SAXONY-ANHALT
LAND OF THE OTTONIANS

FROM THE PERIPHERY TO
A CENTRAL REGION IN EUROPE
The ruling family of the Ottonians laid the foundation for the incomparable abundance of cultural heritage in Saxony-Anhalt. Emperor Otto the Great made Magdeburg and the region between the Elbe and Saale and around the Harz the center of his realm. He thus helped it become one the Holy Roman Empire’s central territories and fostered this region’s exchange with major European metropolises. Trade and culture flourished in the “Land of the Ottonians”, making the region rich in palaces and monasteries. The figure of Otto the Great, his ties throughout Europe and his central role in the history of medieval emperorship received scholarly recognition in three major medieval exhibitions at the Kulturhistorisches Museum Magdeburg as well as a big response. The main exhibitions themselves were accompanied by projects at tie-in locations, each of which invited visitors to get to know Saxony Anhalt better by following Otto the Great’s footsteps.

The panel exhibition “Saxony-Anhalt, Land of the Ottonians. From the Periphery to a Central Region in Europe” ties in directly with these exhibitions. It takes a look at eight sites of events in Otto the Great’s life in present-day Saxony-Anhalt – from the possible place of his birth to the site of his tomb – and highlights the Ottonian family’s close ties to this region. At the same time, the individual events serve to illustrate important aspects of medieval European history.

The panel exhibition of the Zentrum für Mittelalterausstellungen (ZMA) is an invitation to experience the German and European History. A memorable tour through our state leads to the discovery that Saxony-Anhalt has even more to offer. Stone eyewitnesses to events along the “Romanesque Road”, idyllic parks and gardens in “Garden Dreams”, outdoor activities along the “Blue Ribbon” and spectacular archaeological finds on “Celestial Paths” also make our state a worthwhile travel destination.

Stephan Dorgerloh
Saxony-Anhalt Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM THE PERIPHERY TO A CENTRAL REGION IN EUROPE

Today, the region around the eastern Harz and the central Elbe and Saale is part of the German state of Saxony-Anhalt in the heart of Europe. It is a distinctive cultural landscape, rich in sites of historical memory and historic buildings. Still a remote province in the Roman Empire and during the Carolingian period, it experienced a notable cultural and economic boom in the 10th century and later became one of the central territories of the Holy Roman Empire. The beginning of the history of present-day Saxony-Anhalt commences with a ruling family, which came from this region, which remained rooted in it, and which made it the central territory in its domains and an important locus of European history.

The Rise of the Ottonians
Through his wars against the still heathen Saxons, Charlemagne had pushed the borders of the Kingdom of the Franks as far as the Elbe by the end of the 8th century. As Carolingian sovereignty declined, counts in the conquered territories increasingly gained autonomy and influence of their own; this was particularly true for the noble family of the Ottonians, which rose to become Dukes of Saxony. The central territory of the medieval Duchy of Saxony incorporated the present-day German states of Lower Saxony, Bremen and Saxony-Anhalt as well as Westphalia and Lippe in present-day North Rhine-Westphalia and Holstein. The election of Henry I, Duke of Saxony, king of the realm of the Eastern Franks and Saxons in 919 (reigned 919 – 936) marked the first high point in the rise of his noble family, the Ottonians.

A New Royal Territory
Along with the old centers of Carolingian power in the Rhine-Meuse region, East Saxony became the heart of the empire. Henry’s son and the first emperor in the Kingdom of the Eastern Franks (since 962), Otto the Great (reigned 936 – 973), and the three other emperors from his family, Otto II (reigned 961 – 983), Otto III (reigned 983 – 1002) and Henry II (reigned 1002 – 1024), further strengthened these domains by building castles and palaces, by founding dioceses and monasteries and by granting privileges. The kings’ frequent sojourns and the imperial diets and court festivals held there heightened the region’s standing.
East Saxony advanced from being a frontier area “remote from the king” to being the most important royal territory in the empire. It was the land of the Ottonian kings and emperors’ origin, power and memory and is intimately linked with both the biographies of the Ottonian rulers and the history of the empire. Sites central to Otto the Great’s life and deeds are located in present-day Saxony-Anhalt. These sites evoke the history of both the personages and the political and social conditions of the 10th century.

History and Story Tellers
The region’s political and economic rise also entailed a cultural change: The monasteries founded by kings and noble families and the newly created cathedral chapters became centers of intellectual life. The new proximity to king and empire was also reflected in the historiography produced in East Saxony from the mid-10th century onward: Chroniclers such as Widukind of Corvey, Thietmar of Merseburg, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim and the author of the so-called “older vita of Matilda” (Vita Mathildis reginae antiquior) recorded the history of the Saxon emperors and kings.
Otto the Great’s Itinerary

The Ottonians’ old center around the Harz was the basis of their power.

The map specifies the number of times and number of days the royal court sojourned in a given place or region.
Table of consanguinity of the Ottonians, Salians and Hohenstaufens

Chronica Sancti Pantaleonis, 2nd half of the 12th century. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 74.3 Aug 2°, fol. 114v (pag. 226)

This 12th century table of consanguinity pictures Henry I and Matilda at the top, set apart as the couple that founded a long line of emperors and kings. Beneath them in the center is their eldest son, Otto the Great.
“When Henry (I) beheld her [Matilda] and found her appearance to be radiant, he locked his gaze on the damsel, so very inflamed by love for her that their engagement brooked no delay ... At the break of the next day, she [was] ... escorted to the Saxon homeland until the wedding feast ... was celebrated in Wallhausen ... and he gave her the selfsame city with all appurtenances as a morning gift.”
The Ottonians
Henry I and thus his family, called the Ottonians after the dominant name Otto, attained the title of king in the Kingdom of the Franks. The genealogical table nevertheless reveals that, even in the Middle Ages, the male line of the family was not the sole point of reference. Otto’s mother Matilda also has her place in the genealogical table and embodies the relationship with Widukind, the great Duke of Saxony.

Individual Succession to the Throne and Family Conflicts
Unlike the Carolingians who had reigned earlier, Henry I introduced the principle of undivided succession in the empire. He designated his son Otto sole successor and this became the cause of numerous conflicts within the family. After prolonged struggles, Otto the Great ultimately asserted his authority: His coronation as king in Aachen in 936 was eventually followed by his coronation as emperor in Rome in 962.
Red samite robe, so-called “Cloak of Otto”  
Byzantium and Germany,  
10th – 12th century  
Merseburg, Domstift

Contrary to later accounts, the so-called Cloak of Otto was probably a donation from Henry II. Its attribution to Emperor Otto the Great nevertheless reveals the people of Merseburg’s awareness of and pride in being able to trace the foundation of their diocese back to him.
Chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg, II,10

“On the next day, that is, on the Feast of Lawrence, martyr of Christ, [August 10, 955], the king prostrated himself before God and made ... with many tears the vow: if, through the mediation of such an intercessor, Christ granted him victory and life on that day, then he intended to found a diocese in the city of Merseburg in honor of this victor over fire and to have his large palace under construction converted into a church.”

Crypt of Merseburg Cathedral
The cathedral and palace in Merseburg is an ensemble of outstanding historic Romanesque and Gothic architecture. Altered and expanded many times, the cathedral still bears Ottonian traces. The cathedral chapter’s rich archive and library and the cathedral treasury also attest to the diocese’s great importance. Among other things, the Merseburg Incantations, a famous work of Old High German literature from the Early Middle Ages, is on display in the exhibition in the south close.
Groups of nomadic Hungarians had invaded Central Europe time and again since the close of the 9th century. His organization of the defense against these plundering expeditions had been one of the most important underpinnings of Henry I’s assertion of power. Otto the Great’s victory over the Hungarians secured his power, too: On August 10, 955, an army under his command defeated the Hungarians once and for all at the Battle of Lechfeld near Augsburg. Putting an end to a decades-long foreign threat to the empire, this victory was an important impetus behind Otto the Great’s eminence in Europa and his later imperial coronation. Before the battle, Otto the Great had made a vow: If St. Lawrence, whose feast day it was, granted him victory, he would found a diocese in Merseburg. Otto ultimately kept his promise.

The Ottonian Imperial Church
Like later rulers, the Ottonians also availed themselves of the church to place their power on a solid basis and to administer their extensive domains as effectively as possible. With its dioceses and monasteries, the church – as opposed to the crown – had long-established structures and sacral authority at its disposal. Kings granted the bishops and the abbots of imperial abbies land, immunity from secular jurisdiction and sovereign rights such as minting coins, collecting tolls or holding markets. Learned clerics administered the estates and additionally served as political advisors and diplomats. Church estates were run like royal estates and provided the king taxes and bases on his constant travels through the empire.

Such a structure was all the more important in the newly converted territories. Conquest and mission were therefore also accompanied by the founding of dioceses, such as Merseburg, and monasteries. These ecclesiastical institutions created the first true governing structure in the Duchy of Saxony and, later, east of the Elbe as well.
Sarcophagus of Bernhard of Halberstadt in Halberstadt Cathedral

Having served as bishop for forty-five years, Bernhard of Halberstadt died on February 3, 968. His monumental limestone sarcophagus is preserved in the choir of Halberstadt Cathedral. It and the sarcophagus of Queen Matilda are the only surviving Ottonian-era sarcophagi in Saxony-Anhalt.
“When he [Otto] wanted to found a diocese there [in Magdeburg], too, he was unable to carry that through as long as Bernhard, the seventh Bishop of the church in Halberstadt, in whose diocese Magdeburg is located, was alive.”
Otto the Great wanted to establish an archdiocese in Magdeburg and thus a new center for missionary work among the heathens in the eastern empire. Fierce opposition to his plan formed, however, because it entailed the cession of territories and the curtailment of long-established dioceses’ power. The two most powerful opponents of the founding of an archdiocese were Bernhard, Bishop of Halberstadt, and Wilhelm, Archbishop of Mainz and an illegitimate son of Otto’s.

In 966, the tense situation between Otto I and Bishop Bernhard escalated into an open conflict: Otto I had the contentious Bernhard imprisoned in Quedlinburg over the Easter festival of 966. The bishop responded by excommunicating the emperor. Otto was only able to have his excommunication lifted by going to Halberstadt to beg forgiveness – as recounted in the Chronicle of the Diocese of Halberstadt. He was not able to realize his plan until the deaths of Bishop Bernhard of Halberstadt and Wilhelm von Mainz.

**Conflict and Conflict Resolution**
The Bishop of Halberstadt’s successful opposition to Otto’s plans reveals that a 10th century king and emperor did not have absolute power. The rules of the political game of the early medieval upper class were based on consensus and reconciliation of interests. Symbolic rituals and ceremonies were employed in the Middle Ages to establish order through mutual cooperation. The Chronicle of the Diocese of Halberstadt describes one such symbolic act to resolve a conflict in its account of the legend of Emperor Otto the Great walking barefoot to Halberstadt as a penitent and throwing himself at the bishop’s feet. The ritual of submission was, however, by no means a spontaneous gesture. On the contrary, detailed negotiations determined in advance what form atonement was to take.

**Conversion of the Heathens**
Expanding and protecting Christendom were some of the princely virtues of the Middle Ages. Otto the Great’s foundation of dioceses in the Elbe region, Havelberg and Brandenburg (948) and the archdiocese in Magdeburg, with its suffragan dioceses of Merseburg, Meissen and Zeitz (968), supported missionary work among the heathen West Slavs. They inhabited territories beyond the Elbe, which were the object of the Eastern Frankish kings and emperors’ territorial expansion.
Abbey Church of St. Cyriacus

The former abbey church is both one of the best preserved Ottonian churches and one of the oldest surviving churches in Northern Europe. It houses the oldest replica of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in all of Germany, which was erected there at the end of the 11th century for annual Passion plays.
“Further, [Margrave] Gero, the defender of the fatherland, went ... to Rome and, as an aged veteran, laid down his victorious weapons before the altar of Prince of the Apostles, Peter, and after obtaining an arm of St. Cyriacus from the Apostolic lord through his entreaties, he dedicated himself together with his all of his possessions to God. He returned to the fatherland and built in a forest a monastery, which is named after him [Gernrode].”
Following the loss of his last male heir, Gero, Margrave of the Saxon Eastern March and an important confidant of Otto the Great, had converted his castle into a monastery. In 961, he made a pilgrimage to Rome where he committed the newly founded community of canonesses in Gernrode to the Holy See. He brought an arm reliquary of St. Cyriacus back from this pilgrimage. The monumental church, the construction of which was begun during Gero’s lifetime and in which he was laid to rest after his death in 965, bears this martyr’s name to this day.

A Combative Margrave
Gero was one of Otto the Great’s most important followers. The king made him margrave at the important border to the Slavic territories along the central Elbe. Leading the Saxon nobility against the Slavs in Otto’s stead, Gero not only defended the border but also subjugated the territory between the Elbe and the Oder and thus launched the conversion of this region.

The appointment of trustworthy followers, such as Gero or Hermann Billung, to key posts also precipitated conflicts, however, with Otto’s own family and with nobles that laid claim to these posts.

A Union of Nobility Based on Personal Ties
The empire in the High Middle Ages should not be understood as a unified territory. The king’s power meant power over peoples, not over territory. Nobles swore fealty to a particular king, not to the empire, not to the institution of “king”. For this reason, too, the king exercised his power while constantly riding through his empire. This is called itinerant kingship: His presence in person was essential for functioning governance.

Margrave Gero furnishes an example of such a close personal relationship with a ruler and of the manner in which Otto’s and his successors’ power functioned.
The so-called Gospels of Otto and Adelaide are one of the most precious pieces in the Quedlinburg cathedral treasury. The Byzantine ivory in the book cover had probably reached Quedlinburg through the Ottonian family. Gifts and donations of works of art from all of Europe made the expansive geographical horizon of the Ottonian emperors’ power evident to their contemporaries.
“Thence he went to Quedlinburg, where he spent the Easter festival [973] thanking God and in earthly pleasure. At the emperor’s command, the Dukes Miseco [Mieszko I of Poland] and Bolizlav [Boleslav II of Bohemia] as well as the envoys of the Greeks, the Beneventans, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Danes and Slavs together with all notables of the entire empire all hastened thither.”
Shortly before Otto the Great’s death, a magnificent imperial court festival was held in Quedlinburg at Easter on March 23, 973. Envoys from much of Europe attended and held diplomatic talks with the emperor. Chronicles additionally tell of legations from the Caliph of Cordoba and from the Kievan Rus. The court festival and the delegations from afar showed Otto the Great at the peak of his power and demonstrated the European dimension of his power. At the same time, Quedlinburg proved to be a center of the empire, which was closely tied to the Ottonian family and, along with Magdeburg, was one of their favorite official residences.

Saxony as a Political Center
Saxony, the Ottonians’ stem duchy, was accorded a special role in the early history of the empire. Its location on the eastern border made Saxony extremely strategically important to the protection of the empire against the incursions of Hungarians and West Slavs. Ottonian rulers frequently sojourned in Saxony where they had abundant possessions and incorporated the sites of their palaces and foundations in their dynastic and royal policy. Quedlinburg, a fortress on the eastern frontier since Henry I’s day and the site of his and his wife Matilda’s burial, evolved into the center of familial memorialization and the location of the palace in which Easter was customarily celebrated.

European Ties
Envoys from all over Europe made their way to this new royal territory. Moreover, the clearest sign of the Saxon emperors’ international ties were their marriages with women from higher European nobility. Henry I’s wife Matilda was descended from Widukind, Duke of Saxony. Otto the Great’s first wife Eadgyth came from the English royal house of Wessex. His second wife Adelaide was the King of Burgundy’s daughter and Queen of Italy. Otto II’s wife was the Byzantine princess Theophanu. These women brought their spouses higher rank, new loyal followers and extensive ties. Ottonian women also married into European royal houses in the Kingdom of the Western Franks, Lorraine and Hungary. Ottonian power was ultimately part of a network of international dynastic relationships.
Marriage certificate of Empress Theophanu
Rome, April 14, 972
(MGH D O II, 21)
Wolfenbüttel, Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv,
Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel, 6 Urk 11.
“May the zeal of all those, who are faithful to God’s holy church and us now and in the future, know that ... as rightful wedding gift our very beloved bride ... has been let have by us certain estates within the Italian borders as well as in our domains north of the alps, which she is supposed to receive and have possession of under perpetual right, ... also our imperial courts, befitting our own majesty, Boppard, Tiel, Herford, Tilleda, Nordhausen ...”
The first known mention of the imperial and royal palace at Tilleda comes from the year 972 when Emperor Otto II presented it to his wife Theophanu as a dowry (dos). The dowry given to the Byzantine Theophanu by the Ottonians was extraordinarily extensive: Their intention was to document the vastness of the Ottonian Empire south and north of the Alps and thus to underscore the power of western emperorship, which was still quite new compared with Byzantium’s ancient eastern Roman emperorship. Theophanu thus received the aforementioned courts, which were worthy of an emperor.

Itinerant Kingship
The kingdom of the High Middle Ages did not have a capital. Nor did the king routinely reign from a capital. On the one hand, the infrastructure and communication capabilities for a centrally controlled administration were lacking. On the other hand, the king’s personal appearance on the ground was essential in order to make the kingdom visible and tangible to his subjects and to maintain contact with local leadership. The itinerancy of the king and his court, a group consisting of court officials, clergy, servants and assistants, which could be comprised of over 300 and, in exceptional cases, as many as 1000 people, made a staged system of accommodations in the kingdom essential. Palaces and royal courts or episcopal cities and monasteries, in which the court could take up quarters, were each located twenty to thirty kilometers apart, approximately equivalent to a day’s journey of the royal retinue.

Royal Palaces
Unlike the Byzantine emperor’s palace in Constantinople, where Theophanu had grown up, most Ottonian palaces tended to be modest complexes. They nevertheless provided a measure of comfort and, unlike basic royal estates, boasted representative buildings: a large hall with the so-called aula regia (royal hall), a living area and a chapel as well as fortifications and domestic outbuildings. An outer bailey or an outer courtyard provided lodgings for tradesmen, merchants and court servants. The court was supplied by the farms and estates belonging to the palace.
Depiction of the Last Judgment in the so-called “Bamberg Apocalypse”
Reichenau, ca. 1010, Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, Msc. Bibl.140, fol. 53r
Flanked by angels and Apostles, Christ appears with the cross as Judge of
the world. Trumpets call the dead from their graves. Two angels hold scrolls
with judgments deciding over entry into the eternal Kingdom of God (left) or
eternal damnation (right).
**Memleben Abbey and Royal Palace**
The magnificent ruins of the 13th century Gothic abbey church fit idyllically into the ambience between the abbey garden and the close buildings. Preserved in its original state, the late Romanesque crypt in particular makes Memleben a unique cultural destination.

The original walls as well as a reconstructed floor plan of the first, 10th century abbey church attest to the erstwhile importance of the earlier imperial abbey in Memleben, which was thoroughly comparable with the abbeys in Fulda and Reichenau.

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**Chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg, II,43**

“Thence ... he [Otto the Great] came to Miminlevo [Memleben] on Tuesday before Pentecost and still sat quite merrily at table on the following day. After the meal, however, he became ... unwell and fainted. Those standing right there caught him and carried him to a daybed, whereupon he ... gave up his spirit among everyone’s prayers ... In the following night, his viscera were interred in St. Mary’s Church [in Memleben]. His body, however, was brought to Magdeburg embalmed.”
Like his father Henry I before him in July of 936, Emperor Otto the Great died at his palace in Memleben on May 7, 973. His internal organs were interred in a St. Mary’s Church there but, at his own wish, his corpse was translated to Magdeburg Cathedral. Later, Otto II and Theophanu founded a Benedictine abbey in Memleben, the place of Otto the Great’s death. The monks were supposed to provide for memoria for him as well as for Emperor Otto II and his wife. Otto II had endowed the abbey abundantly with property and rights. His successor Otto III granted the monastic community at Memleben the right to hold markets, mint coins and collect tolls.

Dying in the Middle Ages
In Otto the Great’s day, death was considered to be a stage in life, not the end of it. It commenced a period of waiting until the Last Judgment and resurrection. People expected that the returning Christ would pronounce judgment over their eternal life or eternal damnation. From this perspective, earthly life became preparation for death and, ultimately, the Last Judgment.

Naturally, this applied to the emperor in particular. As God’s steward on earth, he bore particular responsibility for the commonweal until the commencement of Christ’s reign. The “just emperor” was the ideal deserving of emulation. Surviving family members also rendered posthumous assistance to emperors for the salvation of their souls.

Memoria
Memleben Abbey was built to create a place of prayer and a site of memoria for Otto the Great, his son and his wife.

In a broad sense, memoria is a society’s memory or the culture of memory in general. In a narrower sense, it denotes the ritual commemoration of the dead, which establishes a fellowship between the living and the dead. The living prayed for the salvation of the souls of the dead and performed rituals to preserve the memory of the dead until their resurrection on Judgment Day.
Ivory plaque with Christ in Majesty and Otto I as the founder of Magdeburg Cathedral
Milan, between 962 and 973
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
“At her [Eadgyth’s] urging, he began to build the city of Magdeburg ... for he acquired this city for the sake of eternal recompense and for the salvation of the fatherland. ... The emperor also had precious marble together with gold and gems brought to Magdeburg, and he commanded that relics of the saints be enclosed in all of the capitals of the columns. ... In this church, he himself desired to lie and most zealously ensured that a tomb was prepared for him there while he was still alive.”
When they married in 929, Otto the Great gave his first wife, the English princess Eadgyth, Magdeburg as a dowry. The two of them patronized the then-frontier outpost, where they also frequently sojourned, presumably until Otto’s election as king in 937. Afterward, he founded an abbey under the patronage of St. Mauritius there, which he showered with gifts time and again. Eventually, he conceived the plan to found an archdiocese, which he was able to make reality in 968. Upon his death in 973, Otto, at his own wish, was laid to rest in Magdeburg Cathedral, as had been his first wife Eadgyth before him.

From Royal City to Metropolis
Thietmar of Merseburg describes the magnificent materials and the numerous relics with which Otto had his cathedral decorated. Following the tradition of Charlemagne in Aachen, he had classical porphyry columns incorporated in the cathedral. The construction and decoration of this cathedral, the granting of the right to collect tolls, hold markets and mint coins and other privileges to the city, and, finally, the establishment of an archdiocese in Magdeburg brought about the “new Rome’s” rapid rise in the eastern empire. The royal court sojourned nowhere else more frequently during the reign of Otto the Great.

Emperorship
The Eastern Frankish king Otto the Great married Adelaide, the widow of the King of Italy, in 951. This second marriage not only got him closer to the imperial crown, linked with rule over Italy since Charlemagne, through the crown of Italy but also brought him an exceptionally educated and wealthy wife, who introduced him to the Roman cultural tradition. His victory over the Hungarians in 955 ultimately paved his way for his coronation as emperor in Rome in 962.

This new imperial dimension and the claim to universal dominion were reflected and made visible to the whole world in Magdeburg’s architecture and, above all, its decoration, the Ottonian family’s donations to monasteries, works of art and sumptuous manuscripts. By founding an archdiocese in the metropolis where he had himself entombed, Otto the Great had sought an exclusive form of memoria, which he also attained. Nowhere did this emperor leave as many traces behind as in Magdeburg. The emperor remained a presence in his city through its evocation of Otto the Great as lord of the city in portraits, chronicles and charters.
From the Middle Ages onward, Otto the Great was revered in Magdeburg as the patron of the city and the founder of the archdiocese. In all probability, this freestanding equestrian statue, which was the first since antiquity and was created in Magdeburg in the mid-13th century, portrays this emperor.
At the close of the Ottonian era, Magdeburg had risen from being a Carolingian frontier outpost to being the center of an archdiocese. In just one hundred years, East Saxony had evolved from being a region on the periphery of the Roman Empire to being a royal territory, which was highly integrated in the new empire. Although they set other priorities, Otto the Great’s successors nevertheless still frequently sojourned in the territory between the Harz and the Elbe. Henry II still called the city of Magdeburg “locum illum quem totum corde deligimus” (that place we love with our whole heart) in a charter from 1006.

The Dawn of German History?
In the 19th century, Otto the Great and his father Henry I were regarded as the founders of a German empire. Scholars overlooked the fact that the term regnum teutonicum (German empire) did not appear until the close of the 11th century as well as the Ottonian rulers’ continuity with the Carolingian Empire. The historian Bernd Schneidmüller formulated it thusly:

“Otto acted as a Frankish king from Saxon lands on a European scale.”

A “German” dimension is not yet discernible. Germany’s evolution was a continual development over several centuries, for which the Ottonian rulers provided other impetuses. Otto the Great nevertheless laid the groundwork for its later development through his deeds: He united the Bavarii, Alemani, Saxons and Franks in the Kingdom of the Eastern Franks against foreign threats for a long time to come, thus distinguishing himself from the group of Frankish subkings. He attained the emperorship and the ensuing perpetual union of the Kingdom of the Franks north of the Alps and Italy, which constituted the Holy Roman Empire.
Saxony-Anhalt has a greater abundance of medieval architectural monuments from the Romanesque era than any other German state. These stone witnesses recall an epoch between 950 and 1250 when a center of political power emerged in the region of present-day Saxony-Anhalt.

This invaluable wealth of internationally acclaimed cultural-historically and architecturally valuable architectural monuments prompted the creation of the cultural tourism route of the “Romanesque Road” in 1993. It connects eighty Romanesque buildings in sixty-five locations with one another over a distance of over 1,000 km. The capital city of Magdeburg is the point where the routes laid out in a figure eight intersect and subdivides the “Romanesque Road” into a northern and a southern route. In its twenty-year history, the “Romanesque Road” has evolved into one of Germany’s most important vacation routes and takes 1.6 million culture and history lovers on a fascinating trip to medieval times every year. Visitors transported back to this eventful period of the formation and consolidation of the empire, can investigate historical events against the authentic backdrop of cathedrals, monasteries, treasure chambers, castles and village churches. The “Romanesque Road” is intimately linked with the history of the Ottonians, who made the territory of present-day Saxony-Anhalt one of Europe’s cultural and political centers. Tourist attractions on the “Romanesque Road” include Magdeburg Cathedral, the final resting place of Otto the Great and his wife Eadgyth, the Cathedral of St. Mary in Havelberg, and the cathedrals and cathedral treasuries in Naumburg, Merseburg, Halberstadt and Quedlinburg, home to the largest collections of medieval religious art in the world. Other important sites are the Abbey Church of St. Cyriacus in Gernrode with the Holy Sepulcher, the oldest replica of the tomb of Christ in Germany, Memleben Abbey, the place of Otto the Great’s and his father Henry I’s death, the royal palace at Tilleda, within sight of the majestic Kyffhäuser, and Wallhausen, the probable birthplace of Otto the Great. Since 2007, the “Romanesque Road” has been part of the European cultural route TRANSROMANICA, which connects European regions in eight countries.
“Saxony-Anhalt – Land of the Ottonians
From the Periphery to a Central Region in Europe”
An exhibition by the Zentrum für Mittelalterausstellungen at the Kulturhistorisches Museum Magdeburg

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