to family and loyal warriors as previous kings had done, *but he also gave land to the Church* (the organization of *Nicene* Christianity that accepted the leadership of the bishops of Rome, i.e. the “popes”).
5. This resulted in a new kind of powerful lord: a “bishop-prince,” who was both a leader of the Christian church *and* a lord who controlled land in the same way as a duke.
6. Finally, Otto marched on Rome itself to assist the pope, as Charlemagne had done. Having imposed his authority there, he was crowned “*Holy Roman Emperor*” in **962 AD**.



Otto I of Saxony became Otto “the Great” by granting power to the Church as a way to solve “*the problem of the dukes.*”

### C. So What? (The Fate of the Ottonian “Holy Roman Empire”)

1. Although the system created by Otto worked for a brief time, it gave rise to a new and bigger problem: who was the ultimate authority—the king/emperor or the pope? This is known as the problem of the relationship between “church and state.”
2. At first, Otto and the kings had more power, but as time passed, the the popes became more secure. They believed, that as representatives of God, their authority over human affairs should be the higher than the kings.
3. To impose their authority, the popes banned the practice of kings creating *bishop-princes* in the way that Otto had arranged.
  - a) A “lay” person, it was held, should not be able to “invest” a bishop with authority within the Church.
  - b) Therefore, pope Gregory VII *excommunicated* king Henry IV of Germany in **1077** for the practice of “lay investiture.” (He expelled Henry from membership in Christianity, and thus he was no longer a legitimate king).
  - c) This allowed his lords to deny Henry’s authority, *and* made the bishop-princes Henry’s enemies as well, for they had to follow the authority of the pope in order to be bishops.
  - d) Unable to maintain his power, Henry was forced to make his way to Italy, to a castle belonging to the pope at a place called Canossa, to beg for forgiveness from the pope in order to be readmitted into Christianity.

- e) This event, known as the “Humiliation at Canossa” of **1077** signaled the break-down of the Ottonian System.
4. From this point onward, two battling groups emerged in the Ottonian Holy Roman Empire. One favored the king as the supreme defender of Germany and European Christianity. The other favored the pope as the highest religious authority.
  5. The struggle between these two groups caused the disintegration of Germany, until such time as no group had enough power to elect a king, and there simply was none.
  6. From **1254** to **1273** there was thus an “Interregnum” in Germany—a period without a king at all. This was the historical outcome of the Ottonian system. Because the kings were never able to become masters of Germany, the country was still in this position as the Reformation and Religious wars got underway a couple centuries later.



An illustration of “lay investiture”—with a king passing a bishop’s crook/staff to invest an ally with his authority as a bishop.