

**Theses of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

***Ruzi, Poloni, Ungari, facti sunt christiani.* Die  
ottonische Missionspolitik in der historiographischen  
Erinnerungskultur des mittelalterlichen Reiches**

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## 1. Objectives of the dissertation and the outlines of the research topic

The topic of the present PhD thesis is the representation of the missionary politics of the first dynasty of the Holy Roman Empire, the Liudolfing House (919-1024) or better known the Ottonians, in medieval German historiography. The purpose of the dissertation is twofold: on the one hand, it seeks to critically examine the individual works that contain any information on Otto-era spatial policy. On the other hand, it examines the available resources as they are related to the representation and interpretation of the 10th century Holy Roman Empire and its missionary activities towards Central, Eastern and Northern Europe.

The dissertation deals primarily with narrative historical sources, that reflect upon the events of their own age or that of the recent or distant past, with the intention to reconstruct the occurrences taken place. The present study, however, goes beyond the interpretative framework, investigating not only the classical genres (chronicles, *gestae*, histories, and annals), but also include hagiographic works (legends and *vitae*), letters, or even narrative poems.

The *chronological* framework of the dissertation ranges from the first half of the 10th century to the first quarter of the 16th century. From the beginning, it was always a major problem to identify the periods of the research, as the earliest sources were contemporaries, being traced back to the 10th century, but it was much more difficult to determine the terminus representing the “end” of medieval German historiography. It was a conceptual decision that the end of medieval historiography should be the Reformation, that is to say, there are narrative sources in the present thesis that can be rightfully classified as medieval historiographical works (although in some texts like Hartmann Schedel’s *Liber Chronicorum* or the *Historia Bohemica* by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini already pursue the objectives of the humanist historiography), but at the same time the Reformation also appears in these works to some extent.

The *geographical* framework of the dissertation is provided by the Holy Roman Empire, as the narrative sources being included in the present thesis were written between the constantly changing borders of the medieval Holy Roman Empire. as described in pages 10-16. century German-Roman Empire was constantly evolving. This created further difficulties of interpretation since the multiethnic character of the empire also demanded some space for works that did originate in the non-German-speaking territories of the empire, such as the

Papal State, Burgundy, Upper Lorraine, Alsace and Flanders. For this reason, neither the title nor the topic can and should not include a statement that the dissertation deals with medieval “German” historiography but rather than with the historiography of the Holy Roman Empire, which is not only conceptual but also an explicitly practical difference.

The theoretical-conceptual framework of the thesis is determined by the concept of “Remembrance Culture” (*Erinnerungskultur*), more precisely the historiographical Remembrance Culture. By this approach, the dissertation could go beyond the textual criticism and would be able to track the evolution of representation and interpretation of the Ottonian mission politics, placing it into a social and cultural context. The *Erinnerungskultur* (basing on the conceptual premises elaborated by Maurice Halbwachs, Jan and Aleida Assmann or Astrid Erll, for instance) could become the fingerprint of historical and cultural variables throughout the ages and it means in the context of the present dissertation, that it could be possible to specify a general collective memory of the Ottonian church policy (including the missionary activities, Christianization and church organization in Central and Eastern Europe) in the geographical regions and in the rich historiographical tradition examined in the dissertation.

## **2. Applied methodology**

The applied methods of the dissertation changed based on the two major parts of the work. The preparation of the PhD thesis (starting from the arduous search of the texts that became the part of the analysis to the elaboration of the text) took over a decade and went through different stages, that required different approaches and methodology, thus significantly changing and refining the final work.

The first, longer unit of the dissertation is the so-called descriptive part (Deskriptiver Teil). It describes 178 narrative sources, that dealt with the different questions of the Ottonian mission politics to any extent. These narrative sources were divided into geographical regions based on their origin (real or presumed), postulating that the place of origin is decisive for the content of the texts, and thus, through content analysis, even entire group of chronicles can be identified. The geographical regions examined are the following (not including the non-German speaking areas already mentioned in the previous section): Alemannia; Austria

(excluding Salzburg); Bavaria (excluding Austria); Brandenburg; Upper Rhineland; Franconia; the Hanseatic cities (Bremen and Lübeck); Mecklenburg; the State of the German Knighthood; the Rhine region (principally the Archdiocese of Cologne) and the Rhine-Franconia; Saxony (broken down separately for Ostfalia, the Archdiocese of Magdeburg, Lower and Upper Saxony, and Lower and Upper Lausitz); the territory of the Archdiocese of Salzburg; Swabia; Thuringia; Westphalia.

The descriptive part is primarily of analytical nature examining sources one by one using textual critical methods, forming the larger unit of the dissertation. The examined sources were divided by regions on the one hand, and are listed in chronological order, starting from the earliest works to the latest ones. Chronology is important not only in determining the date of creation of works but rather in determining the source value of the individual works.

Using the traditional method of source analysis, we were interested in the following questions: (a) the author of the work or in the case of anonymous works, the discourse upon the authorship; b.) the date of origin, if it can be ascertained; c.) the circumstance of the survival of the source, whether it is preserved in its original (perhaps autographic) form, or a copy, including the manuscript tradition of the work, and the language; d.) and finally, we examined statements of the works in relation to the Ottonian mission policy, and what are the direct sources of their information. The following topics were taken into consideration in the content analysis: the role of the rulers of the Liudolfingian dynasty from King Henry I the Fowler of Germany to Emperor Henry II in the missions to Central and Eastern Europe, ie the Elbe Slavic territories, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, the Kievan Rus and Denmark; b.) the organization of churches in the areas affected by the Ottonian mission policy, namely the establishment of archdioceses and bishoprics (Archdiocese of Magdeburg and their suffragan bishoprics – Brandenburg, Havelberg, Merseburg, Meissen, Zeitz-Naumburg and Poznań –, as well the Danish dioceses of Schleswig, Ripen and Aarhus, the Diocese of Oldenburg and the Diocese of Bamberg), that were important for the Elbe Slavic conversion; c.) and the activities of certain missionary monks, especially St. Adalbert of Prague and St. Bruno of Querfurt.

In terms of methodology, the name of Nóra BEREND (University of Cambridge) also should be mentioned, who, in several studies elaborated the methodology for researching the mission history of early medieval Europe, especially in her concise 2008 study (*Cristianización y formación de Estados en Escandinavia y en la Europa Centro-oriental*). Using this, the

describing part of the dissertation focuses on the following issues and issues in the analysis of the missionary history of each ruler: a.) the contact between the Ottonian rulers and the area subjected to the christianization prior to the actual missionary activities (*evidencias de contactos, especialmente de aquéllos conducentes a la cristianización, antes del bautismo del gobernante*); b.) the baptism of the rulers of the pagan territories and the possible participation of the Ottonians in the baptism (*bautismo del gobernante*); c.) the possible opposition to the convalescent activity of the German Imperial Church (*'rebeliones paganas'*) and, last but not least, d.) the historians' perception of the process of remuneration (*manifestación de percepciones medievales de los procesos de conversión*). The dissertation did not include an analysis of all the aspects outlined by Berend, such as the pagan cults of pre-Christianity, the cult of post-congregation, and the cult of the parishioners, especially those of the converted rulers and missionaries.

The so-called systematic part (Systematischer Teil) is, in contrast to the first one, is a synthetic unit seeks to examine the sources involved in their totality. This section analyzes the participation of members of the Bavarian branch of the Liudolfingian Dynasty, more precisely Gisela, Queen Consort of Hungary and her son, Prince Emeric of Hungary. Although Gisela, as the sister of Emperor Henry II and Emeric, were not directly involved in the conversion of Hungary, but due to their kinship and relation with the Bavarian Liudolfing House, and their role described in the analysed sources, they deserved to be included in our analysis, as individuals who played a significant role in the beginnings of the Hungarian Christianity and the consolidation of the Christian faith in Hungary. The analysis of the sources about the role of Gisela and Emeric occurred in a synthetic way dividing them into three major groups. This methodological approach was inspired by the tripartite system of Fernand BRAUDEL (1949) of the "long term" (*longue durée*), grouping the historical events and their reconstruction in three categories: the "eventual history" (*histoire événementielle*), the second, known as the "history of conjunctures" (*histoire conjoncturelle*) and the "structural history" (*histoire structurelle*). In our opinion, the contemporary resources and their information fall into the first group; it is not yet clear how each piece of information will survive, how it would affect the historical memory, and thus shaping the historical thinking. The second group includes those sources that emerged at least fifty to one hundred years after the events, and where certain recurring elements and motifs can be found. The third group comprise the sources – or rather the

statements made by the sources – that were written hundreds of years later and sometimes these narratives even compete with the statements of contemporary sources.

### **3. Scientific achievement of the dissertation**

With the above mentioned theoretical and methodological background, the thesis has reached several conclusions which are partly in line with the experimental conclusions formulated in the topic, but partly lead to different results.

It has become clear that some of the information in the sources show strong geographical variations. For obvious reasons, the establishment of the Archbishopric of Magdeburg is essential, together with the presentation of the conversion of the Elbe Slavic (primarily the Lutician) territories in the Saxon historiography. The most important source here is the chronicles by Widukind of Corvey and Thietmar of Merseburg. On the other hand, the conversion of the Obodrits and Northern Elbingia (especially the establishment of the Diocese of Oldenburg) as well the Christianization of Denmark have a much more prominent role in the historiography the Lower Saxonian territories and the Hanseatic towns. In this area, the bishopric and regional chronicles by Adam of Bremen and Helmold of Bosau are the most important sources for later historians. Another important area of the Ottonian mission was Bavaria, and her historiographical memory was highly inspired by the motif of the “Lorch tradition”. According to this tradition, the predecessor of the Diocese of Passau was the Bishopric of Lorch destroyed by the Avars in the early Middle Ages. that instigated Bishop Pilgrim of Passau to make forged charters claiming the missionary and canonical authority over Hungary and independence of Passau from the Archbishop of Salzburg. Until the end of the Middle Ages, these forgeries of the 10th century determined the position of Bavarian historiography to the Ottonian missionary policy and the place and role of the Bishopric of Passau in the early medieval imperial church. St. Wolfgang of Regensburg and his mission to Hungary also appear in this narrative tradition.

There are several issues in the dissertation that are echoed not only in local historiography. The most important of these is the foundation of the Bishopric of Bamberg (1007), which is included in most of the narrative sources examined. However, while Bamberg played an important role in the Christianization of the Slavs at the Main River according to the contemporary sources (as it appears in the letter by Bishop Arnulf of Halberstadt), the later historian tradition only considered the establishment of the new diocese as the pious act of Emperor Henry II, without significance in mission politics. However, the founding of the Bamberg diocese can be found in the historiographic tradition of each region.

There are regional historiographical traditions that have a very definite reception of a narrative source, such as the reception of the chronicle of Cosmas of Prague in Bohemia, who developed a very specific tradition, independent of the German-speaking territories. In his 12th century chronicle, St. Adalbert of Prague and Duke St. Wenceslas of Bohemia play the lead roles, though Cosmas does not overlook the connection with the German Imperial Church. In his historical work, Cosmas successfully combines earlier hagiographic traditions (both for Wenceslas and Adalbert) with his own narrative. As far as Thuringia is concerned, we can see that not only the University of Erfurt, founded in the late 14th century but also long before the Benedictine monastery dedicated to St. Peter of Erfurt also influenced the Thuringian historiography of later periods in terms of the Ottonian mission policy.

Contrary to initial ideas, it was not possible to discover "motivation" for political purposes in depicting the missionary policy of the ruler. This is especially true in cases where historians of the Investiture Contest (such as Lampert of Hersfeld) or authors of late-medieval ecclesiastical treatises (such as Dietrich von Nieheim), regardless of their own pro- or anti-papal, highly regarded the missionary activities of the Ottonians.

The lack of pronounced political statements may not necessarily mean a lack of political intent; in the majority of cases, it may simply be the case that of authors of world chronicles (such as Frutolf of Michelsberg) or authors of historical works of canon law (such as Lupold von Bebenburg) had only access to the same chronicles, and by the 12th century, some extent of "canon" was developed in the evaluation of the Ottonian missionary politics, using the works of well-known authors, such as Widukind, Thietmar, Adam of Bremen, Sigebert of

Gembloux, or Adalbert of Bamberg. This can lead the research from the examination of political ideas and historical view to more recent approaches, such as information history or the history of ideas.

As the person of Henry I. the Fowler and his role in the Christianization concerns, there was a full-blown view by the second half of the 10th century stating that he played a role not only in defeating the Elbe Slavs and annexing them to the Kingdom of Germany but during his reign the conversion of the Obodrites and the Danes had already begun. Although in the 10th century this was seen as a process independent of Henry, in which the German king played no incentive role, from the 11th century onwards, the role of King Henry became more and more prevalent as the “apostle” of the Slavs and Danes (or “Normans”).

Emperor Otto I. the Great is clearly one of the greatest figures in the missionary policy of the Ottonian period, not only for his contemporaries but for historians of later periods. His most important achievement was undoubtedly the establishment of the Archdiocese of Magdeburg, which, with a few exceptions, is presented in almost all the sources examined. His activities can be found mainly in the *Gesta of Widukind of Corvey*, whose detailed narration is supported by the charters. Most historians of later ages, following his footsteps, gave a fundamentally factual picture of Otto’s work in mission and church organization, in which the difficulty of establishing the Archdiocese of Magdeburg can only rarely be found (primarily in the debate of Otto the Great with his illegitimate son, Archbishop William of Mainz).

Emperor Otto II received a rather unfavourable image according to Thietmar of Merseburg and his, mainly Saxonian followers, which was based on the abolition of the Bishopric of Merseburg (981). Not only the emperor but Giseler, the later Archbishop of Magdeburg, who played a key role in the dissolution of the diocese, became a distinctly negative figure in the Saxonian historical thinking throughout the Middle Ages, in which Giseler emerges as an opportunistic and careerist prelate.

III. Otto is a great example for the phenomenon, in which a ruler, who played a very important role in the church organization of the Central and Eastern European states (especially the establishment of the Archbishop of Gniezno and the sending of the crown for



King St. Stephen of Hungary) and his contemporaries (Thietmar of Merseburg, Bruno of Querfurt, as well the Annals of Hildesheim and Quedlinburg) also gave detailed account about Otto's role in mission policy, the memory of the missionary activity of Emperor Otto faded completely shortly after his death. His reign (or more precisely: the period of his reign) is primarily tied not to his own actions, but to the missionary activity and martyrdom of St. Adalbert of Prague.

The person of Emperor II. Henry is similar to that of Emperor Otto I. in the Erinnerungskultur of the Ottonian mission policy. Henry played a paramount important role in the reorganization of the Bishopric of Merseburg, the establishment of the Diocese of Bamberg and the conversion of the Hungarians and "Slavs". Bamberg does not appear as a missionary centre in the historiography of the Middle Ages, although the founding charter of the bishopric mentions this function. Even more interesting, however, that Emperor Henry II, who had been heavily criticized by his contemporary Bruno of Querfurt for his alliance with the pagan Lutici, Henry appeared shortly after his death as the "apostle" of the Hungarians (due to this role he shared with his sister, Queen Gisela of Hungary). From the end of the 11th century (inspired by the work of Heimo of St. Jakob), the motif of the "Apostle of Slavs" was added to the emperor's person, that became the unquestionable evidence of Henry's sanctity in his canonization bull of 1146, which eventually dominated the medieval German historical thinking on Emperor Henry II.

Queen Gisela of Hungary, the sister of Emperor Henry II appears in a dual role in the historian tradition of the medieval Holy Roman Empire. On the one hand, she emerged as a passive character, who was given by his brother King Stephen of Hungary as some sort of "reward" (most of the sources describe him as a pagan ruler) for converting his people to Christianity. At the same time, Gisela's figure has a feature – and many of the sources mention this aspect – in which Gisela plays an active (moreover very proactive) role in the conversion of St. Stephen and the Hungarians. Her son, Prince St. Emeric (whose figure shows many parallels to his uncle) played not so much a role in establishing the Christianity in Hungary, but rather in the strengthening of the Christian faith, at least as far as the spontaneous cult around his person and the Hungarian or non-Hungarian historians acknowledge that.

We are convinced that the results of the dissertation highlight that there may be available space for studying medieval historiographic works as they might be used not only for the reconstruction of the events of political or church history but also in terms of their source value for understanding the historical thinking of the researched era. In such a paradigm, it is no longer justified, for instance, to consider late medieval world chronicles as worthless compilations that do not bring the reader closer to understanding events of the past. A research in the field of the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* needs to go beyond philological inquiry and it has to be accessible to the entire history as academic discipline, and it must include the complete (or nearly complete) range of sources that are somehow related for the events investigated, thus they could bring us closer to the thinking of the past embedded in the larger context of historical memory.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapters (2)

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