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**"Renowned Queen Mother Mathilda:" Ideals and Realities of Ottonian
Queenship in the *Vitae Mathildis reginae* (Mathilda of Saxony, 895?-968)***

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In 919, the German dukes elected as king one of their number, Henry I, "the Fowler," of Saxony. A member of the powerful noble family the Liudolfings, Henry had been duke of Saxony for seven years when he succeeded Conrad I of Franconia as king. At Henry's side was his wife Mathilda, herself a woman of high rank, whom he had married in 909. From 919 through 936, Henry and Mathilda ruled their new kingdom, expanding and consolidating their territory as well as their power. Their first-born son, Otto, elected king after his father's death in 936, became emperor in 962, cementing his family's rule and giving it his name. The Ottonians dominated Europe during the tenth century, reviving the traditions of their Carolingian predecessors and establishing themselves as a dynasty in their own right.

Henry and Mathilda were the first royal rulers from Saxony. Mathilda herself was the object of much veneration, revered as the patron saint of the Ottonians and commemorated in numerous historiographical writings of the time, including two works about her life, the *Vita Mathildis reginae antiquior* (the earlier *Life of Queen Mathilda*), and the *Vita Mathildis reginae posterior* (the later *Life of Queen Mathilda*). The *Vita antiquior*, dedicated to Emperor Otto II, was written in 974, six years after Mathilda's death, and the *Vita posterior*, addressed to Henry II, in 1002/1003.¹ Although both were probably produced at the convent of Nordhausen in Saxony, neither work's author is known. Blending biography, hagiography, and dynastic history, these *vitae* reveal issues central to both tenth century Germany in general, and to the Ottonian family in particular, including control of land and wealth, issues of status, and gender roles for men and women. They also paint a portrait of the first queen of Germany, revealing how Mathilda's image was constructed by others and how she constructed her own image.

This paper explores the image of Mathilda created by these *vitae*, examining their representation of her before, during, and after her marriage to Henry. In each period of her life, the *vitae* portray her as the epitome of womanhood, the best virgin, wife, and widow. As such, she provided a model for other women, especially members of the royal family, thereby making the *vitae* a valuable source for understanding Ottonian conceptions of queenship and the appropriate roles for royal women, from birth to death.² While the hagiographic nature of these texts and their function as *exempla* necessarily restricted, dictated, and molded the figure of Mathilda, they are grounded to a certain degree in the roles Mathilda herself took on and the activities she pursued. These roles and activities, shaped by the realities of tenth-century Ottonian society, form the final section of this article, which analyses the connections between the 'constructed' and the 'historical' Mathilda.

Modern Historiography on the *Vitae Mathildis Reginae*

The *Vita Mathildis reginae posterior* was the only *vita* of Mathilda known to scholars for many centuries. Surviving in numerous manuscripts and first published in the *Acta Sanctorum* in 1668,³ it remained the authority on Queen Mathilda until the *Vita Mathildis reginae anterior* was rediscovered by Georg Pertz in 1824.⁴ The *Vita Mathildis reginae antiquior* is the shorter of the two, being about half the length of the *Vita Mathildis reginae posterior*. The interpretation of these lives has fluctuated greatly in the time since their publication in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historia*, the *Vita antiquior* in 1852 and the *Vita posterior* in 1841.⁵ Nineteenth-century historians such as Philippe Jaffé and Rudolph Köpke argued over their place of origin, author, and historical accuracy, questions which remain current today.⁶

Several dissertations on Queen Mathilda appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, including Arno Büsing's *Mathilde, Gemahlin Heinrichs I*,⁷ but for the most part the *vitae* were little touched until the middle of the twentieth century. Then a number of scholars, including Helmut Beumann, Martin Lintzel, and Karl Schmid, revived interest in the *vitae*, recognizing them as sources for information about Ottonian self-perception. They examined the sections of the *vitae* not dependent on other writings, especially those concerning the Ottonian ascension to power, the ducal election of Henry, and the transfer of royal power from Henry I to his oldest son Otto. Although such scholarship returned the *Vitae Mathildis reginae* to the shelves of Ottonian history, it did not look at Mathilda *per se*, but rather gleaned what it could about other issues pertaining to Ottonian rule. Maria Stoeckle was one of the few to deviate from this pattern, examining, rather, the hagiographic structure of the *vitae*, and fixing them within the recognized trends in female saints' lives between the seventh and tenth centuries.⁸

In line with Maria Stoeckle's research, Patrick Corbet has concentrated on the hagiographic aspects of the *Vitae* in his work *Les saints Ottoniens: Sainteté dynastique, sainteté royale et sainteté féminine autour de l'an Mil*, a thorough study of the nature of Mathilda's sanctity.⁹ Winfrid Glocker and Pauline Stafford have produced the only works to address Mathilda specifically as queen.¹⁰ Stafford considered Mathilda in conjunction with other medieval queens, an approach which limited her to anecdotes and generalizations about queenship. Glocker's work passed over Mathilda as queen rather quickly, saying only that we cannot know anything about Mathilda's role at court or her influence on Henry, statements in themselves which may be too strong.

Many other works on Ottonian history have made references to Mathilda, some longer, some shorter, which is only fitting for a figure long acknowledged as central to Ottonian self-conception, the only one to be the subject of two separate *vitae*. None of them, however, has looked in detail at the figure of Mathilda in her entirety, to see how she was constructed as queen, from childhood through death, and to see the relationship between the idealized and the historical Mathilda. Although the nature of the texts does, as Glocker stated,¹¹ make it difficult to get at the "real" Mathilda, there is much still to glean from these *Vitae* about the nature of Ottonian queenship. In focusing exclusively on the nature of kingship and/or the Ottonian *memoria*, historians have forgotten Mathilda herself. She was the loom upon which her *Vitae* were spun, providing them with a framework that limited, but did not entirely define, the picture of Mathilda they produced.

Narrative of Mathilda's life

Before investigating the figure of Mathilda in depth, a short narrative is in order. Because the two Vitae follow essentially the same story line, with slight variations in sequence or emphasis, they have been woven together, noting only the most significant differences.

The vitae begin with Henry's noble lineage, focusing on his parents Otto the illustrious, Otto's wife Haduwich, and their children. When Henry, the youngest of the three sons, was old enough to marry, his parents sought a noble wife for him. They heard of Mathilda, a beautiful girl of noble lineage raised and educated in the convent of Herford, and a descendant of Widukind, the Saxon duke who had led the fiercest resistance against Charlemagne's efforts to convert the Saxons to Christianity in the late eighth century. The vitae describe in detail Widukind's conversion at Charlemagne's hand, then shift to Mathilda's more recent relatives, including her father Tiedericus, mother Reinheld, and grandmother Mathilda, abbess of Herford who oversaw Mathilda's upbringing. In addition to noting that Mathilda could read, these vitae stressed Mathilda's virtues, notably her nobility, uprightness, and virtue.¹²

When fame of Mathilda's reputation spread to Henry's parents, they sent his teacher, Thietmar, to Herford to determine if she was suitable for marriage to their son. After he returned with stories of Mathilda's great beauty and virtue, Henry and a retinue accompanied Thietmar back to the convent. Inflamed with love for her at first sight,¹³ Henry pressured Mathilda's grandmother for permission to marry Mathilda. She consented without consulting Mathilda's relatives. After their marriage, Henry brought Mathilda back to his own Saxon homeland. They toured first through a number of cities, then enjoyed a wedding feast at Wallhausen, a town which Mathilda received as part of her dowry.

Both vitae skip the first years of Henry's and Mathilda's married life, mentioning only Otto the Illustrious' death three years later, at which point the highest-ranking nobles (*principes regni*) elected Henry duke and then, almost in the same sentence, made him king, celebrating and recognizing him as the first king from Saxony. As king, Henry conquered a number of foreign peoples, including Slavs, Danes, Bavarians, and Bohemians. He engaged in Christian activities, building and repairing churches, as well as caring for the poor and widows. Mathilda, meanwhile, involved herself in spiritual activities, leaving her husband's bed at night to pray and do good works. She interceded on behalf of condemned criminals, obtaining clemency from the king. The vitae highlight Mathilda's role as mother. Although she actually bore Henry five children, the vitae mention only four (Otto, Henry, Brun, and Gerberga). Mathilda and Henry traveled around the kingdom, giving money to all existing monasteries and building new ones. After consulting the leading men (*principes*) of the realm, they decided to found a convent at Quedlinburg, to which they transferred nuns from the nearby convent of Wendhausen. Henry died before this project could be completed, but Mathilda made it her first task as royal widow, establishing herself as its leader. Both vitae focus on her good character as a widow.

Sometime after her son Otto became king, he and his brother Henry quarreled with their mother Mathilda. When some of the nobles accused Mathilda of giving too much of the royal wealth to the church and the poor, Otto forced her to relinquish the properties given to her as her widow's pension by her husband Henry and to enter the convent at Enger, part of her paternal inheritance which lay outside of the Saxon heartland. Once there, Mathilda continued in her good works, while evils, strife, and sickness befell Otto and Henry. Seeing how saddened her husband was at his misfortunes, Edith, Otto's Anglo-Saxon wife of royal lineage, finally intervened on Mathilda's behalf and persuaded Otto to let his mother not only return to Saxony, but to regain her original status and properties. He sent an embassy of the leading ecclesiastical and secular men to escort her back, and she was reconciled with her sons.

Edith died shortly thereafter. Mathilda and her newly widowed son Otto then traveled around the kingdom together, founding additional monasteries. A few years later, Otto went to Italy in order to rescue Adelheid, widow of Lothar, king of Italy, from the hands of Berengar, who had imprisoned her in an attempt to gain control of Italy. Otto married Adelheid, thereby inheriting a claim to rule the Italians. After returning to Saxony, Adelheid bore Otto several children, including his son Otto II and his daughter Mathilda, whom Otto gave, at his mother's request, to the convent at Quedlinburg. Queen Mathilda raised the younger Mathilda, much as her grandmother had raised her. During this period, Henry, Mathilda's second son, died, an event which the *Vita Mathildis antiquior* omitted, but which figured prominently in the *Vita Mathildis posterior*, marking, according to the latter vita, a major turning point in Mathilda's life; only then did she fully embrace widowhood, giving up the pleasures of secular music and games and donning widow's weeds for the first time.

The first vita then described Mathilda's good works, including her founding of various monastic houses. She fed, bathed, and clothed the poor and pilgrims, as well as her own nuns. She prayed, and had her nuns pray, on behalf of both her deceased husband and, according to the second vita, her son Henry. She traveled around the kingdom with her noble attendant Ricburg, ensuring that the less fortunate were well-cared for. Both vitae describe two miracles which Mathilda performed. In the first, angered that food has not been adequately provided for the needy on a certain day, she threw bread down from the top of a mountain to the poor in the valley below, which miraculously reached them undamaged. For her second miracle, Mathilda recovered a sacred vase used for bringing wine to mass by getting the deer which had swallowed it to vomit it up. The *Vita Mathildis posterior* is also more ecclesiastical in flavor, expanding and expounding on all of Mathilda's religious activities, from prayer to the founding of monastic houses to the scene of her death. The same elements are present in the first vita, but the author of the *Vita Mathildis posterior* presents a more stylized portrait of Mathilda as saint than the vita of forty years earlier does.¹⁴

When Otto and Adelheid went to Italy at the pope's request and received the imperial crown, Mathilda, concerned for her son's safety and well-being, founded a convent at Nordhausen, dedicated to the commemoration of and prayer for all members of the Ottonian family, living and dead. According to the *Vita antiquior*, the ruling family convened at Cologne directly upon Otto's return, where Mathilda was royally received "first by Caesar, then by all the rest of her descendants."¹⁵ This act is in line with the *Vita Mathildis reginae antiquior*'s focus on the legitimacy of Ottonian rule, emphasizing the virtue and noble birth of both Henry and Mathilda as well as Otto's role as emperor. This assembly reflected the power and unity of the Ottonian family.

After she predicted that Otto II would become king, Mathilda expressed concern for Nordhausen and obtained Otto's promise that it would always be cared for after her death. This passage was significantly altered in the *Vita posterior*; instead of meeting at Cologne, the family met at Frohse on the Elbe *before* Otto had become emperor.¹⁶ This earlier date is a key reflection of the *Vita Mathildis reginae posterior*'s focus on the legitimacy of rule, as well, but it was the Bavarian line of the Ottonian family which took center stage, to the point of excluding some Saxon members. The most obvious example concerns Mathilda's gift of prophecy, which, as opposed to the *Vita antiquior*, focused in the *Vita posterior* not on Otto II but on his cousin Henry the Wrangler and the hope that one of his children would rule someday.¹⁷ Henry II, the emperor to whom this second life was dedicated, stemmed in fact from that line, being the son of Henry the Wrangler and grandson of Mathilda's second son Henry, Otto I's brother, who had become duke of Bavaria in 947. In promoting Henry II as legitimate emperor, the "Henry"-line of the Ottonian family took on added importance, and the *Vita Mathildis posterior* thus depicts events not included in the first vita, such as Henry's participation in the quarrel over Mathilda's dower lands or even his death in 955. The relationship between Mathilda

and Henry, and Mathilda's supposed preference for Henry over Otto, forms a central theme in this latter vita.

After this family reunion, Otto and his son returned to Italy. Mathilda fell ill. Although sick, she continued to travel for a year, visiting various castles and monasteries, finally going to Nordhausen to see Ricburg, her faithful companion whom she had consecrated as abbess of that same monastery. Although she would have liked to be buried there, Mathilda told Ricburg she had to be buried in Quedlinburg, next to her husband Henry. Once she returned to Quedlinburg, Mathilda gave away all of her worldly possessions to the churchmen and the poor who come to see her. Before she died, her grandson William, archbishop of Mainz and Otto's illegitimate son, visited her, from whom she secured a promise to care for Nordhausen. After a premonition of his death, Mathilda gave him her only remaining clothing, so that he would have attire in which he could be buried.

Knowing that she herself was close to death, Mathilda called her granddaughter Mathilda to her, instructed her on how to be a good abbess, and entrusted her with a computarium, a calendar which contained the names of dead family members and friends, on whose behalf Mathilda should pray. With Ricburg at her side, Mathilda died. Here the *Vita posterior* ends, but the *Vita antiquior* continues. Underscoring its concentration on the strength and legitimacy of Ottonian rule, the *Vita antiquior* concludes with the image of Otto as reigning emperor and the transfer of that imperial power to his son Otto II.¹⁸ Stricken with grief after receiving the news of his mother's death, Otto returned to Saxony and fulfilled the promises he had made to his mother, namely the outfitting of Nordhausen, for which he also procured a papal letter of protection. Upon his death, his son Otto II, who had married Theophanu, a Byzantine of imperial heritage, while he was in Italy, became emperor. At that point the *Vita Mathildis antiquior* ends.

It is vital to note that in spite of differences between the two lives, the figure of Mathilda is remarkably consistent. She acted in essentially the same way in each life, serving as a representative of the fortunes of the Ottonian family,¹⁹ as well as a symbol of unity in times of discord. When things went badly for Mathilda, as in the quarrel with her sons which resulted in her having to abandon her dower lands, things went badly as a whole. When Mathilda returned, the Ottonians prospered. Both vitae of Mathilda gloss over the discord present among the Saxon nobles and within the Ottonian family itself during the initial period after their ascension to royal power, preferring rather to make Mathilda the symbol and focus of familial and royal unity. Even in the *Vita Mathildis posterior*, which hides neither the strife between Otto and Henry nor Mathilda's preference for her younger son, it is Mathilda who reconciled the two brothers.²⁰

Mathilda's reputation for sanctity, fostered by these two vitae, served as an endorsement for her family as a whole, and these hagiographic texts were means by which to further promote the Ottonians. She is depicted similarly in each vita, a queen devoted to her family and the cultivation of their memoria who occupied herself with religious activities while remaining conscious of her royal and worldly status. She provided, according to her biographers, a unifying force in a period wrought with division and served as an example for future generations of how a queen should behave, both as ruling queen and as dowager.

The Nature of the *Vitae Mathildis reginae*

There are certain aspects of the vitae which, because they shaped and influenced the texts themselves, shape and influence how we read and understand them and must therefore be kept in

mind: their hagiographic nature, their function as preservation pleas, their role as Königs/Königinsspiegeln, and the political purpose of each text.

The Vitae Mathildis reginae as Saint's Lives

These two vitae present an idealized picture of Mathilda, molded to fit certain patterns and themes typical of the hagiographic genre. Hagiography, or the writing about saints, miracles, and/or relics, was among the most common kinds of writing in the early Middle Ages, and also among the most conservative.²¹ The intent was not to produce a biography, an account of one individual's experiences, but rather to confirm the sanctity of the subject.²² To produce a life of a saint which deviated from the established norms was counterproductive to the purpose of the text. Using earlier saint's lives as models was therefore not only acceptable, but often expected, to ensure the saint was in line with those already venerated as holy.²³ The authors of the Vitae Mathildis both relied heavily on other texts such as those from Virgil, Terence, Sulpicius Severus, the Vulgate Bible, Boethius, and Widukind of Corvey, to the point of word-for-word adaptation.²⁴ The most influential sources for the vitae Mathildis, however, were the vitae of two earlier female saints, namely Venantius Fortunatus' Vita Radegundis, which detailed the life of the Frankish Queen Radegund, and the Vita Gertrudis, the life of the Carolingian abbess Gertrude of Nivelles.²⁵

Although these vitae followed common patterns, this imitation does not render the texts useless for the historian; there was flexibility within those patterns, allowing for the realities of the saint's world. The nature of hagiography changed over the course of late antiquity and the early medieval period, responding to changes in Christian society and Christian ideals. Martyrdom was the most common route to sanctity in the early Christian period. As Christianity expanded and flourished, and especially after it became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the number of martyr saints declined, although they never completely disappeared.²⁶ With the advent of monasticism, which quickly became a central force in Christianity, lives of saints began to reflect monastic ideals and ways of life over that of martyrs. By the seventh century, hagiography had incorporated alongside monastic principles the idea that "noble blood" was essential for sanctity, as spiritual virtue was deemed to follow from illustrious lineage.²⁷

This "noble holiness" (Adelsheiligkeit) formed a key element in the saints' lives of the Ottonian period, including the Vitae Mathildis.²⁸

Saints' vitae were not so heavily prefigured that the names of saints were simply interchangeable in the texts.²⁹ Although the Vitae Mathildis relied heavily on the Vita Radegundis, they did not merely reproduce it in unaltered form: the reality of Mathilda's tenth-century society shaped her portrayal and the ideals espoused by her vitae, even when the events and often the wording were essentially the same. Evidence of this difference between the vitae of Mathilda and Radegund lies in their treatment of the relationship between the secular and the religious life. While Radegund had to reject the secular in order to live a religious life, in the Mathilda vitae, the secular and religious enhanced each other. Radegund's marriage to the Merovingian king Clothar was nothing but a hindrance for her and her spiritual desires: "she was more Christ's partner than her husband's companion."³⁰ She left her husband's bed to pray, and "because of this, people said the King had yoked himself to a monacha (female monk), rather than a Queen. Her goodness provoked him to harsher irritation, but she either soothed him to the best of her ability or bore her husband's brawling modestly."³¹ The Mathilda vitae

adopted this passage almost verbatim, but emphasized that Mathilda slipped away secretly.³² The Vita posterior said King Henry, although he pretended not to know, was actually aware of Mathilda's religious activities and showed his approval in his silence.³³ There is no hint of the "irritation" Chlotar felt.

Secular marriage and royal activities did not hinder a religious lifestyle, but rather worked in tandem with it. The image in the Mathilda vitae was that of a royal couple living and ruling in ways appropriate for a Christian life. Where Radegund dispensed money to monasteries on her own, Mathilda and Henry did the same, but together.³⁴ Mathilda was not made into an ascetic or model nun, but rather became the protector of her family, the holy patron of the dynasty. Radegund fled from the king and kingship; Mathilda became a holy queen.³⁵ While clearly modeled on the Merovingian queen, Mathilda was not reduced to a copy of her.³⁶

The Vitae Mathildis Reginae as Self-Legitimization of Ottonian Rule

Although fashioned within a hagiographic framework, the Vitae Mathildis reginae are more than just saint's lives; they incorporate a large amount of dynastic history.³⁷ The history included was selective, however, focused on the events which brought or increased power for the Ottonians, such as Henry's ascension to the kingship and Otto's crowning as emperor. Each Vita had as its basic aim the legitimization of the emperor to whom it was dedicated.³⁸ Legitimization was a key issue in these vitae: their main intent was to attest to Mathilda's sanctity, but they were also meant to legitimize and promote the Ottonian family, which was well aware of its recent ascent to power.

One striking aspect of the Vita antiquior is that it neither begins nor ends with Mathilda. The initial focus was on Henry's family, illuminating and praising the male Liudolfing line. After Mathilda's death, the vitae turned to her son Otto and focused on the continuation of Ottonian rule.³⁹ The emphasis on the family as rulers, whether royal or imperial, served to legitimize the Ottonians.

For Henry II, legitimization was crucial. He ascended to the throne in 1002, at a time when the Ottonians had clearly established themselves as the imperial family, but as a newcomer, in some ways a foreigner, because he stemmed from the descendants of Mathilda's second son Henry, whom Otto had made Duke of Bavaria in 947. Thus this 'Bavarian' Ottonian had to prove himself capable and deserving of rule. The author of the Vita posterior was aware of the need to legitimize this line of the family.⁴⁰

The Vitae Mathildis as König[in]sspiegel (Mirror for Kings/Queens)

Each vita's prologue set Mathilda's life as a precedent for other ruling Ottonians, a guidebook for what one should do and how one should live.⁴¹ It was to be a model for the reigning emperor and his descendants.⁴² For the Vita antiquior, this meant Mathilda's grandson Otto II and his wife Theophanu. Theophanu was a member of the Byzantine imperial family, a connection solicited by the Ottonians for the prestige it brought. She was also a newcomer, unfamiliar with the Saxon system. The Vita antiquior thus provided a guidebook, as much for her as for Otto, stipulating the expected qualities of a ruler. As the first queen, Mathilda had the ability to set the tone, so to speak, for Ottonian queenship. Other Ottonian queens, such as Otto's two wives Edith and Adelheid, both

foreigners, brought their own traditions and customs with them, some of which the Ottonians adopted, but, like Theophanu, these women had to adapt to the roles already created by the Saxons themselves.⁴³

For all members of the royal family, Mathilda was an "illustrious queen, whose life, shining with merit, should be imitated."⁴⁴ She was the ideal queen, exemplifying the desired behavior for ruling women. But her virtue was not limited to the female gender: some of her behavior patterns befitted the male side of the family, as well. The *Vitae Mathildis reginae* distinguished the differing roles available to royal women and men in tenth-century Ottonian Saxony: the king, while expected to act in a Christian manner, worked more extensively in the secular realm than his queen, who more actively adopted religious patterns of behavior in assuming the duty of praying on behalf of her family members and in cultivating their *memoria*.⁴⁵ According to the *vitae*, however, both gave generously to churches, founded monasteries, and aided the poor.⁴⁶ The *vitae* strongly emphasized the uprightness and Christian behavior of the entire royal family, praising all members, male and female, for their moral virtue.⁴⁷ For Henry II, the *Vita posterior* was specifically intended to provide guidance and to serve as a model for his own behavior:

For you have in this volume just a few deeds of your fathers, from which you are able to learn what is expedient for you to do and how to live...let it be a model and form of justice for you for governing and for faithfully ruling the church, so that having been made a suitable observer, you will have great advice, diligence, and discipline.⁴⁸

In providing a manual for proper royal comportment and lifestyle, each *vita* thus functioned as a *Königsspiegel*, or more specifically a *Königinsspiegel*. This prescriptive form of writing, common throughout the medieval period and beyond, was intended to instruct both rulers and their subjects as to the qualities and activities deemed appropriate for those in power.⁴⁹

The *Vitae Mathildis Reginae* as Pleas for Monastic Preservation

Gerd Althoff suggests these two *vitae* served as pleas for the preservation of Nordhausen.⁵⁰ Exhortations to the ruler to protect and provide for Nordhausen figure prominently in the *vitae*.⁵¹ The first *vita*, Althoff contends, is an admonition to both Otto and Theophanu not to neglect Nordhausen, which Theophanu held as part of her dowry.⁵² With the shifting of the government to Otto II, the author of the *Vita antiquior* may have feared Otto would decide to make the newly constituted archbishopric of Magdeburg his primary seat. In addition, the *Vita posterior*'s author had the right to be concerned that these monastic houses, although central to the Saxon realm, would not hold the meaning for the Bavarian Liudolfing Henry that they had had for the earlier Ottonians.⁵³

These four issues, namely the hagiographic nature of the texts, their political significance, their role as *Königinsspiegel*n, and their function as pleas for monastic preservation, thus determined the construction of the Mathilda *vitae*. Their hagiographic nature prevents scholars from accepting every word as fact, whereas the verifiable historical details keep historians from rejecting every word as false. Knowing they served to legitimize and glorify Ottonian rule makes one aware of their political/propagandistic intent. Their function as preservation pleas for convents invites reflection on the role of convents in Saxony during this period, specifically that of Quedlinburg and Nordhausen: Why did Mathilda found them? What purpose did they serve? Finally, as *König[in]sspiegel*n, as pattern books for proper royal behavior, these *vitae*, having idealized Mathilda as a saint, idealized her

as a ruling figure as well. Knowing this, we can determine the ideology of queenship: what the Ottonians felt to be the appropriate qualities for a queen in all phases of her life.

The Ideal Queen: The Construction of Mathilda in the *Vita Mathildis reginae*

Portrait of the Queen as a Young Woman

We first see Mathilda in Herford convent, where she was raised and educated by her grandmother. Mathilda was "beautiful in appearance, lovable from childhood, industrious, modest in morals, humble and generous...for the sign of her grandfather's and father's honor shown in her."⁵⁴ She was noble in birth and illustrious in virtues, as well as skilled in reading the psalms and doing good works.⁵⁵ The authors depicted an ideal virgin. Physical beauty served as a reflection of inner virtue, a topos common in hagiography.⁵⁶

It was irrelevant to them whether Mathilda was truly physically beautiful or not.

Mathilda was not a nun, but was at Herford to learn to read and to perform good works.⁵⁷ One immediate distinction between Mathilda and Henry was apparent: whereas Henry excelled in war, an area barred to women, Mathilda was skilled in reading. This reveals the educational function of female convents during the tenth century; they served to raise, shelter, and educate many Saxon noblewomen. Some of these women remained in the convent and took full vows as nuns or became canonesses, but others, like Mathilda herself, left the convent for marriage.⁵⁸

Following this brief description of Mathilda, both vitae explored her ancestry. Listed first in her genealogical record was Widukind. Widukind is an interesting figure in the vitae of Queen Mathilda. Here the Saxon duke who led the resistance to Charlemagne's militaristic missionary activities at the end of the eighth century was reclaimed and positively portrayed, overturning a century and a half's worth of denial on the part of the now-Christian Saxons, who wanted nothing to do with this reminder of their pagan ways.⁵⁹ He was Mathilda's most famous ancestor, so to show him as the forefather of the Saxon church, as the vitae did, raised her own status significantly. After his conversion at the hands of Charlemagne and Boniface,⁶⁰ Widukind became "the most Christian protector of the churches and of God," the exemplary religious ruler who built churches, founded monasteries, served the poor, and defended the helpless.⁶¹ This foreshadowed Mathilda's own activities as a ruler 150 years later.

The connection to Charlemagne was also very valuable for these Saxons who were trying to establish their "new" rule as legitimate. Charlemagne, "the most Christian of men, strong in arms, educated in the law, and completely Catholic in faith,"⁶² still epitomized the great Christian leader in the tenth century, and the Ottonians consciously patterned themselves on the Carolingian model.⁶³ To have Widukind in alliance with Charlemagne put the Ottonians, by extension, in alliance with Charlemagne, a very desirable position. In fact, with his conversion, Widukind became Charlemagne's equal -- they formed a pact of peace and a bond of friendship.⁶⁴ Such a concord put them on an equal level, as friends. Whereas the vitae depicted the conflict between the Franks and the Saxons as a duel between Charlemagne and Widukind alone, after his conversion the reverse was true: Widukind's equality with Charlemagne extended to the Saxons being equal to the Franks, or even further to the

ruler of the Saxons being equal to Charlemagne himself.⁶⁵ This was quite a claim to make, but not an improbable notion, since at the time the vitae were written, the Ottonians had become emperors, imitating in many ways the Frankish traditions of the Carolingians. Using Widukind in this way was part of the manifold effort on the Ottonians' behalf to establish themselves as the equals of and successors to Charlemagne and his family.

The Courtship of Mathilda

After fame of Mathilda's ancestry, virtue, and beauty spread to Henry's family, who were seeking a bride equal to him in birth and virtue, they sent Henry with a group of companions to woo the virgin himself.⁶⁶ Scholars have shown this scene, the first courtship scene to appear in a saint's life, was heavily stylized, stitched together from other sources.⁶⁷ Little to nothing is known about the circumstances surrounding Henry and Mathilda's marriage.⁶⁸ Gone, however, was the reality of Henry's first wife, Hatheburg, and their son Thangmar, as well as the fact that Henry was certainly around thirty when he and Mathilda married.⁶⁹

The vitae heavily idealized Mathilda in this courtship. The first time Henry saw her she was "sitting inside her chamber and holding a Psalter in her hand, very virtuous in bearing and with a face wholly worthy of reverence."⁷⁰ Her beauty sparkled: she had a fair forehead; her face, which was beautiful to look at, was white like lilies; and her cheeks were like the vivid color of roses."⁷¹ Mathilda was noble, virtuous, and honorable.⁷² These were idealized, formulaic traits, but they revealed the qualities valued in women.⁷³

The marriage of Henry and Mathilda

Each vita depicted Mathilda as marrying without the knowledge or consent of her parents.⁷⁴ Her grandmother assented to the marriage, but only after considerable pressure from Henry.⁷⁵ Is this perhaps a discreet reference to Henry's earlier marriage? He repudiated his first wife Hatheburg, even after she had born him a son, Thangmar, to marry Mathilda, a move that was subject to criticism.⁷⁶ Scholars have often debated the reasons for Henry's divorce and subsequent remarriage. He was the third son of a duke, and Winfrid Glocker posited that his two older brothers, Liudolf and Thankmar, were still alive when Henry married Hatheburg.⁷⁷ By 912, both brothers had died, and Henry ascended to the dukedom uncontested.⁷⁸ Is it possible these brothers had died by 909, the year of Henry's marriage to Mathilda? At the time of his first marriage, Henry would have been seen as very unlikely to gain ducal power. Hatheburg was thus a good match, as she brought with her lands in and around Merseburg, providing Henry with sources of wealth and power.⁷⁹ However, as sole heir to the dukedom, Henry may have wished to expand his power base, especially in the west where Liudolfing control was weaker.⁸⁰ With these details in mind, it seems possible to suggest that Mathilda was, in fact, quickly snapped up by Henry, without parental, or perhaps even her own, consent.⁸¹ The Vita antiquior describes Henry and Mathilda as enjoying licit love,⁸² emphasizing the legality of their bond. This reflected on Henry's first marriage, but also worked to legitimize the second, perhaps entered under uncertain or suspicious circumstances. Henry stood to gain much from his marriage to Mathilda: lands in the Enger and Osnabrück regions in western part of the duchy and what Leyser termed "badly-needed connections" in Westfalian Saxony and Lower Lotharingia, which increased his

power base and expanded his family's influence, as well as association with the powerful Immending clan to which Mathilda belonged, and especially the prestigious Widukind line from which she descended.⁸³

Whatever the circumstances of their marriage, it followed the accepted pattern of a high-status, political marriage in the tenth century. After they returned to Saxony from the west, Henry and Mathilda traveled around the kingdom, visiting various cities throughout the duchy.⁸⁴ This was in accord with the nature of itinerant rule, the necessary pattern of governing for the early kingdoms (and duchies) of the tenth century. Without extensive institutions or bureaucracies to aid in governing, early medieval kings had to make their presence known to reaffirm their rule by constantly traveling to various points in the realm.⁸⁵ Leading a newly wedded royal couple around the kingdom reinforced the current rule while establishing them as the appointed heirs.⁸⁶ Otto I's and Otto II's marriages attested to this: it was fitting that Henry and Mathilda would have done this, as well.⁸⁷

Both vitae pass over the initial years of Mathilda's and Henry's life together, marking only the death of Henry's father, Otto, in 912. Each vita worked to establish Henry's kingship as soon as possible: having become duke upon his father's death, Henry was made king in the very next sentence (in both vitae), even though in actuality seven years separated the two events.⁸⁸ Although they glorify Henry's ascension to power, the vitae give no information about his rule as duke, a title which he held for ten years. Mathilda does not appear at all; even the births of two of her children, Otto and Gerberga, known to have occurred in this period, receives no mention until later in the texts.

Mathilda as Queen (919-936)

Once Henry became king, he subjected other nations, including the Danes, Slavs, Bohemians, and Bavarians, to his rule.⁸⁹ The vitae highlighted Henry's position as the first -- the first royal Saxon and the first to conquer these foreign lands.⁹⁰ The Liudolfings were very aware of the newness of their kingship, which required legitimization and substantiation through public displays of power. War was an instrument by which kings proved their ability to lead. Public displays took other forms, as well. Victorious in his campaigns, Henry gave thanks to God by building churches and doing good deeds, as Widukind had done.⁹¹

Focusing first on Henry's activities as king, centered around war, the vitae then turned to Mathilda and discussed her actions as queen. Much of this image of Mathilda as queen wife was formulaic, culled from other sources to build an idealized picture especially hagiographic in style. The authors represented Mathilda as a "near-virginal" queen, living chastely with her husband Henry in a form of spiritual marriage and devoting herself to spiritual works.⁹² Although the authors adapted this image of Mathilda as queen from Venantius Fortunatus' *Vita Radegundis*, it was not entirely applicable. Whereas Mathilda lived as a "happy wife" who bore her husband five children, Radegund endeavored to avoid the marriage bed and eventually retreated to a monastery to escape her worldly duties as wife and queen altogether.⁹³

The focus in each vita is Mathilda's spiritual actions, as befitted hagiographic texts. This does not mean, however, that we know nothing of Mathilda's activities as queen. The vitae depicts Mathilda as not having an overtly political role as queen in the governing of the realm, which her few appearances in Henry's royal diplomas corroborated; she appears as an intercessor only six times, and only in

connection with ecclesiastical establishments.⁹⁴ According to the vitae, Mathilda did, however, serve in a legal capacity, acting in the administration of justice by obtaining mercy for sentenced criminals:

... if she knew anyone to be oppressed by any force or to be confined in jail on account of the wickedness of a crime or to be deputed to die by a popular trial, she wasn't happy until she appeased the anger of the king. If she went away without having been heard, provoked by public opinion, the king silently groaned to himself, because he was upset in not fulfilling her wish.⁹⁵

Intercession on the behalf of others was a common hagiographic theme.⁹⁶ That this passage was taken directly, almost verbatim, from the Vita Radegundis admittedly lessened its force. But these observations do not rule out the possibility that Mathilda really was active in this way. In fact, Edith's intervention on behalf of Mathilda, whom Otto exiled from the Saxon kingdom, further attested to this as a queenly duty.⁹⁷ Jo Ann McNamara has suggested that "the intervention of women on behalf of prisoners may indicate an aspect of the division of labor whereby the harsh military face of kingship could be softened through the merciful quality of queenship without making the king appear weak or indecisive."⁹⁸ Even if not historically verifiable, the authors of the vitae presented this duty as not only appropriate, but also praiseworthy for the queen. In the Vita posterior, Henry acknowledges his wife's service in this capacity, saying "you have my thanks, because you purposely soothed my anger and you gave me useful advice in everything, you often turned me away from iniquity to justice, and you admonished me to be merciful."⁹⁹

The vitae next turned to the queen's role as mother, describing Henry and Mathilda's children Otto, Henry, Brun, and Gerberga, each in connection to his or her eventual high-ranking position in the realm: Otto as king and husband of the royal Anglo-Saxon Edith, Henry as the duke of Bavaria, Brun as the archbishop of Cologne, and Gerberga as wife to Gisilbert, dux of Lotharingia.¹⁰⁰ Just as the virtues of her father and grandfather shone in Mathilda,¹⁰¹ so her children reflected her own admirable qualities and indicated again the charisma and sacrality of the Ottonian family as a whole, depicted almost as a chosen people blessed with moral superiority and ruling with divine authority.¹⁰²

Henry and Mathilda's Religious Activities

The Vitae Mathildis reginae stylized Henry and Mathilda as true Christian leaders. Mathilda herself was closely connected to the religious aspects of rule; she had no official political role in the realm. Or, perhaps better said, what role she did have was religiously focused and religiously styled: "Thus the venerable queen rose to the rank of the royal throne, illustrious in matrimonial power and more illustrious in divine religion."¹⁰³ Queenship, however, was a secular occupation. A queen was a visible symbol of her family in a society where wealth and power were measured by their visual expression. Pauline Stafford has described medieval queens as the personification of the royal household's need for treasure, its management, and its display; royal women were part of royal ostentation. Displays of wealth could involve wearing fine clothing and jewelry, but also largesse to the less fortunate, the granting of goods and lands, and the building of palaces and church foundations.¹⁰⁴ Mathilda was aware of these expectations, and of her own rank, and behaved accordingly. The authors emphasized that Mathilda was, however, not prideful: she went out in public adorned with gems and silk, but inwardly she bore the more precious decoration, a heart agreeable to God.¹⁰⁵

Each year of their reign, according to her vitae, Henry and Mathilda traveled around the kingdom, giving money to all the monasteries they visited and sending gifts to those they did not reach.¹⁰⁶ The vitae presented them as a true team, providing for the poor and caring for ecclesiastical foundations. Although patterned after the Vita Radegundis, this section differs significantly in that whereas Radegund operated on her own, the vitae Mathildis portrayed Henry and Mathilda as working together.¹⁰⁷ Their desire to found a royal monastery was such an important decision that they convoked a council of the highest nobles to aid them in determining where to put this monastery and who should be included in it.¹⁰⁸ Such councils had previously only assembled for the purpose of electing a duke or king. While this council of men indicated the significance of this convent, it also served to deflect criticism. The convent at Quedlinburg took the most noble nuns from Wendhausen, considerably lessening Wendhausen's status and providing a possible source of contention.¹⁰⁹

Transferring the highest-ranking noble women to Quedlinburg granted it instant status and promoted immediate allegiance of their parents and relatives to the king and queen. What better way to control one's subjects than to have their daughters and other female relatives under royal control? Founding a royal monastery accomplished far more than just building a house of prayer to God. Aside from true religious sentiments, such activities expanded economic resources and political control. Tying the king and his family to the church was also a very strong ideological move, legitimizing the rulers of the kingdom in God's eyes, which in turn served to legitimize them in the eyes of the other duces.¹¹⁰

Shortly before his death, Henry called another council to determine which of his sons should succeed to the kingship.¹¹¹ At this council Henry asked Dietmot, the abbess of Wendhausen, whom he had summoned there, to move her nuns to Quedlinburg. According to the vitae, this was the last official action Henry performed, underscoring its importance.¹¹² Henry himself was buried at Quedlinburg. Having his body transferred to Quedlinburg from Memleben, where he had died, was reminiscent of translating holy relics to a monastery. Directly after his interment, Mathilda established a cult for his memory.¹¹³

Mathilda and Edith

Before turning to Mathilda's activities as widow, which form the bulk of the two vitae, the situation in the royal household, including the tensions among members of the royal family over the succession of Otto to kingship, should be addressed. These tensions stemmed from Henry's efforts to organize his household in 929. In doing so, Henry granted Mathilda a substantial Wittum (widow's endowment),¹¹⁴ dedicated his youngest son Brun to the church, and betrothed his son Otto to Edith, a member of the Anglo-Saxon royal house. A number of scholars believe that this marriage signified Henry's choice of Otto as his sole heir.¹¹⁵ This single succession broke with the Carolingian tradition, in which each son had had a right to rule.¹¹⁶

The tension this Hausordnung wrought spread to a personal level between Mathilda and Edith. When Henry refused the sacral blessing of his kingship in 919, he also denied it to his wife. She was thus an unconsecrated queen, facing a daughter-in-law not only of royal birth, but also possibly anointed and crowned.¹¹⁷ Mathilda herself would certainly have been conscious of the disparity between Edith's bloodlines and her own. Edith, however, had to live for seven years in the Saxon realm as princess, not queen.¹¹⁸ When Henry died in 936, Edith and Mathilda's roles suddenly

reversed, with Mathilda relegated to the position of dowager. The conflict over the change in power roles escalated with the competition of sorts between Mathilda and the new ruling royal couple over their respective monastic foundations. Mathilda founded the convent Quedlinburg in commemoration of her husband Henry in 936. Just a year later, Edith and Otto founded the convent of St. Mauritius on Edith's dower property in Magdeburg, a move which Mathilda may have seen as threatening to Quedlinburg's status.¹¹⁹ Although never a prominent witness in her husband's diplomas, Mathilda appeared only once in Otto's decrees between 936-946, the years Edith ruled at Otto's side. After Edith's death, Mathilda once again served as a witness in Otto's royal documents.¹²⁰

Whereas Edith had been of royal blood, but only a princess, and entered the Ottonian family while Mathilda still presided as queen, Adelheid, Otto's second wife, daughter of the King of Burgundy, was a queen in her own right through her marriage to King Lothar of Italy in 947, and she entered the Ottonian family as the highest-ranking female, that of ruling queen, upon her marriage to Otto in 951. There is less information about the relationship between Mathilda and her second daughter-in-law, but Mathilda was surely aware of the disparity in their background and status, especially after Otto and Adelheid were crowned emperor and empress together in Rome in 962.¹²¹

Mathilda was conscious of her own status as queen, and behaved in ways appropriate to that position. The authors of these narratives were aware of the status of each figure in the vitae, which they carefully described. In this regard, the Widukind anecdote discussed above takes on additional meaning. Widukind not only legitimized the Ottonians by making them equal to Charlemagne and the Carolingians, he legitimized Mathilda herself.¹²² In marrying Edith in 929, Otto married into the Anglo-Saxon royal line, an event seen by contemporaries as an effort to secure the continuity of Henry's still very new and fragile kingship by tying the Liudolfings to an old and venerated royal family.¹²³ The vitae were very conscious of Edith's royal status; she was clearly a royal bride.¹²⁴ Mathilda, although from a well-respected noble family proud of its connections to Widukind, was not royal by blood. Nor did she marry royalty. Thus she herself, as well as other members of the royal family, may have felt vulnerable about her status.

Mathilda as Dowager Queen

While Edith's entry into the Saxon royal family in 929 already had challenged Mathilde's status, with Henry's death in 936 Mathilda's position shifted yet again. No longer actively ruling as queen, Mathilda had to find new ways to maintain her power within the family, a challenge sharpened by the apparent conflict between her and the new ruling couple.

In their initial portrayal of Mathilda as dowager queen, her vitae chose to focus not on the conflicts inherent in the Ottonian clan at this time, but rather on the image of Mathilda as ideal widow. She "was so virtuous in widowhood, that hardly anyone from either sex was able to imitate her."¹²⁵ Even so, as in her girlhood and her time as ruling queen, Mathilda's behavior in widowhood was meant to be a model for others: she was "an example of such goodness in giving, being compassionate, and converting those in error."¹²⁶ Mathilda's grandmother had foreshadowed Mathilda's own demeanor as widow.¹²⁷ As a widow, Mathilda was "wise in her advice, lenient to the good and harsh to the proud, generous in alms-giving, intent in prayer, pious to all the needy, eloquent, and chaste."¹²⁸ Whereas the Vitae had emphasized her beauty in her youth, in widowhood chastity and prudence became her highest virtues. These were Christian virtues, borrowed to some extent from the Vita Gertrudis.¹²⁹

As dowager, Mathilda retained the title of queen.¹³⁰ Her first major activity after the death of her husband was to found Quedlinburg, in fulfillment of his last wish and dedicated to his memory. Her son Otto, now king, and other Saxon principes aided her in this task, but she herself assumed command of the convent.¹³¹ This set the pattern for the rest of her life. She devoted herself to her monastic foundations and to the commemoration of and prayer for her family members, dead and alive. In choosing these activities, Mathilda assumed a new role, carving out specific duties for herself as dowager queen. This role as *custodia animae*, "guardian of the soul," was not singular to Mathilda: her activities as a widow were in keeping with those considered appropriate for Saxon noble women during this period, especially widows, namely founding or patronizing monastic houses for the sake of their families, and praying on their behalf.¹³²

Mathilda's extensive building program revealed a number of things about her. As mentioned above, it gave her a continued role in the kingdom by pursuing individually what she and her husband had done together. As this was an accepted activity for high-ranking noble women, Mathilda could gain support for such endeavors. She chose not to retire to a monastery, as widows often did, but the monastic houses provided her with a place of refuge, if necessary.

Endowing monasteries required wealth and land. Ownership of land, in turn, brought additional economic resources and power. That Mathilda owned so much land thus made her a key player in the kingdom. Mathilda had inherited lands in the western parts of the realm from her father, including Enger.¹³³ According to her *vitae*, Henry gave Mathilda the city of Wallhausen as her wedding gift.¹³⁴ He also provided her with a substantial widow's settlement, which included the cities of Quedlinburg, Nordhausen, Pöhlde, Grona, and Duderstadt.¹³⁵ These were some of the most important cities in the Saxon heartland, especially Quedlinburg, which Henry had favored as a stopping point on his itinerary and as a place to celebrate Easter, the highest church festival of the year, long before the convent was established there.¹³⁶ Otto followed this custom during his reign, as well.¹³⁷

Direct ownership of land provided a means of economic support, as well as political power, and was thus crucial for Ottonian rule. Lands housing religious institutions in particular formed the basis of economic, governmental, and military support for the royal house. In exchange for grants of immunity which released them from local jurisdiction, lay and episcopal communities of institutions supported the king and his entourage physically by providing hospitality and material goods. This support extended naturally to the spiritual realm as well, as members were obligated to pray on behalf of the royal family.¹³⁸ Mathilda's endowments and maintenance of religious foundations thus aided her family's rule, as well as provided her with control over essential bases of power.

Mathilda's strife with her sons

Henry's imposition of primogeniture on a system which had favored division of property and title led to fierce conflict between Otto and his younger brother Henry. Much of this discord simmered below the surface of these *vitae*; no mention was made, for example, of Henry's various attempts to usurp power from his older brother, including his failed assassination attempt at Quedlinburg in 941.¹³⁹ But when they depicted Mathilda as instructing her sons to "stop fighting for transitory honor, and not to let their soul be saddened, if one of them was placed above the other," the *vitae* acknowledged the power struggle of the initial post-Henry era.¹⁴⁰

Sometime after his ascension to the royal throne, Otto, having heard Mathilda's excessive largess to the poor and to the church was depleting the royal treasury, forced his mother to give back all her goods, including her dower lands, and to retreat to her paternal inheritance at Enger, where she should take the veil and retire.¹⁴¹ The central issue here was monetary: her sons were worried about economic issues revolving around control of royal wealth.¹⁴²

Some scholars have posited that this quarrel concerned her dotal possessions, key cities in the Liudolfing holdings, whose economic, political, and ideological resources Otto wanted to utilize in building up his own kingship.¹⁴³ Others suggested Mathilda had used her money to support Henry's attempts to become king, and Otto was thus punishing his mother for her machinations against him.¹⁴⁴ The vitae indicated Otto and Henry pressured their mother to take the veil and retire to a convent, as other widows did.¹⁴⁵ Becoming a nun would have ensured that Mathilda never married again, a situation rife with possibilities for further familial struggles if a step-father with interest in political power had entered the picture.¹⁴⁶ However, Henry himself had specified Mathilda was to receive her Wittum on the basis that she not remarry, and it seems unlikely she would have relinquished the resources at her disposal in order to wed again.¹⁴⁷

Just as scholars are divided over the cause of the quarrel between Otto and his mother, so also do they differ regarding the date of this quarrel.¹⁴⁸ Köpke and Dümmler concluded that it took place sometime after 941, the year of Otto's and Henry's reconciliation, since the two worked in tandem against their mother.¹⁴⁹ Leyser favored 941 itself, as Grona, given by both vitae as the site of reconciliation between Otto and Mathilda, served as a verifiable stopping place for Otto only once during his mother's life, and that on December 5, 941.¹⁵⁰ Still, almost all agree the terminus ante quem was Edith's death, in January of 946.

Although Schütte argued that this tale belonged solely to the hagiographic realm, evidence for an actual disagreement of some sort is strong.¹⁵¹ Looking for specific causes and factual realities of the quarrel may, however, be the wrong way to interpret this passage. Just as the vitae boiled down the strife between the Saxons and the Carolingians over religious conversion to a single duel between Widukind and Charlemagne, so the depiction of the quarrel between Otto and his mother (and to a lesser degree but quite definitely implicated, Henry) may reflect the stress felt throughout the kingdom over the reorganization of political power, especially since the kingdom itself was not only still very new, but the idea of an indivisible realm was as well. Mathilda may have truly felt her second son was unfairly shut out of the kingship, as a number of scholars have suggested, but she may also figuratively represent the older system having to make way for the new.¹⁵²

Mathilda also had to create a role for herself in these new political dynamics. Just as she was the first Ottonian queen and had to decide how to act as such, now she was the first dowager queen, learning how to negotiate with her ruling son and his new wife, with whom disagreement and dissatisfaction was evident.¹⁵³ That Mathilda was, in the eyes of her biographers, a strong influence in the realm is beyond doubt. Mathilda's reconciliation with Otto and Henry reflected this position of the dowager queen. Upon Edith's intercession on Mathilda's behalf, Otto sent a large embassy to his mother, a contingent of bishops, leading nobles, and virtuous attendants.¹⁵⁴ The size of this embassy as well as its composition underscored Mathilda's rank and status in the kingdom. Otto restored her lands, her wealth, and her position as "first in the kingdom," and "having prostrated himself at her feet, he promised to remedy anything which he had done against her."¹⁵⁵

Queen Edith died soon after the reconciliation between Otto and his mother. Still technically a dowager, Mathilda was now once again the primary royal woman in the realm, and she resumed some of the duties she had as queen in conjunction with her widowed son: "the king, already advanced in age, together with his mother had churches and monastic houses built, establishing peace, ruling justly, and imitating paternal piety in all things."¹⁵⁶ Charter evidence supports this claim to a certain degree: Mathilda appeared in four charters within the first five years after Edith's death, each of which referred to her as queen, and each of which entailed the granting of some of her goods to Quedlinburg and Enger, themselves two foundations which she owned.¹⁵⁷

Mathilda and Adelheid

In November of 950, Lothar, king of Italy, died, leaving behind his wife of three years, a young woman named Adelheid, daughter of King Rudolf II of Burgundy. Persuaded by the advice of the highest nobles, Otto went to Italy to rescue Adelheid from the clutches of a certain Berengar, who had aimed to take control of the kingdom by marrying Adelheid and thus acquiring her properties.¹⁵⁸ The *vitae* paid little attention to Adelheid, mentioning her mostly in connection to her role as mother. The daughter of one king and wife to another, Adelheid ranked higher than any previous Ottonian spouse.¹⁵⁹ Mathilda still maintained considerable influence, however, in the realm and in the royal family. Otto and Adelheid dedicated their daughter Mathilda, named in honor of Otto's mother, to the convent at Quedlinburg at Mathilda's request.¹⁶⁰

According to her *vitae*, Mathilda continued in her religious activities after Otto's second marriage, especially in founding monastic houses.¹⁶¹ The *vitae* stated she established a house of clerics at Pöhle, part of her dowry territory, and a convent of canonesses in Gerenrod.¹⁶² Mathilda exemplified the pious ruler, building monasteries, feeding the poor twice a day with royal food, bathing the poor and pilgrims on the Sabbath (Saturdays), and washing the limbs of her own nuns. She did not eat anything until food had been distributed to all the people first and demanded the same kind of "holy fast" from those who served the poor whenever she was absent from the monastery, all hagiographic *topoi* adapted from Venantius Fortunatus' *Vita Radegundis*.¹⁶³ Mathilda periodically absented herself from the monastery -- she did not remain cloistered in Quedlinburg, nor was she "in retirement" as she had been in Enger. In the *vitae*, Mathilda performed many good works while traveling. She circulated about the kingdom, much as she had with her husband Henry and her son Otto, distributing candles to various houses of prayer and supplying paupers with food and clothing.¹⁶⁴

The *vitae*, especially the *Vita posterior*, consciously patterned themselves after the Rule of St. Benedict. Mathilda engaged in both good works and divine reading, two major principles of the Rule: "on feast days, having time for reading, she spent her time either reading or listening to others read. Daily she applied herself to prayer or the psalms, or physical works, as she was always accustomed to do."¹⁶⁵ This was perhaps not surprising, as Mathilda herself was educated in the Benedictine convent of Herford, and both Quedlinburg and Nordhausen, her two principal foundations, followed the precepts of the Rule.¹⁶⁶

Mathilda and Emperor Otto

After focusing on Mathilda's miracles, the vitae return to her son Otto. They pass over a large number of years in the Ottonian period, however, from Otto's second marriage until his crowning as emperor (951-962), mentioning only the children born to Otto and Adelheid.¹⁶⁷ The numerous wars Otto waged in the 950's, both civil and foreign, including the famous Battle at Lechfeld in 955 where Otto decisively defeated the Hungarians, receive no mention. The vitae are not interested in warfare, but focus rather on the papal summons for Otto to come to Rome and receive the imperial crown.¹⁶⁸ Entrusting the kingdom to his son William of Mainz, Otto, accompanied by his wife and his strongest men, thus went to Italy, where, "crowned emperor with his wife in St. Peter's cathedral, he ruled with the highest power over Italian cities and held the Roman empire."¹⁶⁹

With Adelheid and Otto in Italy, Mathilda was once again the highest-ranking woman in Saxony. The Vita posterior even credited her with participation in the governing the realm, along with William of Mainz and Otto II.¹⁷⁰ Afraid for her son and his welfare in Italy, Mathilda constantly prayed on his behalf, and she "built a monastery in Nordhausen with the consent of her grandson Otto II, gathering a group of woman on behalf of the salvation of her own body and soul and the bodies and souls of her family members."¹⁷¹ She founded Nordhausen explicitly for the commemoration of the Ottonians.¹⁷² Developing her role as the protector and curator of the Ottonian memoria was a way for Mathilda to secure her own status in the realm, especially after her son and his wife had been crowned with imperial titles, a shift in status with which Mathilda could not compete.

When Otto returned from Italy in 965, three years after Mathilda began construction on Nordhausen, the royal family gathered in Cologne. "Famous mother and queen," Mathilda "was honorably received, first by the emperor, then by all her descendants," reflecting her top position within the family.¹⁷³ Just as Quedlinburg had been the central issue at Henry I's final assembly, Nordhausen was the main, seemingly the only, order of business at this family reunion. Worried she would die before Nordhausen was adequately provided for, Mathilda solicited Otto's promise that he and his descendants would always care for Nordhausen.¹⁷⁴ They traveled together to that same monastery, and "mother and her son the king gave the monastery things, adding goods registered in a charter signed by her own hand."¹⁷⁵ The author of the Vita antiquior emphasizes these provisions for Nordhausen, possibly out of concern that the new rulers, Otto II and his wife Theophanu, might not provide for Nordhausen.¹⁷⁶ As with Quedlinburg, Nordhausen was a center of the Ottonian memoria, intended to commemorate and pray on behalf of the souls of the deceased Ottonian family members, and for the health of those still living, as well as the stability of the kingdom in general.¹⁷⁷

Both vitae emphasize Mathilda's prophetic abilities, a suitable hagiographic topos, at these royal assemblies.¹⁷⁸ In the Vita antiquior, Mathilda predicted that Otto II would become emperor. This worked to glorify Otto II, the recipient of the Vita antiquior; as the object of a prophesy, he increased his sacral aura.¹⁷⁹ In the Vita posterior, on the other hand, Mathilda foretold that a descendant of her grandson Henry the Quarrelsome would become king, with no mention of Otto II. To this prophesy the author added "Who doubts that this prophesy of the handmaid of Christ now is fulfilled in the most Christian king Henry?"¹⁸⁰ Thus these prophecies, although working to establish Mathilda's sanctity, underscore the political motivations of each text.

The Death of Queen Mathilda

Shortly before her death, Mathilda divided her worldly goods in the fashion of a Christian penitent: "immediately she paid out the abundance of riches which she still had to the bishops, priests, and the poor, and divided it among monasteries."¹⁸¹ This was an established hagiographic theme, and it is therefore hard to judge its validity.¹⁸² But the clothing she set aside for her own burial -- two garments, one scarlet and the other linen -- served as reminders of her connection to the secular world: they were suited to her wealth and social position.¹⁸³ Foreseeing the death of her grandson William, Archbishop of Mainz, Mathilda gave him these garments.¹⁸⁴ Mathilda's generosity did not leave her "shirtless," however: upon her death, messengers from her daughter Gerberga came bearing a pallium. Woven in gold, this garment befitted Mathilda's station as queen. Other sections of the vitae note her rich clothing, as well. The Vita posterior describes her reaction after the death of her son Henry:

...on that day she took off her rich garments, which she had had for decoration in widowhood. After the death of the memorable king Henry she had constantly worn scarlet-colored clothing, not in public, but under a cloth of linen, and she wore a little gold for ornamentation. She took off all of this and afterwards she went around clothed in funeral garb.¹⁸⁵

The attention devoted to clothing, as to other worldly goods, including land, signified the material focus of these vitae, a focus appropriate to royalty and their need to establish themselves worthy of their rank. People needed physical representations of wealth and power to prove they held it. Such representations included everything from the building of palaces, churches, or monastic houses and the raising of armies to the creation of art works, from manuscripts to goblets, and the wearing of precious objects such as jewelry, crowns, and rich clothing. Combined with the sacral aura of Germanic kingship, material ostentation provided tangible evidence of rule.¹⁸⁶

This physical representation of royal status was not incompatible with a pious lifestyle, however. In her study of the lives of female saints between the seventh and eleventh centuries, Maria Stoeckle notes that physical and spiritual well-being were closely linked: beauty, strength, honor, and wealth were all necessary attributes, in line with the saint's noble birth. Lothar Bornscheuer argues this represented a form of royal piety, the fusion of an outside appearance worthy of royalty combined with inner piety, an idea expressed by the vitae themselves: "She went forth in public decorated with gems and silk, but inwardly she wore a more valuable ornament, a heart acceptable to God."¹⁸⁷

Aware of her family's worldly status as royal rulers, Mathilda was likewise aware of the prestige monasteries gained in housing royal remains, much as they did in possessing saints' relics; being the site of a royal mausoleum increased a monastic house's status in the realm. The vitae proclaimed that Mathilda had wished to be buried at Nordhausen, but knew she must rest next to her husband Henry: "I wish to be buried in this place," she told Ricburg, "so that my sons would take special care in providing for you, but I know this will be allowed in no way, for my lord Henry rests at Quedlinburg."¹⁸⁸ As we have seen, Quedlinburg became a major center after Mathilda established Henry's memorial cult there.

The Quedlinburg Computarium

Mathilda maintained the cultivation of the Ottonian memoria, her primary focus as dowager queen, to the end. On her deathbed, she called "the emperor's daughter, the abbess of Quedlinburg, to her,"¹⁸⁹ advising her to

be pious, humble, prudent, and cautious, to provide for her convent and to rarely leave the monastery, to read the Holy Scriptures and to teach others what she read, and to leave behind an example of good works for all. She gave her a calendar (computarium) in which the names of the dead were written, commending Henry I's soul to her, and not only his soul, but the souls of all whose memory (memoria) she should faithfully cultivate.¹⁹⁰

This is a key passage in the *Vita Mathildis antiquior*, giving a clear-cut, precisely defined set of instructions as to how an abbess should behave in caring for her monastery. It is interesting to note that the elder Mathilda was, as queen, subject to a different set of conventions than those which were suitable or expected of the younger Mathilda, a full nun: while Queen Mathilda traveled around the kingdom, Abbess Mathilda was to stay within the confines of her convent. In fact, although ill for over a year before she passed away, Mathilda continued to travel as much as she was able.¹⁹¹ Her travels were essential to her, the means by which she distributed necessities to each individual monastery.¹⁹²

The second part of the passage contains the much-discussed reference to the computarium, a calendar in which the names of deceased nobles were written, tangible evidence of Mathilda's role as caretaker of the Ottonian cult. Mathilda had presumably produced this book herself, passing it down from one royal woman to another, further heightening this memoria as a role for the female members of the royal house. Queen Mathilda, Empress Adelheid, Abbess Mathilda of Quedlinburg, and Empress Kunigunde all showed themselves as active in commemorating the Ottonian family. The cultivation of such memoria was not limited to the royal family alone, but occupied the female members of other nobles families, as well.¹⁹³ Mathilda, however, emphasized this role for Ottonian royal women, an emphasis noted by other contemporary historiographers.¹⁹⁴

Mathilda died on March 14, 968, leaving behind a model for her descendants and other Ottonian women in particular. She was laid to rest in the basilica of St. Servatius next to her husband, King Henry.

Understanding Mathilda: Some conclusions on the *Vitae Mathildis reginae*

While these vitae touched on the main events of the Ottonian house in the tenth century, they passed over numerous elements of import for the development of Ottonian rule in that period. The omissions are as valuable as the direct statements in determining the authors' foci and in understanding their conceptions of Mathilda.

The first and highly visible omission is that of war. Foreign wars, such as the major campaigns against the Hungarians or the Slavs, receive little or no mention in these vitae.¹⁹⁵ Although skill in warfare is portrayed as a prerequisite for leadership, the vitae gloss over actual military activities.¹⁹⁶ The vitae allude to the civil strife rampant in the early Ottonian period, especially the first decades of Otto's rule, perhaps reducing it to the quarrel between Mathilda and her sons, but never overtly describing it. The *Vita posterior* directs more attention to the strife between Otto and his brother Henry, but makes no specific mention of Henry's various uprisings. Nor do the vitae mention other family rebellions, such as Henry I's son Thankmar's rebellion of 938 or Otto I's son Liudolf's rebellion of 953. These vitae focus on the Ottonian family, not Ottonian politics, and even within the family, the authors included only the events and figures which aided their ascension to power. They formulated an image of success and unity, not failure and dissension. Thus the vitae not only work to establish Mathilda as a figure worthy of veneration, but to promote the Ottonian family as worthy of the same.

In her vitae, Mathilda provided the tie that held the family together, a symbol of unity and peace in a time full of war.¹⁹⁷ She and the other women in the vitae functioned as peacemakers, interceding in times of strife: Mathilda reconciled Henry and Otto, just as Edith did Otto and Mathilda. The queen's role was moral -- she provided moral support for her family, and performed morally sound deeds in devoting her attention to religious concerns. One must be careful not to overemphasize this aspect of the queen, as the source of the sentiment is two works hagiographic in intent, meant to glorify and, in some aspects, purify their subject. The *Vitae Mathildis reginae* molded Mathilda into a saintly queen who fit specific patterns, both in her function as saint and her function as queen. That does not mean some of those patterns were not real, but to reconstruct Mathilda requires looking past the patterns to see where Mathilda was truly visible.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine every reference to Mathilda in the Ottonian period, she appeared in a variety of sources and places. Hrotsvitha, Widukind, Liudprand, and Thietmar all mention Mathilda.¹⁹⁸ She appeared in the official documents of Henry and Otto and in various monastic annals.¹⁹⁹ All of them showed her involved in areas related to the church.²⁰⁰ While a variety of historiographical texts attested to Mathilda's life and activities, royal charters and official documents provide even more reliable evidence regarding Mathilda's concerns and actions, and confirm many of the details of Mathilda's life as presented by her vitae. Such sources prove Mathilda involved herself heavily in the founding and maintenance of religious houses and the commemoration of her husband Henry, among other activities.²⁰¹ But she was not isolated from political events any more than she was isolated from the world in general. Mathilda worked within a religious sphere, but was active in the world. This is true in regard to her image in her vitae and in regard to the historical Mathilda.²⁰² In a time when the religious and the political fed from and influenced each other, religiously motivated activities often had direct political consequences. In fact, considering the close ties between the Ottonian family and the religious establishments in their kingdom, it is not inaccurate to say that the religious was political and vice-versa.²⁰³

Mathilda's vitae centered themselves around hagiographic concepts. They focused on her noble birth, her virtues, her religious activities, her miracles. But they included a substantial amount of material which illuminated her relationship to the world. She did not leave the world to pursue holy activities, as Rade Gund and Gertrude did, but rather used religious activities to stay involved in secular society.²⁰⁴ Some of the activities appropriate for and constructed as holy behavior in the *Vitae Mathildis*, including her travels around the kingdom to care for the needy and her suffering and exile at the hands of her sons, reflected real duties and issues Mathilda faced in her life, such as the itinerant nature of rule and the struggles, often inter-generational, over land.²⁰⁵

Her vitae painted Mathilda as an active and public figure in the Ottonian realm, visible within the scope of her religious activities, whether as monastic founder or keeper of the Ottonian memoria. She stayed active even after the death of her husband, when it was common for many noble women to enter and remain in a specific convent. Mathilda consciously carved out a niche for herself in the new realm, a feat more easily accomplished in widowhood than in marriage. She was not a revolutionary queen, in that she adapted roles already associated with and considered appropriate for noble women. But Mathilda was aware of her status, her new status, as queen, and worked to keep herself at the appropriate high rank, whether through expensive clothing or royal largesse. Through her active involvement in religious areas, Mathilda provided an example for royal women, an example which her vitae promoted in shaping her into the central model for Ottonian kings and queens.

Notes

[*] I would like to sincerely thank Professors Thomas F.X. Noble and H.C. Erik Midelfort for their invaluable guidance regarding my master's thesis, of which this article is a condensed version, and also Louisa Parker-Mattozzi for her editorial assistance.

[1] Bernd Schütte, ed., *Die Lebensbeschreibungen der Königin Mathilda*, vol. 66 of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1994), 10, 42.

[2] Although Mathilda was not of royal lineage herself and did not become queen until 919, the *vitae* made every effort to portray her as worthy of such rank from birth; the authors created a youthful Mathilda with character traits and an upbringing appropriate for a queen. As such, they merit consideration in understanding the ideal of queenship formulated by the *vitae* as a whole.

[3] Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 50-68. *Vita b. Mathildis reginae [posterior]*, *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur [AASS]* March 2 (Antwerp, 1668), 365-70 and (Paris-Rom, 1865), 351-65.

[4] It had survived only as an insert in the *Annalensis Palidensis* (Pöhlde Annals). Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 18, 70.

[5] Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 9, 70.

[6] Schütte discusses much of this early historiography in the introduction to the *vitae*. Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 9-88.

[7] This 1910 dissertation was unavailable to me.

[8] Maria Stoeckle, *Studien über Ideale in Frauenviten des VII.-X. Jahrhunderts* (Münich: 'Uni'-Druck, 1957).

[9] Patrick Corbet, *Les saints Ottoniens: Sainteté dynastique, sainteté royale et sainteté féminine autour de l'an Mil.* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1986).

[10] Pauline Stafford, *Queens, concubines, and dowagers : the king's wife in the early Middle Ages.* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1983), and Winfrid Glocker, *Die Verwandten der Ottonen und ihre Bedeutung in der Politik. Studien zur Familienpolitik und zur Genealogie des sächsischen Kaiserhauses: Dissertationen zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 5* (Köln-Wien: Bohlau, 1989).

[11] Glocker 5, 10.

[12] *nobilitas, probitas, decus.* *Vita Mathildis reginae antiquior*, (hereafter *VMa*) 114, lines 13-18 ; *Vita Mathildis posterior*, (hereafter *VMp*) 148, lines 3-5. Both texts are in Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*.

[13] "in eius succensus amore," *VMa*, 116, line 1. Similarly in the *VMp*, 151, lines 22-24: "hanc tanti decoris ut vidit egregius iuvenis, minime valens diutius celare amorem cordis."-"When the noble

youth saw the young woman of such virtue, he was not able to hide the love in his heart for very long."

[14] Paul Fouracre has suggested that "the biography of the saint which was written closest to the events described had least room to manoeuvre in arguing for the sanctity of its subject," especially when people who remembered or actively interacted with the subject remained who could legitimately challenge inaccuracies in a hagiographical biography. Paul Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," *Past and Present* 127 (May 1990), 21.

[15] *VMa* 133, lines 14-15.

[16] As with Henry and Otto, the *Vita Mathildis antiquior* served to promote Otto II, the emperor for whom the *Vita* was written, by making him the object of Mathilda's prophecy. *VMa* 126, lines 15-16: "Hic ceteris illustrior fama nobis aliquo praebiturus est insigne parentibus"-"More illustrious in reputation to us than all the rest, he will be given some distinguishing honor by his parents."

[17] *VMP* 185, lines 8-11: "Speramus autem hoc nomen non excidere de genere nostro, priusquam aliquis parvulus nepos oriatur de eiusdem pueri semine, qui sublimetur regali dignitate." -"We hope that this name [Henry] will not disappear from our family, before some descendant shall be born from that same seed, who will be raised to royal office."

[18] *VMa* 139, line 10-141, line 5.

[19] Corbet, *Saints*, 120-234, and Stoeckle, *Frauenviten*, 89, focus in particular on the image of Mathilda as the 'barometer' of Ottonian fortunes.

[20] *VMP* 161, lines 22-24: "At last Jesus Christ, the mediator of God and men, not wishing the brothers to fight amongst themselves for long, united them as one through the service of their holy mother." "Tandem mediator dei et hominum Christus Iesus nolens fratres inter se diutius discordare per sancte matris meritum illos concordavit in unum."

[21] Fouracre, "Merovingian Hagiography," 2.

[22] Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head, eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) xvii-xviii.

[23] Noble, *Soldiers of Christ*, xviii.

[24] Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibung*, 11.

[25] These two *vitae* can be found in English translation in Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg, and E. Gordon Whatley, eds. and trans., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) 60-105 and 220-34. Every scholar accepts the heavy influence of these texts, especially the *Vita Radegundis*. For a specific comparison of the *Vita Radegundis* and the *Vitae Mathildis*, see Frantisek Graus, *Volk, Herrscher, und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1965) 410-11.

[26] The frontier realms where Christianity and paganism clashed, such as sixth-century Anglo-Saxon England and eighth-century Saxony, produced numerous martyred saints throughout the early

medieval period. Noble, *Soldiers of Christ*, xxiii.

[27] For further information on the changing styles of hagiography in the early medieval period, see Noble, *Soldiers of Christ*, xxiii-xliv.

[28] See Stoeckle, *Frauenviten*, 19-21, and Robert Folz, *Les Saintes Reines du Moyen Âge en Occident [Vie-XIIIe siècles]* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1992).

[29] Stoeckle, *Frauenviten*, 2.

[30] Venantius Fortunatus, "The Life of the Holy Radegund" in McNamara, *Sainted Women*, 72, section 3.

[31] McNamara, *Sainted Women*, 73, section 5.

[32] "occulte," *VMa*, 119 line 6; "furtive," *VMP*, 154 line 8.

[33] "Noctis quoque tempore sese a latere regis furtive subtraxit quasi ipso ignorante relinquens regalem thalamum; orationi intendebat animum, ut sibi reconciliaret deum, quem diligebat casto amore et cui serviebat integra fide. Quis etiam dubitet, ut rege nesciente electa Christi famula talia posset agere? Ipse etenim bene intelligebat, sed quasi se nescire simulabat, quia veraciter noverat cuncta eius opera bona existere et utrisque prodesse." "And at night she withdrew herself furtively from the side of the king, leaving the royal bed as if the king were ignorant of her actions; she dedicated her soul to prayer, so that she might be reconciled to God, whom she loved with a chaste love, and whom she served with complete faith. Who would doubt that the chosen handmaid of Christ was able to do so many things without the king knowing? The king knew full well, but pretended as if he did not know, because he knew truthfully that all of her works were good, and benefitted each of them." *VMP*, 154 lines 8-15.

[34] McNamara, *Sainted Women*, 72 section 3; *VMa*, 120, lines 4-7.

[35] Graus, *Volk, Herrscher, und Heiliger*, 411.

[36] Stoeckle, *Frauenviten*, 92.

[37] Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 31.

[38] See Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 15-25 and 85-92.

[39] *VMa* 139-42.

[40] Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 43.

[41] "quid agere quidve vobis expedit vitare," *VMP*, 146, lines 9-10.

[42] *VMa* 109, line 8, and *VMP*, 145, lines 11-12.

[43] For Edith's influence, see Leyser, "Die Ottonen und Wessex," (*Frühmittelalterlichen Studien* 17 (1983): 73-97. For Adelheid's role in the Ottonian empire, see Gerald Beyreuther, "Kaiserin Adelheid: 'Mutter der Königreiche'," *Herrscherinnen und Nonnen: Frauengestalten von der Ottonenzeit bis zu*

den Staufern, ed. Erika Uitz, Babara Pätzold, and Gerald Beyreuther (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1990), 43-79.

[44] *illustris regine, cuius vita lucida merito est imitanda. VMp*, 146, lines 10-11.

[45] See Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), chapters 5 and 6. For Mathilda's role in cultivating the Ottonian memoria, see Gerd Althoff, *Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung. Studien zum Totengedanken der Billunger und Ottonen* (München: W. Fink, 1984), 167-72.

[46] See *VMa* 120, lines 2-7, and *VMp* 157, line 14-158, line 6.

[47] *VMa* 112, line 3 and 114, line 18- 115, line 4, and *VMa* 119, line 1-120, line 2. See also *VMp* 157, lines 11-14: "In cunctis eorum actibus resplenduit modestie virtus, merito fuerant rectores regni talibus a deo virtutibus munerati. Beati existunt et eterne beatitudinis requiem possidebant." "In all of their deeds shown the virtue of modesty, with reason they were rulers of their kingdom, receiving all of their virtues from God. They were blessed and they had the peace of eternal happiness."

[48] "Habetis quidem in hoc volumine perpauca vestrorum facta patrum, ex quibus potestis discere, quid agere quidve vobis expediat vitare... faciat vos exemplum et formam iusticiae ad gubernandam fideliterque regendam ecclesiam, ut speculator ydoneus effectus sitis magni consilii, industrie et discipline.." *VMp*, 46, lines 8-10 and 16-18.

[49] Königsspiegel [Mirror for Kings], Königinsspiegel [Mirror for Queens], and/or Fürstenspiegel [Mirror for Princes] is the German term for this kind of moral handbook, often used as a way of advising rulers in the medieval period. See, for example, Hans Hubert Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1968).

[50] Gerd Althoff, "Causa scribendi und Darstellungsabsicht: Die Lebensbeschreibung der Königin Mathilde und andere Beispiele," *Litterae Medii Aevi: Festschrift Johanne Autenrieth*. ed. Michael Borgolte and Herrad Spilling (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1988), 126.

[51] Which, as previously mentioned, were most likely written there. Corbet, *Saints*, 120.

[52] Bernd Schütte rejects Althoff's thesis, concluding that the city of Nordhausen, not the convent, belonged to Theophanu's dowry, and pointing out Quedlinburg's equal, if not greater, prominence in the *Vita*. Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 70-75. Even if the convent at Nordhausen was not specifically part of Theophanu's dowry, the concern for self-preservation upon a change in leadership should not be overlooked.

[53] And, in fact, he did shift his attention to Merseburg and Bamberg, both of which he had made seats of bishoprics. Helmut Beumann, *Die Ottonen* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1987), 157-176.

[54] "pulchra facie, amabilis in infancia, operibus industris, moribus modesta, humilis et larga...Nam aviti ac paterni in ea eluxit specimen decoris." *VMa*, 115, lines 1-4, and 114, line 18.

[55] *VMp*, 148, lines 3-6.

[56] Stoeckle, *Fraeunviten*, 20.

[57] "non inter sanctimonialia numeranda sed ad queque utilia libris operibusque nutrienda." *VMa* 114, 13-15; see also *VMa* 113 lines 2-3.

[58] Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, chapter 6.

[59] Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 37.

[60] In actuality, Widukind could not have been baptized by Boniface, who died in 754, years before the Saxon wars. Considered the "Apostle to the Germans," however, Boniface provided an important link between the Frankish Carolingians and the Saxon Ottonians, emphasizing the legitimacy of Widukind's conversion at the hands of a figure renowned for his Christian missionary efforts. Helmut Beumann, "Sachsen und Franken im werdenden Regnum Teutonicum," in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del centro, 1986), 900.

[61] "christianissimus cultor ecclesiarum et dei... desirabat ecclesias reedificare, collocavit oratoria sanctorum," *VMa* 114, lines 3-5; see also *VMp* 149, lines 18-20.

[62] "vir christianissimus, armis strenuus, lege eruditus totusque in fide catholicus," *VMa* 113, 8-10.

[63] See especially Gerd Althoff and Hagen Keller, *Heinrich I. und Otto der Grosse Neubeginn auf karolingischem Erbe* (Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt Verlag, 1985).

[64] "concordes amici" and "federe pacis"; *VMp* 149 lines 7-8 and 12. See Beumann, *Die Ottonen*, 48, and Gerd Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue: zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im frühen Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 105-107 regarding the use of friendship pacts in Ottonian Saxony.

[65] Helmut Beumann discusses this idea of Frankish and Saxon equality in "Sachsen und Franken," 885-912.

[66] "non disparem genere probitateque," *VMa* 112, lines 13-14.

[67] Stoeckle, *Frauenviten*, 19.

[68] Max Kirchner, "Die deutschen Kaiserinnen in der Zeit von Konrad I. bis zum Tode Lothars von Supplinburg," *Historische Studien* 79 (1910), 7, note 5.

[69] Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 18.

[70] "intus sedentem et psalterium manu tenentem, honestissimam habitu et admodum reverendo vultu," *VMp* 151, lines 4-5

[71] "frons serenus et speciosus ad inteundum vultus in candore liliis extitit persimilis, in vivido autem colore assimilabatur rosarum foliis," *VMp* 151, lines 20-22.

[72] "nobilitas, probitas, and decus," *VMa* 114 lines 13-18.

[73] Stoeckle, *Frauenviten*, 5, 20-22.

[74] "ceteris parentum ignorantibus," *VMa* 116 line 3; "Non est nostrum eam nuptui dare alicui absque consilio et consensu parentum," "It is not for me to give you to another in marriage without the advice and knowledge of your parents," Mathilda's grandmother says, but nonetheless "Haut mora ornamentis honeste paratis, que congrua erant desponsationi virginis, sequenti die Heinricus secum duxit venerabilem virginem in partes Saxones," "After everything (honor/decoration) which was suitable for the betrothal of a virgin had been provided without delay, on the following day Henry led the venerable virgin with him into Saxon territory." *VMp* 152 lines 2-3 and 12-15. See also Corbet, 130, for a discussion of this marriage as a form of Raubehe (marriage by abduction or force), an idea he ultimately rejects as literary fiction. The historical circumstances of this particular marriage, as much as they can be ascertained, are worth bearing in mind, however, when considering this description of Henry's actions. To dismiss the entire episode as a literary construction, without acknowledging innuendos it may hold, seems a hasty judgment.

[75] "magis et magis perseveraret adolescens in inceptu petitionis," "The youth persisted more and more since the beginning of his petition." *VMp* 151 line 26-152, line 1.

[76] Hatheburg, Henry's first wife, was actually a widow before her marriage to Henry. She also is presumed to have taken the veil. Marrying Henry after that, as she did, was thus illegal in the eyes of the church, and the bishop of Halberstadt endeavored to dissolve the marriage before Henry had even sought a divorce. After their separation, Hatheburg returned to the cloister, and Henry retained the lands she had brought to the marriage, including the city of Merseburg. See Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 12.

[77] Glocker, *Verwandten*, 47.

[78] Eduard Hlawitschka concurs with Glocker that both brothers had died before 912, but neither scholar provides a source for this information. See Hlawitschka, "Kontroverses aus dem Umfeld von König Heinrich I. Gemahlin Mathilde," *Deus qui mutat tempora. Menschen und Institutionen im Wandel des Mittelalters. Festschrift für Alfons Becker zu seinem fünfundsiebszigsten Geburtstag* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1987) 33-54.

[79] Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 12.

[80] Beumann, *Ottonen*, 26; Glocker, *Verwandten*, 10; Kirchner, "Kaiserinnen," 8, note 13a.

[81] See also Martin Lintzel, "Königin Mathilde," *Westfälische Lebensbilder* 5 (Münster, 1937), 156-157.

[82] "licito perfruuntur amore." *VMa* 116, line 8.

[83] Kirchner, "Kaiserinnen," 8, note 8a; Althoff, "Mathilde," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* vol 16 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1953/1990), 371.

[84] "Tunc circumducebatur per civitates egregii ducis Ottonis a comite Thietmaro et militibus ceteris." "Then they were led through the cities of the noble duke Otto by Count Thietmar and the rest of the army," *VMp* 152 lines 15-16.

[85] John Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936-1075* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 45-50.

[86] Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 46-48. Karl Leyser also discusses this "exhibition of royalty" in conjunction with Otto and Edith in "Die Ottonen und Wessex," 78-79.

[87] The *VMp* testifies to this: after his marriage to his second wife Adelheid, Otto "joyfully led his lady Adelheid with him through the cities of the Latin peoples." *VMp* 174, lines 5-6. The question remains whether this reflected reality or the royal ideal, as Henry and Mathilda were not royalty at the time. Still, as, according to Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 45, itinerant rule was the standard for all people who held power in the early medieval period, from kings to dukes to abbots to bishops, it is likely such a procession would have occurred.

[88] *VMp* 152 line 23-153 line 2

[89] *VMA* 117, 13-17: *VMp* 153, 12-15. This did follow the basic chronological order (albeit without specific dates) in which Henry dealt with these "peoples," absorbing some of them into his kingdom. The Hungarians, perhaps the major threat to the Saxons in the early tenth century, received no mention, although Henry battled against them several times. Thus this view of Henry as king was highly simplified (as one would already deduce from the brevity of the passage) and idealized. The vitae also make no mention of Arnulf of Bavaria, who contended the kingship until 921, or of any other internal resistance to Henry's kingship. See Beumann, Die Ottonen, and Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, for information about Henry's early military activities as king.

[90] "[Lands] quae suis antecessoribus non fuerant subdita," "Lands which his ancestors had not been able to subdue" *VMp* 153, 14-15.

[91] "summo triumphatori regique celesit agens semper gratiarum actiones ecclesias multis reparari fecisset in pensis. Pauperibus largus viduis patrocinebatur et oppressis." "He gave thanks to the highest conqueror and king by always doing deeds of thanks and he gave great wealth for churches to be repaired. He generously patronized the poor, widows, and the oppressed." *VMA* 117, 19-21.

[92] For the hagiographical portrait of Mathilda, see *VMA* 118 and *VMp* 153-154. *VMA* 129, 16-17 : "Virginalium propemodum benefactis illius promerentibus adquisierat palmam." "She almost acquired virginal honor through her deserving works." *VMp* 157, line 10-11: "in ipsis regnavit castitas coniugalium, nec tamen defuit continentia laudabilis." "In her reigned conjugal chastity, nor she did lack laudable continence."

[93] "happy wife" (nuptam felicem), *VMA* 118 line 1. See also Schütte, Lebensbeschreibung, 128, notes 132-135, and Graus, Volk, Herrscher, und Heiliger, 410-411.

[94] DHI 3, 13, 18, 24, 38, and 41, in Die Urkunden der deutschen Könige und Kaiser: Erster Band. Die Urkunden Konrad I., Heinrich I., und Otto I. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956), 41-42, 49-50, 53-54, 59-60, 72, and 74.

[95] "Sin autem quempiam intellexit aliqua vi opprimi aut pro scelere criminis carcere includi seu populari examine deputari morti, nichil habuit hylaritatis, antequam reconciliavit exacerbationem regis. Si quando abscessit non exaudita, id provocante vulgari sententia rex secum tacitus ingemuit, quod petentis votum non implendo perturbavit..." *VMp* 154 lines 23-28. See also *VMA* 118, lines 12-16. It is likely Mathilda was present at some of the court business, which was conducted at the various stopping points on the king's itinerary. Of the six appearances Mathilda made in Henry's diplomas, five stated their place of origin, and they were: Quedlinburg (DHI 3; April 22, 922), Essen (DHI 13; March 18, 927), Dortmund (DHI 18; April 13, 928), Elden (DHI 24; June 30, 930), and Allstedt (DHI

41; October 12, 935). DHI 38 (May 11, 935) did not indicate where it was produced, but pertained to the nuns at Neuenheerse.

[96] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints & Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 141-142.

[97] Especially in the Vita posterior, where Edith is first approached by a group leading men, who beseech her to intervene with Otto on Mathilda's behalf.

[98] McNamara, *Sainted Women*, 75, note 47.

[99] "Itaque gratiam habeas, quod nos sedulo mitigasti iratum et in omni re utile nobis dedisti consilium, nos sepius revocasti ab iniquitate ad iusticiam et sedulo monuisti vi oppresso facere misericordiam." *VMp* 159, lines 8-11.

[100] *VMa* 119-120, line 2, and *VMp* 155-156. The *VMp* mentions only Mathilda's three sons, but describes their virtues and positions of leadership, especially that of Henry, as befitted its focus on his family line, in fuller detail. Although, as Schütte notes, the vitae include only those figures who were significant for the continuation and prosperity of the Ottonian family and/or close to Mathilda, Adelheid's absence is noticeable, especially as she was still alive when the first vita appeared (Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 3-4). While Otto married Edith in 936, Henry became duke of Bavaria only in 947, and it was not until 953 that Otto made Brun archbishop of Cologne, all activities occurred before Otto became emperor, and suggest that the viewpoint here is a temporal one, underscoring the high-status positions each one obtained *before* Otto and the Ottonian family ascended to imperial status.

[101] *VMa* 114, line 18.

[102] "Deus autem omnipotens sibi servientes numquam derelinquens clementer inspexit bona opera regis Heinrici et beatissime Mathildis atque illis multiplicavit excellentiam nobilissimae prolis." "God omnipotent, who never forsakes those who serve him, observed kindly the good works of king Henry and the most blessed Mathilda and he increased the eminence of their noble offspring." *VMp* 155, lines 7-10.

[103] "Igitur regalis solii ascendisset gradum venerabilis regina illustris maritali potentia et illustrior religione divina..." *VMp* 153, lines 23-26.

[104] Stafford, *Queens*, 107-109.

[105] "In publico processit ornata gemmis et serico, sed interius gerebat preciosius ornamentum, cor acceptabile deo." *VMp* 154, lines 4-6.

[106] "cunctis per circuitum monasteriis infinita, quot annis vivebant, dispensabant munera et, quo per semet ipsos iter deerat, missis pecuniis larga aderant manu." *VMa* 120, lines 4-7.

[107] McNamara, *Sainted Women*, 72; *VMa* 120, lines 4-7 and *VMp* 158, lines 1-6.

[108] "illi [principes] statim regi suggesterunt dicentes sanctimoniales in Winedhusen intra sepem cenobii clausas Quidilingaburg posse trasferri." *VMa* 120, lines 8-14. See also *VMp* 158, lines 6-13.

[109] Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibung*, 122, note 92.

[110] See especially Leyser's section on sacral kingship in *Rule and Conflict*, 75-108.

[111] "ibique cunctos principes regni convenire praecepit, ut se invicem coadunarent, quem suorum filiorum regale solium possidere eligerent." "And there he ordered all the leading men of the kingdom to convene, so that they could advise him in turn, which of his sons they would choose to have the throne." *VMp* 158, lines 19-20.

[112] *VMa* 121, lines 5-8; *VMp* 158, lines 20-23.

[113] "Cuius ad exsequias infinitus populorum frequens confluit numerus; quibus lamentando sequentibus corpus Quidilingaburg usque transvectum honorifice, ut equum erat, sepelierunt" *VMa* 121, lines 13-16. "Post hec rite paratis omnibus, que necessaria erant ad funus, maximo cum honore corpus in Quitlingoburg transportabant, ubi ipse requiescere decreverat ibique honorifice tradiderunt sepulture" *VMp* 160, line 26-161, line 2.

[114] As detailed in DHI 20, dated September 13, 929. *Urkunden*, 55-56.

[115] Including Karl Schmid, "Neue Quellen zum Verständnis des Adels im 10. Jahrhundert," in Eduard Hlawitschka, ed., *Königswahl und Thronfolge in Ottonisch-Frühdeutscher Zeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 413, note 71; Leyser, "Die Ottonen," especially 75-80; and Gerd Althoff and Hagen Keller, *Heinrich I. und Otto der Grosse: Neubeginn auf karolingischem Erbe* (Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt Verlag, 1985) 102-104.

[116] Most scholars concur that Henry's designation of Otto was a definitive split from Carolingian precedents. For specific references, see Althoff and Keller, *Neubeginn*, as well as Beumann, *Die Ottonen*, among others.

[117] Leyser, "Die Ottonen," 81; Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 38; Franz-Reiner Erkens, "Die Frau als Herrscherin in ottonisch-frühsalischer Zeit," in *Kaiserin Theophanu: Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends vol II*, ed. Anton V. Euw and Peter Schreiner (Cologne: Druckerei Locher GmbH, 1991), 258.

[118] That neither Otto nor Edith appeared in Henry's diplomas between 929-936 is reverse indication of strife between the two royal couples. Schmid, "Neue Quellen," 413, note 71; Leyser, "Die Ottonen," 83.

[119] Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 22-24.

[120] Mathilda's sole intercession was on behalf of Quedlinburg in 937 (DOI 18). Edith died on January 26th, 946; three days later Mathilda appeared in a diploma for Quedlinburg (DOI 75). Although she did not serve directly as an intercessor, this diploma referred to her as "nostra domina" and "mater regina," perhaps significant in the face of DOI 18, which termed her simply "nostra mater." See Leyser, "Die Ottonen," 83. Mathilda appeared in fourteen additional diplomas of Otto I's before her death in 968 (DOI 75 [29 Jan 946], DOI 89 [4 May 947], DOI 91 [14 July 947], DOI 123 [15 Apr 950], DOI 172 [25 May 954], DOI 186 [5 Dec 956], DOI 212 [13 June 960], DOI 228 [15 July 961], DOI 232 [29 July 961], DOI 281 [12 Apr 965], DOI 292 [8 June 965], DOI 302 [15 July 965], DOI 306 [date unknown], and DOI 328 [17 July 966]). Of these, six featured Mathilda in an intercessorial role (DOI 123, DOI 172, DOI 186, DOI 228, DOI 232, and DOI 302). For the text of each diploma, see *Die Urkunden der deutschen Könige und Kaiser: Erster Band. Die Urkunden*

Konrad I., Heinrich I., und Otto I . Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 2nd ed. Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956.

[121] Perhaps this served as additional impetus for the founding of Nordhausen. Her vitae stated that Mathilda undertook the establishment of Nordhausen out of fear for Otto's safety, but her ability to outfit and provide for a royal convent may have been a means to assert Mathilda's own rank and also retain Otto's support in the face of this new, powerful, and foreign wife, especially in regard to Mathilda's experiences with Edith. Each vita depicted Mathilda as working in conjunction with Otto II in construction Nordhausen "for the sake of King Henry's and his sons' souls," once again emphasizing Mathilda's centrality to the Ottonian family and her importance in caring for its members. See *VMa* 132, line 8-133 line 2; *VMp* 187, lines 4-11.

[122] See Beumann, "Sachsen und Franken," 898-902, as well as his Ottonen, 43.

[123] Karl Leyser deals with this extensively in his article "Die Ottonen," especially 78.

[124] "regalis coniunx," *VMa* 119, line 6.

[125] "in viduitate tante probitatis perstitit, ut vix eam pauci utriusque sexus possent imitari." *VMa* 122, lines 5-6.

[126] "totius bonitatis exemplum largiendo, miserando, errantes convertendo." *VMa* 122, lines 5-6. Quote from *VMp* 166, lines 12-13.

[127] *VMa* 114, lines 15-16.

[128] "prudentis enim consilii, mitissima bonis, dura superbis, elemosinis larga, orationibus intenta, cunctis pia indigentibus, eloquio blanda, caritate erga deum et proximum atque continentia permansit pura." *VMp* 122, lines 7-11.

[129] Schütte, Lebensbeschreibungen, 122, note 94.

[130] As noted in note 145 above, Otto's diplomas consistently refer to Mathilda as queen. In the eighteen charters which mention her by name, only six omit the title of regina: DOI 18, DOI 172, DOI 292, DOI 302, DOI 361, and DOI 393. Although the formulaic nature of such charters should make one wary of drawing too many conclusions solely from the titles used in them, the prominence of this form of address in connection to Mathilda should not be entirely overlooked, either.

[131] "Regina, filio auxiliante scilicet Otto rege aliisque principibus, voti compos effecta eandem dehinc cellam magna mentis intentione cuncta, quibus opus erat, ministrando componebat." "The queen, with the aid of her son King Otto and the rest of the leading men of the kingdom, having made a promise, from that point on ministered that nunnery and all the things which belonged to it with the greatest attention of her mind." *VMa* 121, line 19-122, line 3. Mathilda oversaw Quedlinburg until 966, when, at Mathilda's request, her granddaughter Mathilda became its first official abbess. Beumann, Die Ottonen, 101.

[132] "pro sua suorumque salute animarum et corporum ." *VMa* 133, line 1. Gerd Althoff has been instrumental in exploring Mathilda's role as the protector of the Ottonian family members, both living and dead, in his works *Adels- und Königsfamilien* and *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue*, but Patrick Corbet (in *Saints*), Karl Leyser (in *Rule and Conflict*), and Winfrid Glocker (in *Verwandten*) have also

illuminated aspects of this role for Ottonian royal women, beginning with Mathilda. Glocker summed it up simply in stating "the commemoration of the dead was the most important role of noble women, especially those who were widows." Glocker, *Verwandten*, 14.

[133] Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 35.

[134] *VMa* 116, lines 9-10, and *VMp* 152, lines 20-21.

[135] See DHI 20. *Urkunden*, 55-56.

[136] Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 8; Gerd Althoff, "Gandersheim und Quedlinburg. Ottonische Frauenklöster als Herrschafts- und Überlieferungscentren," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 25 (1991): 127, 129. See also Lothar Bornscheuer, *Miseriae Regum. Untersuchungen zum Krisen- und Todesgedanken in den herrschaftstheologischen Vorstellungen der ottonischsalischen Zeit. Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung* 4. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), 99.

[137] See E. Müller-Mertens, *Die Reichsstruktur im Spiegel der Herrschaftspraxis Ottos des Groen* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1980), 96-97 and 143-48.

[138] Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, 29-35.

[139] While the *VMp* did actually emphasize the discord between Otto and Henry, it did so in veiled notions, never acknowledging Henry's own overt attempts to wrest power from Otto. Nor did either vita mention Mathilda's and Henry's conspicuous absences at Otto's royal coronation in Aachen on August 7, 936. See note 37, as well as Schmid, "Neue Quellen," 412, and Leyser, "Die Ottonen," 82.

[140] "desistite iam contendere pro transitoria dignitate...nec inde vester animus contristetur, quis vestrum alteri praeponatur." *VMp* 160, lines 20-21 and 23-24.

[141] "Quin et regni partem, que in dotem ei contigerat, relinquere, monasterium petere, sacrum velamen suscipere... dotales dimittendo urbes patrimoniumque requirens Aggerinsem cellam in occidentali regione adiit." "She should give back that part of the kingdom which she had received as a dowry, seek a nunnery, and take the holy veil...renouncing her dotal cities and leaving behind her homeland she went to the convent at Enger in the western regions. *VMa* 123, lines 14-16 and 19-20-124, line 1.

[142] Interestingly enough, both sons are implicated in this dispute with their mother, especially in the *VMp*, which, despite its promotion of Mathilda's son Henry, depicts him as working in tandem with his brother Otto against Mathilda: "...haut minus gravem iniuriam sibi intulit Heinricus, quem miro affectu amoris cunctis [Mathilda] praeposuerat filiis." "No less a serious injury did Henry do to her, whom she had preferred over all the rest of her sons with an extraordinary feeling of love." *VMp* 167, lines 15-19.

[143] R. Köpke and E. Dümmler, *Kaiser Otto der Grosse, Jahrbücher der Deutschen Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1876) 148; Corbet, *Saints*, 149-151. See also Glocker, *Verwandten*, 17 note 29, who sees in this a reflection of the inheritance disputes which often arose in the tenth century when family possessions were used to outfit a religious foundation.

[144] Lintzel, "Mathilde," 167-168. Leyser suggested tensions between Mathilda and Edith could have contributed to this quarrel. Leyser, "Die Ottonen."

[145] *VMa* 123, lines 14-16; *VMP* 167, lines 18-20.

[146] Robert Folz argued that prevention of remarriage on Mathilda's part was the impetus for Otto's and Henry's actions against their mother. Robert Folz, "Le saintes reines du moyen âge en Occident [VI e-XIII e siècles]," *Subsidia Hagiographica* 76 (1992), 60.

[147] "Si nobis superstes extiterit et in sanctae viduitatis pudicitia permanserit, praedicta loca ei concedendo tradimus..," "If she should survive us and should remain chaste in holy virginity, we grant to her the specified places....," DHI 20, *Urkunden*, 56, lines 19-21.

[148] Schütte discusses the most relevant postulations in *Untersuchungen*, 62-69.

[149] As noted in Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 67. Against this Schütte points out that Ottonian contemporaries Widukind of Corvei and Hrotsvita of Gandersheim both hint that peace between the two brothers was established only after Otto made Henry duke of Bavaria in 947.

[150] *VMa* 124, line 20; *VMP* 170, line 15. Leyser, "Die Ottonen," 84.

[151] Schütte, *Untersuchungen*, 68. As Leyser posited in his article "Die Ottonen," Mathilda's absence in the diplomas and decrees of her son Otto between 936 and 946 and her reappearance in the years after Edith's death suggest a real alienation between the royal couple and the dowager queen.

[152] Schmid, "Neue Quellen," 412-14. See also Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde, Getreue*, especially 112-14 for a more general outline of the differences in style between Henry I's and Otto I's rule.

[153] I do not argue that Mathilda formulated her role as queen in a vacuum or wholly on her own. Not only did she have Carolingian precedents to which she could turn, but her society, as well as her husband and family members, necessarily influenced the roles she assumed.

[154] "episcopus, praesides ceterosque honestos...satellites." *VMa* 124, lines 14-15. See also *VMP* 170, lines 1-2, which added dukes, counts, and the wisest soldiers to this envoy. As an additional sidenote, Queen Edith's intervention on Mathilda's behalf echoed Mathilda's role of interceding for condemned criminals, emphasizing the role of woman as influencer, consoler, and unifier in these vitae, a role Corbet touched upon in his *Saints*, 34.

[155] "progrediens pedibusque eius prostratus, quicquid fecerat contrarium, secundum matris placitum permutare promisit," *VMa* 124, lines 21-23. Supplication was not only a means by which to gain pardon, but a physical act of submission and acknowledgement of the superiority of the one being supplicated. For a detailed description of rites of subplication in early medieval France, which can fairly be applied here, see Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992) 181-213.

[156] "Rex vero pro vecte iam etatis ecclesias cellulasque simul cum matre construi fecit pacem statuens, recte iudicans, paternam in cunctis imitando pietatem." *VMa* 125, 5-8.

[157] DOI 75 [29 Jan 946], DOI 89 [4 May 947], DOI 91 [14 July 947], and DOI 123 [15 April 950]. Mathilda interceded on behalf of Quedlinburg three more times, two of which also featured transfers of her own properties to the convent: DOI 172 [25 May 954], DOI 186 [5 Dec 956], and DOI 228 [15 July 961]. An interesting but tangential fact is that Mathilda appeared in five more charters after Otto

became emperor in 962, but Quedlinburg was no longer the beneficiary of her efforts. Two of the charters (DOI 281 [12 April 965] and DOI 306 [date unknown]), however, granted goods to the convent of St. Maurice at Magdeburg, a trend begun shortly before Otto's coronation with DOI 232 [29 July 961]. The other three (DOI 292 [8 June 965], DOI 302 [15 July 965], and DOI 328 [17 July 966]) featured donations to Corvey, Osnabrück, and Enger respectively.

[158] In his *Untersuchungen*, Schütte points out that the connection between Otto's first trip to Italy and his marriage to Adelheid are not as closely connected as these vitae make them -- apparently Otto had already planned to go to Italy before the Adelheid situation arose.

[159] Edith, although of prestigious royal lineage coveted by the Ottonians, was a princess upon her betrothal to Otto. Adelheid also brought with her rights over large amounts of land in Italy, which aided Otto's assumption of rule there. That the vitae make very little mention of Adelheid is intriguing, especially in light of the fact that she was alive at the time of the *Vita Mathildis antiquior*. This silence may be a tacit acknowledgement of strain between Adelheid and Mathilda.

The mention of Theophanu, wife of Otto II, at the end of the *VMa* further exhibits the vitae authors' consciousness of the status of each respective Ottonian spouse. The high praise she receives also may reflect the intended audience of the *VMa*: Otto II. The passage describing her runs thusly: "Sed aliquod in Ausonia tempus morabatur, donec filio suo Ottoni iuniori de partibus Grecie augusti de palacio regalis fuisset data coniux praeclaro dicta nomine Theophanu cum innumeris thesaurorum divitiis." "But [Otto] remained in Italy for a while, until his son Otto had been given a noble wife from the royal house in the imperial part of Greece by the name of Theophanu, along with innumerable riches and treasures." *VMa* 140, line 12-141 line 3. As the *VMp* ends with Mathilda's death in 968 and Theophanu did not marry Otto II until 972, she did not appear in that vita.

[160] *VMa* 126, lines 3-5. See also Beumann, *Die Ottonen*, 101.

[161] "Plura quoque cenobia construxit." *VMa* 127, line 10-128 line 1.

[162] Pöhlde was actually founded between 946-950, while Otto was still a widower. *VMa* 127, note 128, and 127, line 6-128, line 2.

[163] Schütte provides direct excerpts from the *Radegund* text as points of comparison in the notes to the vitae texts themselves. See *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 128-9, notes 132, 133, 134, and 135.

[164] *VMa* 129, lines 1-16, *VMp* 179, lines 19-22.

[165] "festis quoque diebus lectioni vacans se occupabat aut ipsa legendo aut ab aliis audiendo. Cotidianis vero diebus, quibus operari licet, orationi aut psalmodie incumbens, ut semper solebat, manuum tamen instabat operibus." *VMa* 129, line 20 -130, line 3. From the Rule: "Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina." As quoted in Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 129-30, note 140.

[166] See Michel Parisse, "Les femmes au monastère dans le Nord de l'Allemagne du IX e au XI e siècle. Conditions sociales et religieuses," *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Lebensbedingungen, Lebensnormen, Lebensformen / Beiträge zu einer internationalen Tagung am*

Fachbereich Geschichtswissenschaften der Freien Universität Berlin, 18. bis 21. Februar 1987, ed. Werner Affeldt (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1990) 319-322.

[167] *VMa* 126, lines 1-16 and *VMp* 174, line-175, line 3. Both vitae mention Otto II as future ruler, and Mathilda in connection with her position as abbess of Quedlinburg.

[168] "Interea regem Ottonem papa Romam voca[vit] imperialem, ut credimus, dei iussu accipere coronam," *VMa* 131, lines 16-17. See also *VMp* 186, lines 18-19.

[169] "augustus sancti Petri ad cathedram cum uxore coronatus, Romanum tenens imperium per Ausonias urbes summa postestate regnabat," *VMa* 132, lines 5-8.

[170] Schütte notes that this is the only place where Mathilda is mentioned as co-regent, but points to the fact that the early charters of Otto II, namely those appearing between 961 and 965 while his father was in Italy, featured both Mathilda and William as intercessors. Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 186 lines 18-19 and note 171.

[171] "construxit etiam in Northusen cenobium congregans sororum catervam pro sua suorumque salute animarum et corporum, sui quoque nepotis Ottonis iunioris consensu," *VMa* 132, line 12-133, line 2.

[172] "pro anima vestri genitoris et fratris et pro incolumitate vestra sicut supra memoravimus," "On behalf of the souls of our parents and brothers and for our own salvation as well as those we mentioned above" *VMp* 191, lines 10-11.

[173] The order in which the *VMa* mentioned the members of the family ran Otto I-Brun (in connection to his position as archbishop of Cologne)-Mathilda-Otto II-Mathilda the younger-Queen Gerberga-other family members. "Inclita mater Machtildis regina"..." primum a cesare, deinde ab omnibus posteris honorifice suscepta," *VMa* 133, lines 7-16. The *VMp* varied this slightly, omitting any reference to the younger Mathilda and including instead Henry the Quarrelsome, Otto's nephew. *VMp* 188, lines 7-10.

[174] *VMa* 134, lines 1-17; *VMp* 189, lines 5-16.

[175] "quicquid mater vel filius rex dederant, addens et ipse possessiones carta manu propria subsignata," *VMa* 134, lines 13-15.

[176] Althoff, "Causa Scribendi," 125. Nordhausen was built with Otto II's consent, as noted in the *VMa* and in DO II 5: this obligated him to provide for it. See *VMa* 133 line 2. According to the *VMa*, Otto I "promisit eidem cenobio numquam deesse omnis subsidii solamen." *VMa* 134 lines 9-10. The *VMp* strengthened this, depicting Otto I as saying "nostra non deerunt auxilia, quin etiam cohortamur filium nostrum Ottonem et ceteros nostros nepotes, ut illis subsidium prebeant, quamdiu vivant." "Our help shall never be absent, and we encourage our son Otto and all the rest of our relatives to provide aid to these nuns as long as they are alive." *VMp* 189, lines 13-16.

[177] "pro sua suorumque salute animarum et corporum," "For her own and their salvation of souls and bodies" *VMa* 133 line 1; "pro anima nostri domini et karissimi filii Heinrici necnon pro regni stabilitate et vestrorum omnium incolumitate" "For the soul of our lord and beloved son Henry and also for the stability of the kingdom and the salvation of all of our family" *VMp* 189, lines 10 -12.

[178] Mathilda as prophet, a key image in the *VMa*'s depiction of the assembly at Cologne, appeared in the *VMp* in conjunction with an earlier assembly at Frohse on the Elbe. This assembly, according to Schütte, took place on August 3, 956, almost a full ten years before the Cologne assembly, and, significantly, six years before Otto gained the imperial title. Thus the *VMp*, while not omitting the family gathering in Cologne, took the focus off of Otto as Emperor, utilizing the earlier convocation to concentrate on Mathilda's prophecies regarding Henry, the discussion of which follows below. See Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 183 note 155. For connections between saints and prophecy, see Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 147.

[179] Karl Leyser explored the notion of sacral kingship and its importance in the promulgation of Ottonian rule in *Rule and Conflict*, especially chapters 8 and 9.

[180] "Quis autem dubitet electe Christi famule prophetiam in christianissimo rege Heinrico nunc esse impletum?" *VMp* 185, lines 11-12.

[181] "omnen continuo diviciarum habundanciam, que restabat, episcopis, presbyteris atque indigentibus erogari et inter monasteria dividi," *VMa* 136, lines 15-18.

[182] This tradition stemmed from the Biblical passage Matthew 19:21, which stated "si vis perfectus esse vade vende quae habes et da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelo et veni sequere me" ("If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; come and follow me"). Schütte, *Lebensbeschreibungen*, 135 note 181.

[183] "veste aliisque duobus palliis, uno coccineo et alio lineo," *VMa* 135, lines 18-20.

[184] *VMa* 137, line 4; *VMp* 197, lines 21-24.

[185] "in hac etiam die herilia deposuit vestimenta, que in viduitate pro ornamento habuit. Post obitum enim memorandi regis Heinrici assidue induit coccinum unius coloris, non in publico, sed sub lineo vestimento, et pro decore ornamenti ante se gessit parum auri. Hoc totum tunc deposuit et postmodum lugubri veste induta processit," *VMp* 178, lines 4-9.

[186] See Stafford, *Queens*, 107-109, Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship*, especially 49-50, and Schulenburg, "Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500-1100," in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), 110. These scholars also acknowledge this need to show power and wealth physically extended down through the levels of the aristocracy, as represented by the building campaigns of many powerful families.

[187] "In publico processit ornata gemmis et serico, sed interius gerebat preciosius ornamentum, cor acceptabile deo." *VMp* 154 lines 4-6. Bornscheuer, *Miseriae Regum*, 71, aptly notes that had Mathilda not been queen, she would not have been able to perform her many pious and generous works, such as founding various religious houses or providing for the poor with expensive food, baths, and clothing.

[188] "vellem hoc loco sepeliri, ut filii mei erga vos maior esset procuratio, sed scio hoc nullo modo consentiri, nam dominus noster Quidilingaburg requiescit Heinricus," *VMa* 135, lines 7-9.

[189] "suam inperatoris filiam cenobii abbatissam ad se," *VMa* 137-38, line 1.

[190] "salutiferis insistendo monitis piam et humilem, prudentem et cautam sibi commisso gregi studiose providere docuit, monasterium raro egredi, sacris mentem indulgere scripturis et, que legeret, alias docere; quicquid vero alias monendo instimularet, ipsa prius omnibus relinquens exemplum bonis inpleret operibus. Quin etiam computarium, in quo erant nomina procerum scripta defunctorum, in manum ipsius dans animam illi commendavit Heinrici nec non et suam sed et omnium, quorum ipsa memoriam recolebat, fidelium," *VMa* 138, lines 1-10.

[191] "casas et castella peragrabat infirmitatem, prout potuit, occultans," *VMa* 135, lines 1-2 ; see also *VMp* 193, lines 9-12.

[192] "queque necessaria singulis impendisset monasteriis," *VMp* 193, lines 11-12.

[193] Althoff, *Adels-und Königsfamilien*, 169, 238-39.

[194] Liudprand of Cremona, for example, stated in his *Antapodosis* that Mathilda did more for this memoria than any other woman. *Antapodosis* IV, 15, as noted in Althoff, *Adels-und Königsfamilien*, 141.

[195] With the exception of the lists at beginning of each vitae detailing the lands Henry conquered after becoming King. See *VMa* 117, lines 13-17 and *VMp* 153, lines 11-15.

[196] Henry, for example, was elected leader of the Saxons because he was the strongest in arms ("armis Saxonum erat fortissimus"). *VMa* 117. The *VMp* praised Mathilda's son Henry for being similar to King Henry in faith and in arms ("in fiducia et armis patri fuerat consimilis"). *VMp* 156, line 4.

[197] Corbet focused especially on this image of Mathilda as unifier in his *Les saints Ottoniens*, 148-151. She is the grand matriarch, the protector of the Ottonian clan.

[198] Hrotsvitha von Gandersheim in her *Gesta Ottonis*, Widukind in his *Res gestae Saxonicae*, Liudprand in his *Antapodosis*, and Thietmar in his *Chronicon*.

[199] Including the Quedlinburg Annals. See *Annales Quedelburgensis* in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores* (MGH SS 3), ed G.H. Pertz (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1839).

[200] Including the aforementioned Quedlinburg Annals, which described her as "Mechtild inclita regina, obeunte coniuge suo, praefato scilicet rege Heinrico, coenobium in monte Quedelingensi, ut ipse prius decreverat, sancta devotione construere coepit." "Renowned queen Mathilda, upon the death of her husband, namely king Henry, with holy devotion began to build a convent on the mountain of Quedlinburg, as he had previously decreed, MGH SS 3, 54.

[201] For Quedlinburg as a specific example, see DOI 75, DOI 172, DOI 186, and DOI 228.

[202] Historical in the sense of lacking the overt hagiographic tone of her vitae. Such sources include narratives such as those mentioned in note 198, as well as charters from the reigns of Henry, Otto, and Otto II.

[203] This is not to strip true piety from any and all actions which involved the church, but rather to assert along the lines of Bernhardt that activities such as founding and supporting ecclesiastical foundations served spiritual and political objectives simultaneously, not to mention economic.

[204] An important distinction, as it was the vitae of these women, her Merovingian and Carolingian predecessors, which served as direct models for her own vitae.

[205] Suzanne Wemple and Jane Schulenburg, among others, have asserted the notion that 'frontier' kingdoms, such as that of Merovingian Gaul or Ottonian Germany, both of which bordered pagan lands, provided greater opportunities for women, requiring more active involvement in the running of a kingdom trying to cope with foreign invaders and foreign customs. Missionary efforts necessitated religious leaders and models, for one's own country's morale, as well as for the newly converted/conquered. Convents, then, could and did provide everything from education to supplies to prayers on behalf of Christian efforts. They also supplied shelter for women who lived close to the borders of the kingdom or who lacked adequate protection due to the loss of male family members to warfare. While Mathilda's vitae did not specifically address any of these ideas, they are certainly within the realm of possibility and would provide additional explanations for the high number of monastical foundations established during this period, especially those for women. See Suzanne Fonay Wemple, "Female Monasticism in Italy and its Comparison with France and Germany from the Ninth through the Eleventh Century," in Werner Affeldt, ed., *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Lebensbedingungen, Lebensnormen, Lebensformen / Beiträge zu einer internationalen Tagung am Fachbereich Geschichtswissenschaften der Freien Universität Berlin*, 18. bis 21. Februar 1987. (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1990), 291-310, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Women's Monastic Communities, 500-1100: Patterns of Expansion and Decline," in Judith M. Bennett, Elizabeth A. Clark, Jean F. O'Barr, B. Anne Vilen, and Sarah Westphal-Wihl, eds., *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 208-39, and Lina Eckenstein, *Women Under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life Between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 143-53.

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