GOD IN HISTORY:
RELIGION AND HISTORICAL MEMORY IN OTTONIAN GERMANY

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GOD IN HISTORY:

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DEDICATION

To Laura, with all the love in my heart
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

For Ottonian Germany and the Saxon Kings, one of the primary works available to modern scholars is Thietmar of Merseburg’s *Chronicon*, written in the early eleventh century.¹ Thietmar was Bishop of Merseburg from 1009-1018. He wrote the *Chronicon* for his contemporary, King Henry II (1002-1024). Thietmar is also noteworthy for his founding of the *Merseburger Dom*, or Merseburg Cathedral, begun in the middle portion of his time as bishop and added to throughout much of the early modern period. The Cathedral was one of the reasons that Henry II found himself frequently in Merseburg.² Thietmar’s motivations for writing the *Chronicon* were to convey to Henry the greatness of the Ottonian line and, accordingly, Thietmar detailed battles and the political framework of the past kings.

However, Thietmar also felt that as a bishop it was his duty to inform the new king of incidents and actions that had not found grace in the eyes of God. Recognizing that all written documents bear the influence of their authors and are thus reflective of

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¹ I have chosen to use the spelling of “Thietmar,” though it is of note that in Merseburg, around Leipzig, and in eastern European literature the spelling is Dietmar. Thietmar is used here in line with the anglicized spelling.
circumstances contemporary to the author as much as they are descriptions of the past allows one to use a source, such as the *Chronicon*, to explore the author’s views and understandings of his society. Thietmar’s work offers great insight into how the people of the day experienced religion and their God in their daily lives and the way that they understood their circumstances. The actions of the past, particularly the work and influence of God, held great meaning because they served as an example for the future. God acted through history. It was only when people failed to adhere to the earlier examples that God had to act in the present; when he acted, it was through historical forms. Furthermore, it was through God’s historical actions that people related their experiences.

The concepts of memory and remembering are central to Thietmar’s work. Thietmar stated that he himself was writing as a means for “preserving the character of the times through the memory of writing.”\(^3\) He was mindful of his role in the greater picture to offer a record of past events. Thietmar declares that he wished to act “as the whetstone [sharpening] the iron but not itself.”\(^4\) His work is the whetstone and future readers are the iron, and he intended his readers to return to his work, to his examples, to find inspiration and guidance. There is a sense that Thietmar believed and recognized that events and people, who are not written about, will not be remembered. One example of this is an early admission by Thietmar in which he stated there are “many deeds of our King and Emperor” that are worthy of remembrance. It saddened Thietmar that because

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\(^3\) Thietmari Merseburgensis Episcopi, *Chronicon*, ed. Werner Trillmich, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), I. 19

he could not offer an accurate account of them, he had to omit them.\textsuperscript{5} Some of his desire to write was because writing the deeds of men in the temporal world to solidify their remembrance paralleled his own belief that acceptance to the kingdom of heaven was granted only to those inscribed in the book of life, to those whom God “remembers.”

Thietmar viewed himself as offering a service by recounting the deeds of others, though as mentioned above, he could only do so much. Patrick Geary offers a warning to historians in this regard when he states that those “who control the past…direct the future.” He argues that the creators of history have it within their power to determine what information was useful and what could be forgotten.\textsuperscript{6} Although Geary’s particular concern is how an “official” memory developed as monks transformed numerous charters into bound cartularies during the eleventh century, his point serves to illustrate a very real problem facing historians: we can only know what they felt obligated to include within their documents. Geary suggests that over time a new vision of the past would emerge, either from the willful exclusion of certain things, or from genuine mistakes. Geary emphasizes that many times historians were writing after the fact, removed from the original events, and therefore did not have the context to illustrate the political and social workings of the past adequately; without context, comprehension is impossible.\textsuperscript{7} It is important to note that this is not a dismissive observation, rather a warning to historians of the outside influences that can have an impact on and alter memory.

\textsuperscript{5} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, I.28


\textsuperscript{7} Geary, \textit{Phantoms of Remembrance}, p. 132.
Because memory is a tool, both in the decision process of what to include as well as when individuals write up documents after the fact, it is useful to understand how people create memories. Geary details the possible four processes which humans use for the assimilation of information. The first is visual association, a process in which the brain recognizes unfamiliar objects as similar to objects already known. Second is analogy, during which the brain remembers items as how they are like something else. Third is general logic through the use of patterns. Lastly, one can use labels and names which, for Geary, is the most important as naming data increases retention.8 This understanding of how memory works will prove very helpful in analyzing Thietmar’s work.

The next chapter discusses the ways that scholars have used Thietmar. Often, this has been towards an understanding of the political framework of Ottonian Germany. However, more recently, scholars working both on Thietmar and medieval society in general, have done so with an eye toward understanding from the perspective of memory and social mentalities. In chapter three, I turn to discussion of Thietmar’s thoughts and beliefs on social hierarchy in the world of the living. This includes a brief overview of the political landscape of Ottonian Germany. Following this in chapters four and five, I discuss the dead, for they appear frequently in Thietmar’s work. First, I look to the dead and recently deceased in chapter four to understand their place in medieval society as well as Thietmar’s own understanding of the dead. In chapter five, I turn to discussion of relics, both of martyrs and of saints, and also the place of martyrs and saints within Thietmar’s work, including the ways that he and his contemporaries understood relics.

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and the holy deceased. Finally, in chapter six, I discuss the three ways in which Thietmar understood and experienced God: as a protector, as a God of vengeance, and as a supreme judge both in this world and the next.
CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY

As it is the intention of this thesis to explain Thietmar in terms of historical memory, the work of memory, and the influence of historical forms and precedents on the understanding of contemporary circumstances, explanation of how some historians have understood Thietmar is necessary. The majority of scholarship surrounding Thietmar focuses on the Ottonian line of German kings and Saxon society under their rule. Thietmar’s position in Merseburg on the eastern side of the Empire makes his *Chronicon* a key source for scholars interested in early Polish history and German/Slavic relations beginning with the Ottonians. Thietmar and his *Chronicon* have always been considered necessary for a modern understanding of Germany under the Ottonians. As a brief example, one can look to Eduard Hlawitschka. Hlawitschka’s *Vom Frankenreich* is an overview of the period 840-1046. While Thietmar gets very little attention in the bulk of the book, he carries a large presence and is constantly referred to as the “next step” for those studying the Ottonians or Polish history.⁹

There have been two major trends in the historiography in the analysis of Ottonian Germany and Thietmar himself through Thietmar’s *Chronicon*. The first and more dominant trend is to use Thietmar’s work toward an understanding of the political

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landscape of Germany under the Ottonians, whereas the second and far different approach is to examine Thietmar in the context of memory and with an understanding of how memory shapes constructions of the past. This also includes a focus on social mentalities and understandings.

Scholarship utilizing Thietmar for his insight into the political workings of Ottonian Germany begins in the early-twentieth century, with the work of James Westfall Thompson spearheading studies of medieval Germany. In 1916, Thompson wrote “The German Church and the Conversion of the Baltic Slavs,” an article examining the expansion of German political and religious pressure into the territory of the Baltic Slavs. Thompson sees in the contact between the Ottonians and the Baltic Slavs a medieval example of contact between a “higher” and “lower” race. Thompson emphasizes the violence and butchery that marked early interaction under Henry I and Otto I.10

Thompson sees Thietmar as an elitist, scornful of the Slavs and their language and as also exhibiting that “same greed for land” during his time as Bishop.11 Thompson explains the expansion as part of a missionary effort, citing Adam of Bremen on the notion that the German church was “largely a money-making proposition” as converted Slavs would pay monies to the church.12 Throughout, Thompson insists on seeing the greed of the church for land as the driving force for conversion and that this “spoliation

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11 Thompson, “German Church and the Conversion,” p. 224.
12 Thompson, “German Church and the Conversion,” p. 211.
of a weaker people” went unparalleled until the sixteenth-century actions of Spain in Spanish America.\(^{13}\)

In “Church and State in Medieval Germany. II” Thompson examines the use of the bishops and monasteries by the Ottonian kingship. Here, Thietmar proved a helpful resource and a key example for Thompson. Thompson argues that Otto I “systematized” the German bishops into “military service” beginning a long line of fighting bishops, described in later scholarship as the *Reichsbischof*, and that late in his reign, though to a lesser extent, Otto similarly mobilized the monasteries.\(^{14}\) Thompson asserts that the growth of the “church’s landed proprietorship” was a reflection in the bishops and abbots of the “political and social ideas of a feudal age.” He suggests that bishops replaced the counts in the power structure and essentially became “prince-bishops” motivated primarily by profits handed down from the Saxon kings. Thompson argues that Henry II saw monks as solely religious, meant to live life in the cloister, whereas the bishops were “chiefly governmental and military officers.”\(^{15}\)

After Thompson’s work, historians wrote relatively little with regard to the Ottonians in general and to Thietmar in particular for the next thirty years. One of the major pieces to investigate this period was Anthony F. Czajkowski’s “The Congress of Gniezo in the Year 1000.” Written in 1949, this article appears in many ways to be a proto-micro history and is an analysis of Boleslaw I (992-1025) of Poland’s attempts to

\(^{13}\) Thompson, “German Church and the Conversion,” pp. 214ff.


\(^{15}\) Thompson, “Church and State,” p. 209.
gain independence for Poland as a country and cease being a fief of the Empire. For his understanding of the actions of Otto III, Czajkowski relies heavily on Thietmar. Czajkowski argues that Boleslav wanted to bring the neighboring Slav tribes under his control. Noting that the Germans continually had to deal with the Slavs militarily and to little avail, Boleslav felt that conversion to Christianity by Polish missionaries would lessen German hostilities towards the Slavs and would unite the Slavs with Christian Poland.

Czajkowski suggests that Otto III used his pilgrimage to Gniezo, to the tomb of a martyred friend, to acquaint himself with “Slavdom” as he felt that they were ready to take their place in the Empire. Czajkowski sees in Thietmar’s account the disgust of a nationalist who has seen a “former tributary prince” raised in status to that of an independent lord. Czajkowski notes that the partnership that had existed between Boleslav and Otto III ended with the accession of Henry II, and Poland did not have a recognized king until Boleslav II, who took advantage of the chaos caused by the Investiture Controversy, sided with the reform pope and received his crown.

There are two other articles from this period that use Thietmar, if only briefly, in examinations of Russian history. A. D. Stokes’ “The Status of the Russian Church” only mentions Thietmar in passing within his analysis of the Russian Church in the aftermath of the conversion of Vladimir I (978-1015). Stokes states that the only written account

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16 Boleslaw will hereafter be spelled Boleslav in line with anglicized spellings.


for the events of this period are contained within the Povest’ Vremenykh Let and that A. A. Shakhmatov’s analysis of the Povest’ in a publication at the turn of the twentieth century demonstrated that the chronicler deliberately tried to conceal certain details.\textsuperscript{19}

Stokes looks to Thietmar for support as he mentions an archbishop of Kiev in his Chronicon, though Stokes explains that there are complexities with using Thietmar’s evidence due to locations which have changed since the chronicler’s time.\textsuperscript{20}

Alexander Riasanovsky turns to Thietmar’s work for details on which peoples were in Kiev historically. His article is a textual analysis of Thietmar, seeking to clear the confusion that exists when one tries to reconcile the Latin with Polish and German translations in terms of which peoples were in Kiev during the period, primarily whether they were predominantly Scandinavian, or if there was a large “foreign and presumably Scandinavian” element in Kiev.\textsuperscript{21} Riasanovsky concludes that while translation and interpretation are continual problems for scholars examining the Chronicon, textual analysis and correlation with Russian sources are key to the proper understanding of Thietmar’s Dani and servi who appear as outside forces serving in the defense of Kiev in 1918.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} A. D. Stokes, “The Status of the Russian Church, 988-1037,” The Slavonic and East European Review 37, no. 89 (June 1959) : 430-442, p. 430.


\textsuperscript{22} Riasanovsky, “‘Runaway Slaves’ and ‘Swift Danes,’” pp. 296-297.
One of the primary scholars of Ottonian Germany in the recent past is Karl Leyser.\textsuperscript{23} In his “German Aristocracy” article he examines the German nobility from the ninth to early twelfth centuries. Concerning Thietmar, Leyser describes an elitist of noble blood for whom the term \textit{pauperi} meant non-noble more often than the destitute.\textsuperscript{24} Leyser attacks the descriptions of interactions with the needy as good actions “for the souls of the donors” in Thietmar or other \textit{vitae} as part of a “devotional repertoire” that allowed the “great [to] practise humility.” He suggests that they did not in any way denote a relationship with the unfortunate and, in the case of the biographers, did not demonstrate any interest in the unfortunate. He asserts that these deeds had nothing to do with social service or on the overall good achieved through such actions; they were merely about the “purchasing power” one could obtain through said deeds. Overall, this article stresses that during the tenth and into the eleventh centuries, nobles were a clear and separate group from their vassals and that the wars between Henry IV and Henry V against their enemies, created an unstable social climate within which nobles needed assistance in feeling positions necessitated by war, thus allowing the \textit{ministeriales} to rise to prominence.\textsuperscript{25} However, Leyser suggests that the \textit{primores}, the elite-nobles, maintained firm control into the twelfth century.

\textsuperscript{23} It is necessary to note that as a way of contextualizing the aims and intended purpose of this thesis, discussion of Leyser’s work will focus largely on his treatment of Thietmar and how he uses the \textit{Chronicon} as a source. This is not to ignore or discredit the bulk of his work or his conclusions.


\textsuperscript{25} Leyser, “German Aristocracy,” pp. 41, 48.
Leyser’s *Rule and Conflict*, published in 1979, treats Thietmar largely as a source of information for the political narrative. Surprisingly, however, there is an attempt in this work to account for some of the more “hagiographical” and supernatural elements in Thietmar’s work that much of Leyser’s work ignores. Leyser recognizes that as a bishop, Thietmar focused on caring for the souls of both the living and the dead, though he does not reference any particular examples.26 Leyser attempts to reconcile times when historians of the period referred to God preserving Otto I against his enemies in his chapter on sacral kingship. Leyser appears uncomfortable with writers of the period who saw “God’s will” in events and placed that reasoning over any “political explanation” of occurrences.27

In “Ottonian Government,” Leyser examines the governmental structure of the Ottonians, indicating that the major works by contemporaries made “forceful, if not unanimous statements” concerning the purposes of government by which they measured the Ottonian kings.28 Leyser states that they are eerily silent on the “means and methods” of government and that they were not interested in administration. Leyser explains that the Ottonian’s chapel and chancery, built on Carolingian precedents, were technically accomplished and staffed by a “clerical elite” that the kings could deploy either to convey

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27 Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, pp. 84-85  
important messages or mediate disputes. Leyser argues that the Ottonian government enhanced the position and rights of the church in response to untrustworthy dukes and counts. Leyser suggests that part of the vagueness found in chronicles, including Thietmar’s, in terms of detailing the actions of the Emperor are due to the nature of the Ottonian kingship. The early Ottonian kings migrated around the Reich, rather than having a centralized base of operations. The key to success for the Ottonian government was through communications.

Within his next major work, Medieval Germany and Its Neighbors, Leyser utilizes Thietmar solely for its benefit as a record of the political narrative and descriptions of the Ottonian kings and there seems to be no attempt to reconcile the pieces of Thietmar’s work that would fall under the category of hagiography. Leyser references Thietmar extensively in the fourth chapter of this work, titled “Ottonian Government.” During his analysis of the Saxon Empire, Leyser mentions that Thietmar is the “greatest successor” to Widukind among the Saxon historians and sees a major focal point of Thietmar’s Chronicon in his treatment of the elite class. He suggests that


32 Admittedly this work was published shortly after Geary’s Furta Sacra and accordingly one would not necessarily expect detailed examination of the saints and the dead.
individual *milites* hold a higher place in Thietmar as compared to in Widukind’s work and accordingly their deaths and the ensuing feuds and battles figure prominently.33

Helmut Lippelt focuses largely on the *Chronicon* in his analysis of Thietmar the person in his book from 1973. *Thietmar von Merseburg* begins with an examination of the office of bishop in medieval churches. Lippelt explains that bishops were literally married to their diocese, symbolized by their ring, and adds that this marriage had to be above all else for a bishop, leading to an end of married bishops.34 Lippelt proceeds to examine Thietmar from a biographical perspective, describing his noble origins and the beginning of his training for the clergy.35 Lippelt argues that the “Ottonian system” with regard to bishops differed from other medieval concepts of the office as there was an increased emphasis on solidarity of office between colleagues as opposed to loyalty to family and familial control of a bishopric.36 Lippelt’s work is also noteworthy for his description of the Ottonians from Henry I through Henry II as taken from Thietmar.

M. K. Lawson looks to Thietmar’s a work in a way significantly different from most, the closest being Riasanovksy’s textual analysis. Lawson’s “Those Stories Look True” is an attempt to demonstrate that the figures found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* detailing the sums received in the days of Aethelred II and Cnut from the Scandinavians

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are of a “credible order of magnitude.”  

Lawson wrote this article as a response to an article by John Gillingham, to demonstrate that Gillingham’s arguments were “unconvincing or implausible.” This article centers on a debate within Anglo-Saxon historiography, rather than that of Ottonian Germany. In making his case, Lawson refers to Thietmar’s account of the same events and draws the conclusion the figures were plausible for the eleventh century payments. 

A significant work that relies on Thietmar is Finck von Finckenstein’s Bischof und Reich published in 1989. Finck von Finckenstein’s work is an extensive analysis of the role of the bishop in the Ottonian empire. His work covers many regions of the empire and therefore he does not focus solely on Thietmar and Merseburg. However, Finck von Finckenstein does rely heavily on Thietmar during his explanation of families in the clergy and the prevalence of sächsisch Germans in higher ranks of the clergy within the period. Finck von Finckenstein also references Thietmar in a section on the idea and self-understanding of the office of bishop and churches within the empire, noting the significance of Thietmar’s having been able to reference the necrology in the Merseburger Totenbuch, or Merseburg Book of the Dead. Finck von Finckenstein, like others, recognizes the importance of Thietmar’s Chronicon and the location of

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39 Finck von Finckenstein, Bischof und Reich, pp. 88, 93-99.

40 Finck von Finckenstein, Bischof und Reich, p. 29.
Thietmar’s bishopric, as well as other sächsisch bishops in their own, to understanding the politics of the eastern parts of the Empire. ⁴¹

A major work to utilize Thietmar as a source is Fichtenau’s *Living in the Tenth Century*. ⁴² Translated by Patrick Geary and published in English in 1991, this is one of the few works to reference Thietmar in analysis of a multitude of mentalities and social orders. Fichtenau echoes Thompson’s vision of Thietmar as an elitist noble: however, Fichtenau treats Thietmar slightly less harshly. A major concern with Fichtenau’s work is his understanding of relics in medieval society, and a somewhat dismissive attitude toward the accounts of the dead in Thietmar. In discussing relics, Fichtenau does write from the perspective that his subjects believed in the powers of relics, but appears to judge them poorly for it. ⁴³ Fichtenau is outright dismissive of Thietmar’s accounts of interactions between the living and the dead, stating that Thietmar “has left us a great number of ghost stories, apparently in order to make believable the resurrection of the dead.” ⁴⁴

This difficulty with understanding the placement of the dead in historical sources is combated by the second major trend in the historiography. This category is marked with scholars who break down and analyze memory in medieval society and, by extension, the place of the dead in that society. One of the major scholars in this

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⁴⁴ Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, p. 316.
approach to studying medieval society is Patrick J. Geary. In his *Furta Sacra*, Geary argues that many people during the central Middle Ages, defined by him as 800-1100, understood relics of the saints to be quite literally the saints themselves.\(^{45}\) While Leyser did not go quite this far in his treatment of relics in *Rule and Conflict*, he does refer to relics as “wonder-working pledges” and suggests that these shrines at least led people to believe they enjoyed divine protection.\(^{46}\)

In using texts described as hagiographical, rather than historical, Geary was making a grand departure from other scholars at the time who were largely dismissive of such documents. Geary states that annals, chronicles, and other “medieval ‘histories’ move freely between hagiographical and historical” and that the *translatio* could not be ignored simply because it existed outside of a larger “historical” text. Geary argues that it is also improper to disregard a text defined as a *translation*, and thus a hagiography, since the distinction is due to the subject, not the form.\(^{47}\) The *translatio* is a hagiographical genre of literature concerning how a particular saint came to be at a given location. Geary explains that relics are only legitimate when they have either a reliquary that identifies it as authentic or a tradition, written or oral, that attests that the relic is genuine. This was necessary in order for the “culturally induced perception” of the

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\(^{46}\) Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, p. 87.

individual relic to transmit its meaning to its intended audience. It is out of this that the
translatio was born.\footnote{Geary, Furta Sacra, p. 6.}

Geary explains the personification of relics in that relics were present for the
swearing of oaths, bled when struck, owned property, and could keep transgressors from
taking them against their will through retaliation, all of which is indicative of their
perception as the saints themselves.\footnote{Geary, Furta Sacra, p. 125.} Furthermore, within a translatio one sees the
conflict for an author who was trying to offer justifications and explanations for the
translation which occurred either at the behest of the saint or was more of a kidnapping.
This process of reasoning reflected the value system under which the author was
operating.\footnote{Geary, Furta Sacra, p. 9.}

Ward’s Miracles and the Medieval Mind is an examination of medieval accounts
of miracles, particularly the miracle stories attached to shrines of saints. Ward argues
against the notion that medieval belief in miracles came from naïveté and explains that
they possessed a more “complex and subtle view of reality” than twentieth-century
society.\footnote{Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 1ff.} Ward explains that the presuppositions for medieval thought on miracles came
almost exclusively from the works of Augustine of Hippo and later those of Anselm of
Canterbury. Augustine’s miracles were any act of God provoking wonder; “genuine
miracles” were those acting not counter to nature but superior to nature. Anselm further

48 Geary, Furta Sacra, p. 6.

49 Geary, Furta Sacra, p. 125.

50 Geary, Furta Sacra, p. 9.

refined miracle thought as he separated events that occurred either by the will of nature or the will of men from events caused by God’s direct intervention. Ward suggests that this distinction between miracles and nature, while not clearly “expounded or applied,” did place the two on equal footing into the twelfth century.\footnote{Ward, \textit{Miracles and the Medieval Mind}, pp. 8-9.} What was clear was that miracles were wonders with God at their root, as opposed to magic which entailed any wonder attributable to demons. Sometimes, the distinction may not have been instantly recognizable.

David Warner examines Thietmar in terms of ritual and memory in his analysis of the ceremony of \textit{adventus}. Warner states that ritual in the Ottonian \textit{Reich} represented the norms for the kingship, but also played an active role in maintaining said norms. However, Warner himself is interested not in what ritual did, but rather “how it was remembered.”\footnote{David A. Warner, “Ritual and Memory in the Ottonian Reich: The Ceremony of Adventus,” \textit{Speculum} 76, no. 2 (April 2001) : 255-283, pp. 255-256.} Warner plants himself in an understanding of memory that seems to embrace Geary’s ideas from \textit{Phantoms of Rembrance}, but his analysis suggests that Warner himself is unsure whether he is approaching the source in terms of “what really happened” or as a reflection of the author’s beliefs. Warner argues that the “Ottonian literati” could make use of a tradition of employing the \textit{adventus} as a “vehicle for demonstrating right and status,” though they could also use it for the conveyance of deeper and contradictory messages.\footnote{Warner, “Ritual and Memory,” pp. 263ff.} Chief in this tradition was the \textit{adventus} of Jesus into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday described in the Gospels.
Warner examines two accounts of Henry I’s courtship of Mathilda in his argument. He states that the account written by the Quedlinburg biographer corresponds with an identifiable literary motif known as the Brautwerbung, which he timidly remarks “might suggest” fictionalization or the embellishment of details.\(^{55}\) In contrast, Warner states that Thietmar’s account highlights the material benefits of the pairing and is generally “less romantic” than the other, which is not the sole reason that it is more credible: it also corresponds with greater similarity to “what we know” of the politics surrounding medieval marriage. Warner then proceeds to detail other issues that would have influenced the writing of the Quedlinburg account. However, if he were keeping with his original aim to understand sources as reflections of their authors, Warner could have made his point stronger by identifying the places in the Quedlinburg text that reflect the issues. Additionally, textual analysis would have removed the question of whether they were potential influences.

Ultimately, Warner argues that these ceremonial arrivals, as recorded by clerical literati, evolved from chronological events into remembered events.\(^{56}\) He suggests that describing an adventus “required contemplation” of the intended message and that while the interests of the literati might often coincide with the interests of the initial players in the ceremony, they themselves might not agree with the message and would not hesitate to rewrite the past in a “more attractive manner.” Warner feels that the medieval contemporaries could use adventus as a tool and that the recollection of the event was similarly to serve a purpose and that the “interplay” of event and memory in their

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descriptions undermines the ability to reconstruct the ceremony itself. It is disconcerting that Warner is troubled by the inability to retrieve “what actually happened” when he began his article by emphasizing that he wanted to understand how the author’s personal beliefs and motivations impacted their documents. One concludes that any impact would, by definition, have had an effect on the history, leading it away from being an unbiased account of what happened.

Stefan Weinfurter uses Thietmar’s work in his deconstruction of how Henry II legitimated himself as successor to Otto III. Weinfurter states that Henry II was the first of the “East Frankish-German” kings to develop a claim to the throne by submitting himself to the coronation ordo of Mainz.57 Weinfurter then deconstructs the coronation ordo in its relation to Old Testament kingship entailing succession through the paternal line and the consecration of the king by the bishops which bestowed the office as a hereditary right from God. Weinfurter argues that in pursuing consecration from the bishops and basing his kingship on a “liturgical-sacral foundation,” Henry II demonstrated that an election process was no longer necessary; he merely had to gain recognition from his former competitors and now current subjects.58

Historian John W. Bernhardt relies heavily on Thietmar’s work in his analysis of King Henry II. In his article, Bernhardt looks at Henry II’s use of royal self-


representation or “imagination” and historical memory. Bernhardt argues that in order to demonstrate his rightful place as heir to the throne, Henry II took on ritual roles and acts. Bernhardt suggests that while attending the funeral of Otto III, Henry bore Otto’s casket on his shoulders in a demonstration of “piety and a debt of human sympathy.” Furthermore, this ritual act served as a “public representation” that Henry was the heir to the throne. Bernhardt goes on to describe Henry II’s gifts bestowed “on behalf of the salvation of Charlemagne and especially Otto III” and others, including Henry’s family and Henry himself, as “programmatically emphasizing” his right to the throne and remarks that Henry II has thus “successfully played the ritual role of next of kin.” Additionally, Bernhardt explains Henry II’s choice of words in charters issued to monasteries as all being part of his self-representation as a “pious and divinely ordained supporter of the church.”

Bernhardt’s association of royal self-representation with imagination raises cause for concern. While there was certainly a ritual discourse, participation within said discourse certainly carried a multitude of reasoning. One must not be dismissive of all participation within a discourse, as one will miss the distinction between genuine participants and actors, though sometimes the difference is not important. One hears Geoffrey Koziol’s warning to those who would study ritual, saying that “a rebel defeated


by a king prostrated himself and begged for mercy because he had to” and not necessarily
because he had had a genuine change of heart.63

In contrast to Bernhardt, Constance Bouchard, in her *Sword, Miter, and Cloister*,
combats the notion that “for the good of my soul,” as it appeared in charters documenting
donations to monasteries, existed solely as part of ritual discourse. Bouchard suggests
that readers see this as a “technical phrase” and in making her argument contrasts the
appearance of “for the good of my soul” in charters recording gifts to those recording
sales which specify the monetary return to the noble.64 Gifts were quite literally given
for the good of one’s soul. Similarly, it is perhaps overreaching for Bernhardt to attempt
to define the actions of Henry II as simply part of a ritual discourse and not consider that
he was genuinely moved to his actions; the two can be, but are not necessarily, mutually
exclusive and there is most certainly a path taking from both Koziol’s and Bouchard’s
interpretations.

Scholars have long recognized importance of Thietmar and his *Chronicon* as a
source for the history of Ottonian Germany. This has primarily been in works that have
sought to examine the political nature and framework of Germany under the Ottonians
and also the Ottonians themselves. Only recently, following the work of scholars such as
Geary and Ward, have historians attempted to look at Thietmar from the perspective of
memory and the impact of the past and historical forms to Thietmar and his
contemporaries. No one has really looked at Thietmar as part of memory; those that have

63 Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Discourse in Early

64 Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in
tried have done so reluctantly and hesitantly. Warner’s “Ritual and Memory” started out firmly planted as a study of memory, only to lose its footing in the conclusion.

Weinfurter and Bernhardt both looked to the role of ritual in their works cited above, but embraced a vision of ritual behavior and discourse, thus presenting a picture wherein the actors were moved solely by the need to participate in said discourse, with no mention of the historical motivations for such actions or the possibility that participation was genuinely motivated. This thesis will attempt to follow in the footsteps of Geary and Ward and discuss Thietmar within the context of memory without hesitation or reservation.
Before entering into the discussion which will serve as primary focus of this thesis, it is important first to examine a few brief examples contextualizing some of the ways in which Thietmar’s contemporaries understood certain power relations within society. Thietmar detailed a hierarchy that included the places and rights of all members of society. Thietmar assumed that the proper hierarchical structure had God at the top, followed by the King as the supreme ruler in the temporal world, and then the Dukes. Thietmar also discussed whose job it was to fill bishoprics and the role that bishops held in the Empire. Fichtenau explains that it was the role of emperors and kings to fill bishoprics as they themselves were representatives of Christ. He states, “Christ had installed them as princes, and it would be senseless for bishops to be subordinated to lesser powers.”

Ottonian kings regularly ruled through their bishops as administrative extensions of their own power as seen in the works of Leyser and Lippelt. One remembers that Thietmar is writing for Henry II, following the death of Otto III. There was understandably tension in the realm as the kingship was returning to the Henrician line. Hlawitschka reminds the reader that for Thietmar, Henry I marks the beginning of the

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Ottonian line and observes that Henry II is fifth in line. There had been tension in the realm surrounding Otto I’s succession to Henry I, as Henry I had a son named Henry, presumably at one point seen as the potential heir. However, Otto I became King. When Otto III died, he left no male heirs to take the throne, thus his second cousin Henry, grandson to the slighted Duke Henry, became Henry II. Before Otto III became ill, this had been a source of enmity between himself and the future Henry II. The differing accounts of Queen Mathilda’s return from exile between the the “older” and “later” lives of Mathilda, contemporary works to Thietmar’s *Chronicon*, illustrate this tension.66

Thietmar’s description of a rebellion by Margrave Henry and Duke Boleslav (Boleslav I of Poland) provides an example of how Thietmar understood the importance of oaths and loyalty. Boleslav had previously sworn oaths that allowed him to receive lands from King Henry II and also swore to serve the King and keep peace between them. However, Henry II had entered into an alliance with the Liutizi, an action disapproved of by many of his people, as the Liutizi were pagans. In response to this Margrave Henry and Boleslav rebelled. The King entered the lands of Margrave Henry and laid waste to them. Thietmar addressed those who might see the actions of Margrave Henry as just in response to those of the King.

He pointed out that “every dominion of this world derives from God” and that to rise against it was to offend God’s majesty. Furthermore, Thietmar recalled that the relationship between the Margrave’s family and that of the King was historically weak and that even so, the King might have overlooked the Margrave’s actions had he not

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openly sided with the King’s enemy. Betrayal is noted as particularly shameful.\textsuperscript{67} However, Thietmar does not limit himself to discussions of loyalty to the King and his position of superiority, Thietmar also spoke to the role of the King with regard to bishops.

Thietmar’s work has much to say on the subject of bishops, as Thietmar was one himself. Thietmar stated that the Emperor Otto III (980-1002) placed many bishops into their positions. Following the death of Bishop Hildebald of Worms, a man whom the Emperor praised because of his integrity, the Emperor placed Franko into the now vacant position. It is also clear that Otto III attempted at one point to elevate two of his chaplains to the episcopacy. Thietmar saw himself as one of an elect few, a special group. He wrote that because these two died having not been consecrated into their bishoprics, that they were not technically bishops and should not be thought of as such.\textsuperscript{68} While this seems to be an obvious truism, that Thietmar felt compelled to stress the distinction suggests that some of his contemporaries would have already seen the two as bishops prior to their consecration. Therefore, one sees in this passage a reflection of real-world tension. Surely there were those who would have already seen the two as bishops and would continue to do so, much to Thietmar’s dismay.

Thietmar’s \textit{Cronicon} provides information that suggests the King, and not the Bishops, are in charge of fulfilling vacancies and appointing Bishops. In one example during the reign of Henry II, Thietmar described the King’s arrival in Merseburg where he learned of the death of Archbishop Liawizo of Bremen. Liawizo had previously

\textsuperscript{67} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, V.32-33.

\textsuperscript{68} Thiermar, \textit{Chronicon}, IV.62.
described how he wanted the bishopric to go to a man named Otto. As such, Otto had made his way to Merseburg with a group of clerics and laymen to entreat the King’s favor for the completion of his election to the bishopric. However, Thietmar states that the King wanted the bishopric to go to his chaplain, Unwan, and Henry II took Otto into his service.\(^69\) Although Unwan eventually received the consent of the other bishops and was consecrated as archbishop, this event demonstrates that the King was the one who ultimately made the final decision, or at least had that right should he so choose.

Thietmar indicated at one point that there was at least one individual granted with the right to “distribute all the bishoprics in his territories” as he saw fit. He is speaking of Duke Arnulf of Bavaria to whom the King had given this “unique” privilege. However, Thietmar fervently reminded the reader that this rightfully transferred back to the King upon Arnulf’s death, stating that the placement of bishops is a right that pertains to the “kings and emperors” alone as they are representatives of the “highest authority.” Thietmar is saying that in a Christian empire the King is the ultimate authority because God placed him in his position. Even though this action belongs to the kings and emperors, Thietmar is quite angry with the counts and dukes that exert “impious power” over the clergy in their regions. He warns that their power over “those who rightly dominate” will soon grow out of control and they will be even crueler.\(^70\)

Thietmar explained that his primary focus was to be the line of Ottonian kings, however, because he saw his work as an opportunity to discuss the lives and deeds of others, he often finds himself drifting away from this initial focus as Thietmar does not

\(^{69}\) Thietmar, *Chronicon* VI.88-90.

hesitate to speak of anyone and everyone from whom the reader can benefit. One example comes as Thietmar began to describe how he came to be Bishop of Merseburg and provides details and insight into what Thietmar saw as valuable characteristics in a bishop. Thietmar mentioned briefly that his predecessor had taken ill and was “anxiously” awaiting his last day. However, Thietmar saw the mention of this individual as the perfect time to offer some details on him “so that they may not be forgotten.” The man was “outstanding in stature and appearance,” had a beautiful voice, was wise in his counsel, and was very generous.71 He set an example that his contemporaries would have done well to follow. More importantly, his life continues to serve as an example through Thietmar’s work to future bishops. This is an important reality that one must contend with though it is not that far removed from contemporary practice. Where does one look to for inspiration but to the past…to the dead.

Thietmar’s vision of the world of the living had God at the top, for it was from God that the world existed. Next was the Kings, placed by God as supreme rulers in the temporal world and followed in societal rank by the Dukes, though the Bishops were arguably next in the chain of administrative power. Thietmar explained that the bonds created by oaths, particularly those dealing with loyalty, carried particularly strong weight. Thietmar contended with the formality of being a bishop and argued against those who would see the position alone as enough for without consecration, the positions had not received God’s blessing and were thus not official. However, some members of society would not have made such a distinction. Thietmar reminded his readers that the King, as God’s ruler in the temporal world, was solely responsible for the filling of

71 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VI.36.
bishoprics, though there were unique circumstances in which the King granted this right to others. Thietmar’s official purpose was to write about the Ottonian kings, though he regularly wrote of anyone from whom the reader could learn. Often, these were examples from the past, from the dead, suggesting that to Thietmar, the dead outranked the living in medieval society.
Thietmar believed that humans must spend their lives giving glory and honor to God as repayment for the gift of life which he has given. Additionally, humans must be thankful for their unique souls. Thietmar wrote that his discussion of souls was directed at the ignorant, particularly the Slavs who were ignorant chiefly because they believed that “everything end[ed] with temporal death.” He explained the nature of souls so that all the “faithful” might be reminded of the certainty of the resurrection and the “reward according to merit.” He operated under the belief that there were three types of soul. One belonged to the incorporeal angels and was thus without beginning or end. Another soul was that of livestock and fowl which both begins and ends with the body. The human soul differed in that it began with the body in birth, but did not endure death with the body. The human soul transcended death. It was immortal and had a very different task in the future than it had in the body. Thietmar’s understanding of the human soul offers insight into his stories of the dead and also explains how the dead would be able to exert influence in the temporal plane with his discussion on souls.

Medieval society combated the fear of death, often a tool of the Devil, by embracing death and welcoming it as a spiritual rebirth. One of the primary examples

that this is how Thietmar felt is visible in the various phrases that he used to describe death. These substitutions give the reader information on how Thietmar viewed a person’s life individually, and also provide a greater commentary on the realities of human existence. Thietmar described one man as going to “sleep in the Lord” whereas he described the death of his church brother and stated that he “escaped the danger of this world.” Thietmar often referred to someone’s death as the date at which time they received their “heavenly reward” or “migrated from this exile.” In the case of Archbishop Tagino’s death, Thietmar stated that he “did not die, but rather departed on his happy voyage” to Christ.\footnote{Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, II.18, IV.67-68, VI.61.} In all these phrases, Thietmar reminds the reader that it is heaven to which people should look. That should be the goal ever-present in the minds of society. Furthermore, these phrases demonstrate Thietmar’s active battle against death. Thietmar did not see the temporal world as where a person belonged nor was it where they should focus their efforts.

These phrases also suggest that the temporal world was a dangerous place and that heaven is free from said dangers. Firstly, there was the constant threat of death from disease. Though Thietmar mentions individuals who are skilled in healing, death is still a very real possibility for those who have taken ill. This is even truer when their affliction is the result of their sins.\footnote{The interpretation of circumstances as retribution from God and as punishment for sins in more varied instances is an idea that will receive discussion at length later.} Thietmar recognized that the world was a sinful place and lamented that many people focused only on their “bodily desires” and did not submit themselves to God. Furthermore, Thietmar saw heaven as such a safe haven because
once there a person is free not only from sin but also from the corrupting power of the devil, the great deceiver who is always trying to “delude us in various ways.”\textsuperscript{75} One could also die during battle. Battles occurred frequently between various kings, dukes, and counts, but there was also the possibility of death following a trial by battle or a duel. This will see further examination later.

After a person’s death, members of the living did many various things to honor, praise, and remember them. Historians often categorize these actions as \textit{memoria}, an example of which is the offering services for the dead, both in honor of them and for the well-being of their eternal soul. Thietmar offers an example of a decree issued by King Henry II following a great synod in 1005. The decree stated that following the death of any individual listed within, various members of the realm according to rank and status must take certain actions the deceased’s behalf. All bishops and priests within their churches should celebrate mass within thirty days if able to do so. Parish priests were to celebrate three masses while deacons and lower members of the clergy were to sing ten psalms. Within this same span of thirty days, the King and Queen were to distribute 1500 pennies and were also to feed an equal number of the poor, whereas the bishops were all to feed 300 paupers, give only 300 pennies, and light thirty candles. A specific Duke Bernhard was to feed 500 and distribute fifteen gold coins. All of this was to offer posthumous redemption of the departed’s soul.\textsuperscript{76} This list demonstrates two things. First, it reinforces the idea that these people were genuinely concerned with their spiritual well-being and suggests that they believed charitable giving was proper. Second, it

\textsuperscript{75} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, VI.48, VII.32.

\textsuperscript{76} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, VI.18.
reflects the expectations for various people according to their rank and position within the societal structure.

Thietmar believed in the words of the prophets that the dead will live; the dead in the grave will rise and the people must hear the voice of the Lord and rejoice.\textsuperscript{77} Thietmar himself believed that such incidents occurred to foretell change and that the living must be on guard when they hear of or see such actions take place.\textsuperscript{78} Thietmar wrote of such occurrences in his \textit{Chronicon} to demonstrate the example that mortals should follow. Furthermore, in Thietmar’s work, the boundary between the realms of the living and the dead existed more as a porous membrane, so much so that the dead themselves are often present within the world of the living. The dead in his work often perform holy functions; ironically, it is the dead and not the living which demonstrate ways of right living that were in accordance with God’s will. One remembers Ward’s explanation of the medieval understanding of miracles and that this was not simple naïveté, rather a complex view of reality. Additionally, there was a clear difference between miraculous works of God and the magical works of demons and the Devil, a difference that Thietmar stressed to reiterate the clear difference between the two.

Thietmar proclaimed through his writing that one who performed good deeds on behalf of others was pleasing to God. Furthermore, he stated that if the deed was performed “with devotion…it makes no difference” whether it is of benefit to the

\textsuperscript{77} Isaiah 26:19, John 5: 28-29.

\textsuperscript{78} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, I.13.
“intended beneficiary.” Thietmar, *Chronicon*, offers multiple examples that Thietmar either witnessed firsthand, or had learned of from a source that he found credible. Thietmar had a personal experience with this in the case of his niece Liudgard. He explained that one night, he and his companion clearly heard the dead conversing. Thietmar concludes that a death would occur in the near future and the suggestion is that it is the death of Liudgard. As he described the death of Liudgard, a woman whose soul the saints themselves invited to the afterlife, the description is of a woman who devoted her life to God. He explained that her fasting and distribution of alms was for the grace of her husband, to protect him.

A separate incident occurred before Thietmar’s time in another city and finds a priest on his way to church, passing through the cemetery. He witnessed numbers of the dead giving offerings to a priest. Even though these individuals had passed on to the next world, they still recognized the importance of making offerings to the church. Frightened at what he saw, the man fortified himself with the cross and proceeded forward. He spoke with the dead there and also to a woman in particular whom he knew well and who was recently deceased. She proceeded to foretell the priest’s own death accurately. Thietmar noted that “the testimony of two or three” suffices in legitimizing events, so in this his first extended section dealing with the work of the dead, he was sure

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79 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VI.84-85.


81 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, I.11.
to give multiple examples. Accordingly, Thietmar described a separate experience of the night guards at the “church of the merchants” in his home of Magdeburg.

This incident occurred while Thietmar was living in Magdeburg and thus, he counted those involved as reliable witnesses since he knew them personally. Two guards, having heard strange sounds coming from the cemetery, proceeded to bring “the best citizens” to observe. The citizens noticed from a distance that there were “candles burning in candleholders” and two men singing the morning praises in order, including the invitatory. However, when they approached to investigate further, no one was there and they saw no evidence of the candles. Thietmar recalled that when he told this story to his niece, Brigida, she was “not at all astonished.” Thietmar’s niece, as one who was firm in her religious beliefs, saw nothing out of the ordinary in Thietmar’s story. This suggests that it was quite normal to explain the otherwise inexplicable in terms of what one knew, often one’s own religious beliefs. This is reflective of one of the memory-forming processes.

In addition to influencing the living through example and action, sometimes the dead communicated information to the living. Thietmar detailed one experience in which Walthard, a recently deceased friend, visited him. This example differs from those previous in that in addition to merely having a conversation, Thietmar informed Walthard that the King had “turned against [him]” and was operating under the belief that Walthard was conspiring against the King. This greatly upset Walthard, who vehemently denied

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82 Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 15:16

the allegations and pleaded with Thietmar to intercede on his behalf. 84 This experience demonstrates that, for Thietmar, there was a real possibility to learn from the deceased. This suggests that for Thietmar and his contemporaries, these spirits did visit them in the world of the living. If they had not they would have been unable to provide any information not already known to the living person.

Many of these examples involve spirit manifestations both in dreams and in the waking world; however, Thietmar states that occasionally the physical and temporal body of one recently deceased will reanimate. He gives the example of a married woman who had died suddenly. After her body had been cared for and transported to the church, she sat up on the bier. She called to her loved ones and offered some parting words and then she returned to “peace and rest.” Thietmar argues that this woman must have been highly valued since God allowed her to “fulfill her just desire” in conveying her last wishes and thus die in peace. 85 God had this power and Thietmar told his audience that God loved his followers and could help ease their transition from the temporal world.

Thietmar stated that this reanimation could only be the work of “our miraculous God.” For Thietmar, this story was credible because it came from a firsthand report given to the Emperor by a count, one who was credible as an “unimpeachable” witness. This tells the reader that Thietmar wanted his contemporaries to trust the words of those who have seen. Thietmar went on to clarify that generally it was work of “the cunning enemy of mortals,” the devil, to appear in the image of the dead and that only “fools accept his deceit as truth.” However, there were exceptions, namely in instances of

84 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VI.78-79.

85 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.32.
special occasions, those of particular merit, and people whose life was one that “caused the world to blossom.” Furthermore, he stated that once the commendation of the soul and the burial of the body had occurred, no corpse would rise.86

Thietmar and others are looked out for the spiritual well-being of their departed peers; they looked forward while subsequently looking back. Additionally, they looked back and recognized examples to follow as they themselves moved forward in their lives toward their own departure from the temporal world. In one instance, Thietmar offered his own pleas to God on behalf of the departed. As he was describing the death of Otto III, Thietmar recognized the Emperor as one of “extraordinary faith” and saw his death as a great loss to the people. Following this information, Thietmar himself lamented the passing of the Emperor and asked God to grant mercy to the departed Emperor and to grant him eternity, a markedly great gift in return for “lesser things,” demonstrating that even a temporal life worthy of salvation can never equal the grandeur of the gift of everlasting life.87 In this example, Thietmar offered his prayers for Otto III for the purpose of intercession. While many often consider intercession as a role for the saints and the dead, Thietmar demonstrated that it was a regular responsibility for the living. Intercession was deeply intertwined with the act of absolution.

Thietmar described a different case in which absolution was granted to one already dead. Following the death of Archbishop Tagino, Thietmar described a bishop celebrating mass who called for all in attendance to grant absolution to Tagino following the presentation of the Gospel. In this case, Thietmar reinforces his rule to focus on

86 Thietmar, Chronicon, VII.32
87 Thietmar, Chronicon, IV.49.
eternal salvation and not the temporal world even though the application is on the well-being of one already dead. Thietmar states that this occurred three days after Tagino’s death. He informs his reader that the third, seventh, and thirtieth days following the death of any Christian are days that should be devoted to the departed’s remembrance, as these days should remind Christians of the Trinity and the “sevenfold” gifts of the Holy Spirit. In both of these examples, Thietmar seemingly detracts from his earlier stance on looking forward to heaven as he and others looked back to the recent dead, however, they looked back for examples; inspiration for how to live one’s life.

The celebrating of masses and distributing of alms for the sake of one’s soul in the previous examples are things that occurred posthumously. Thietmar’s Chronicon emphasizes that people should not wait until death was upon them to focus on the salvation of their souls. However, sometimes death is sudden and unexpected as in Thietmar’s account of a Duke Ernst of Swabia. Wounded while hunting in a forest, the Duke knew death was imminent. He summoned his companions and those around him and asked them to forgive him his misdeeds against them. As there was no priest present, the Duke called for one of his milites. He asked his miles to listen to his confession “with the ears of [his] heart” and asked the miles to commend his sinful soul to “those of the faithful who are absent.” The Duke then proceeded to reveal to all those present every sinful deed he could recall.

Thietmar stated that the Duke’s decision to risk embarrassment in front of his milites rather than risk coming before God with concealed sins was an honorable example that all should follow. He emphasized that people must be mindful to seek forgiveness of

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88 Thietmar, Chronicon, VI.63.
God and that when death is at hand, one should make confession regardless of the confessor to find a “gracious pardon” in heaven.\(^{89}\) Interestingly enough, even though the story suggests that whoever the confessor may be is not important, it is necessary to involve “the faithful” for commendation of the soul and body as only fellow Christians would be able to aid in the matter. Additionally, Thietmar uses this example to illustrate that a proper relationship between a lord and his \textit{milites} is not marred by pride.

Thietmar saw the human soul as unique and, accordingly, humans owed a debt to God their creator for the gift of life in the temporal world. In so doing, Thietmar believed strongly that humans should look forward to heaven and their spiritual reward as that should be the aim of all. This viewpoint worked to combat the fear of death and the devil actively. Heaven provided a reward, a respite from the dangers of the temporal world. The relationship between the living and the dead in Thietmar’s society included numerous acts of \textit{memoria} done by the living to honor the dead and for the well-being of their eternal souls. Medieval society saw the realms of the living and the dead as separated by a porous membrane. Furthermore, one remembered the dead because one could find examples and inspiration in looking to the past.

In many examples, it was the dead who demonstrated the ways of right living. The dead gave offerings to the church and sang the morning praises. The dead could convey information of great importance to the living through dreams and visions, but also in special circumstances through reanimation of the deceased. However, Thietmar was clear to differentiate between God’s miracles and the Devil’s magic. Thietmar explains the importance of acts of \textit{memoria} in interceding on behalf of the deceased’s spirit and

\(^{89}\) Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, VII.14.
relates the acts of intercession and absolution. Thietmar employs the reader not to wait to focus on salvation of their souls, but demonstrates how one might find absolution through confession to one’s peers, and the importance of humility. Thietmar looked back to the past for the sole purpose of finding inspiration, motivation, and information of how to better life a life aimed at the future of heaven. While much of this chapter has demonstrated the living influencing the world of the dead, the actions of martyrs and saints, often through their relics, demonstrates that influence can go both ways.
CHAPTER V

THE LIVING DEAD:

RELICS, MARTYRS, AND SAINTS

Christians of this period often preserved what they could of the bodily remains of holy individuals, saints, and martyrs as relics and usually stored them in reliquaries. Through the Geary’s work, one learns that in dealing with relics, one sees the dead occupying living space both in their temporal remains that take up physical space and also as non-corporeal entities acting in physical space. There were numerous reasons for various institutions and locations such as cities, towns, churches, and monasteries to want a relic. The presence of a holy relic could be a source of economic revenue for the holder of said relic and also for the surrounding community as people would come on pilgrimage to see the relic. Additionally, in the case of monasteries, the presence of a powerful patron lent a considerable ally to an institution which would otherwise have little recourse against powerful dukes and viscounts; those who “understood only force, whether physical or spiritual.” Such a patron could place a religious community in the “stronger position.”

Thietmar’s *Chronicon* offers an example illustrating the translation of saints as Thietmar recounted a story about Otto I (936-973). There came a time when Otto I had the relics of certain saints placed within the columns of the church at Magdeburg, in

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essence making it one large reliquary. The transfer of the body of St. Maurice as well as the bodies of “the saint’s companions and portions of other saints” in 961, first to Regensburg and then on to Magdeburg were received with “great honor” by the people. Thietmar stated that their veneration continued in that location to the people’s salvation.91

One remembers Geary’s explanations that the relics of the saints were the saints themselves and it is for this reason that one had to treat them with respect, much as one would treat someone physically living. When one failed in this regard, the saints retaliated, often punishing the transgressor; this occurs regularly in Thietmar’s work. The language used to describe relics, with translations akin to kidnapping and their physical presence in ceremonies of the living, coupled with the lengths to which one would go to obtain a saint clearly demonstrates that people believed them to be more than simple remains.

Thietmar demonstrated the need for proper treatment of saints’ relics and their living presence in multiple stories. One remembers Brigida, the one to whom Thietmar told a story involving actions of the dead and who was not astonished. She had a similar story to tell to Thietmar in return involving a priest. This priest also witnessed offerings made by the dead, this time both in a cemetery and at the church, all the while singing to God. As the presence of the dead seemed out of the ordinary to the priest, he told his bishop what he had witnessed. The bishop ordered the priest to sleep in the church, reminding him that it was his to guard. It is unclear here whether or not the bishop is concerned that the dead are a malevolent presence that the priest must defend the church against or whether he simply wants to remind the priest of his duties. Whether the bishop

91 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, II.17.
himself genuinely believed the priest at this moment in the story is irrelevant. During the next evening the dead came to the church again and threw the priest and his bed out of the church. Understandably, the priest was afraid. These dead, unlike those in the previous stories, had been interacting physically with the living and did not approve of the priest’s presence during their ceremonies.92

The bishop had the priest blessed with the relics of the saints and “sprinkled with holy water” before commanding him to “continue guarding his church.” Thietmar stated that the priest followed his “lord’s order” and tried once again to sleep in the church. This demonstrates part of the power structure that Thietmar and his contemporaries operated within and illustrates that though afraid, the priest acted as his bishop had ordered. However, the priest found himself unable to sleep, kept awake by his fear. The dead lifted him upon the altar, and his body burned to a “fine ash.” This saddened the bishop and moved him to penance for his actions; he commenced with a three-day fast to aid himself, but more importantly to aid “the souls of the departed.” Interestingly enough, Thietmar does not comment on why the blessings through the relics and holy water failed to protect the priest. Positing that the bishop had been in the wrong in his commands to the priest, Thietmar’s story serves as a warning that relics, and even the power of the divine in the holy water, will not work towards illicit ends.

Thietmar’s niece argued that the night belonged to the dead. Thietmar himself invoked St. Paul’s warning that is not right for a mortal to “know more than is conducive

to sobriety.”⁹³ Paul urges that one have a reasonable estimation of one’s own ability and knowledge, which comes through one’s measure of faith allotted by God. Thus greater faith might grant deeper understanding, but one must be aware of the difference between wisdom that comes from God through faith, versus one’s own self-invented knowledge. That is, one should be of a “sober” mind when evaluating their ability.

The people in Thietmar’s stories, as well as Thietmar himself, clearly understood the boundary between the living and the dead to be fluid as a result of both their religious experience and because the dead had historically demonstrated it to be such. The dead had a very real presence in the temporal world of the living and readily interacted with living individuals. Most likely to exert influence over the living were either the saints or the martyrs of Christ. Thietmar offers the example of one of his colleagues by the name of Gunther to demonstrate such influence. Two martyrs visited Gunther in the night. They inquired into his desire in obtaining their bishopric. Gunther answered that he wanted it if it was in accordance with God’s will and was pleasing to the martyrs, at which time they “pierced him with spears” so that in the morning, he was unable to rise unassisted.⁹⁴ Gunther received the bishopric from the Emperor and served there in lasting pain for four years until his death.

Thietmar expressed his confusion over the man’s torment, as Thietmar knew him as a just and religious man. Thietmar stated that “those with whom he now rests” asserted that God valued him. Thietmar also commented that God does not punish the

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⁹³ Romans 12:3, Thietmar, Chronicon, I.12.

⁹⁴ Thietmar, Chronicon, IV.69.
same mistake twice. This most certainly refers to an earlier transgression of Gunther, most likely that he did not seem committed to the bishopric in his answer to the martyrs. It was important to Thietmar for members of the clergy to realize that in taking on the role of bishop, they were committing themselves to a life of service to the Lord and the King and it was not a decision that one should make lightly. The martyrs pierced Gunther firstly as punishment, but also as a test of his commitment to the office. The martyrs’ very presence serves to illustrate this point. Their role in watching over the bishopric was an active one that continued beyond death. Although they pierced Gunther to test his temporal commitment to the office, their actions demonstrated the potential permanence of such an appointment. Perhaps Gunther would not have overseen the same bishopric after his death, as the aforementioned martyrs had watched over theirs, but as a servant of God, he would always be subject to watch over God’s people and His church.

Thietmar further demonstrated the danger of angering the dead and the power that spirits, could exert in the living world through his retelling of the story of a young monk at Corvey, attacked by two martyrs. This monk lived during the time of the predecessor of Thietmar’s brother Brun, who was currently serving at Corvey’s altar. The young man in the course of his duties was carrying the relics of two martyrs. Although he was carrying them “in the usual manner” he treated them carelessly and instantly suffered the penalty of his transgression. It was a grave offense and a failure to respect the sanctity of the relics. The martyrs struck the young man down for one who fails to “serve God’s

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95 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, IV.69.
saints in the spirit, must die in the flesh.”96 Thietmar is doubtless alluding to the story of Uzzah being struck down by the Lord for breaking the command not to touch the Ark of the Covenant.97 Following this act of judicial punishment, the martyrs went to the abbot to explain the young man’s sin. Thietmar wanted the reader to know that they did not punish indiscriminately and that God metes out vengeance justly.

They accosted the abbot before the doors of the church and barred his exit, explaining that the young man would not remain unpunished. This passage suggests that though the man had already suffered death, his sin would lead to punishment in the afterlife as well. The abbot, upon learning of the tragedy, lamented the course of events. The abbot chastised the young monk’s corpse for how he had treated the martyrs with disrespect, informing those who would defend the dead man of the prior transgression. According to Thietmar, the abbot prayed to the saints asking for intercession, asking to be told when God released the sinner, so that the abbot might grant him absolution and communion with the church. The abbot was conflicted because it was “unseemly for mortals to grant indulgence if God [was] angry.” Thietmar stated that the abbot placated God and received the release of the sinner. He remitted the young man’s sin through “the power of heaven” and granted the body communion.98 This demonstrates that the power to influence went both ways. Just as the martyrs had influenced the young monk, so too could the clergy influence beings in the afterlife. Additionally, this example is indicative

96 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, IV.70.
97 2 Samuel 6:5-15.
of the role of the clergy in granting absolution. More importantly, it illustrates the role of
the clergy to serve as mediators between the deceased and God.

The relics discussed above were the saints and martyrs themselves for Thietmar
and his contemporaries and carried a living presence. There were spiritual, physical, and
economical reasons that led to the translation of saints to various locations, but ultimately
the reasoning was the presence of the saint, as a person, in the town. The understanding
of relics as living embodiments of the deceased gave them their position in society and
made them deserving of respect and veneration as one would owe any living holy person.
Disrespecting the saints and martyrs through their relics carried grave penalties. There
was also significant physical interaction between the living and the dead across the
temporal boundary. The presence of these holy dead suggested the permanence of certain
church offices. Additionally, just as the clergy and the living worked for the well-being
of the souls of the deceased, saints and martyrs could be mediators between God and the
living, granting worldly intercession.
Thietmar believed that God should always be in the minds of Christians, though he argued that there are many roles that God had taken historically in the temporal world depending on the circumstance. God could be a God of protection, a vengeful God, and a divine judge. The role one sees God taking is reflective of the particular example and one’s own understanding of God’s intended purpose. Regardless of God’s visage, Thietmar assured the reader that “the grace of heaven often revealed…what it wished to occur.” God’s intercession revealed that society had not received the initial message, perhaps a subtle work or sign detailing God’s desires, and that a more direct approach was required.

Sometimes, God was a protector as in Thietmar’s account of the monks of St. Paul in Rome. The warriors of a certain Duke Herman seized a meadow rightfully belonging to the monks of St. Paul, and he refused to return it to them. Thietmar noted that the brothers repeatedly and humbly asked the Duke to return to them what was theirs, but he refused. At this, the skies darkened, lightning flashed and thunder boomed across the heavens “revealing the anger of the Lord.” Instantly lightning killed four of the Duke’s best men, striking terror into the remaining number, causing them to flee.

99 Thietmar, Chronicon, II.27.
Thietmar states that in this world “the paupers of Christ should not be held in contempt.” God, who is merciful, will grant rewards to those who honor his servants and protect them in their times of need. However, he will seek to punish their persecutors in either this world or the next. Thietmar noted that of the two, the latter was by far the worse.\textsuperscript{100}

God could also be a vengeful God, meting out punishment to those who had offended their Lord. As an example Thietmar refers to a certain \textit{miles} who had seized some property of St. Clement and refused to give either compensation or return the land itself. As a result of his wickedness he found himself set upon by an innumerable horde of mice. He was unable to fight them off either with his bare fists or even his sword. To escape, he requested to be placed within a chest and suspended in the room until the infestation had come to an end. Once this plague of mice had ended, the time came to free the \textit{miles}, at which time those offering their help discovered that mice had gnawed him to death. Thietmar wrote that this served as evidence that the “vengeful anger of God” consumed the \textit{miles} as payment for his transgression.\textsuperscript{101} Presumably those who placed him in the chest would have made sure there were no mice present within the chest; one also expects that a multitude of mice would have been necessary to “consume” the \textit{miles}. Thus a miracle of God must have placed the mice in the chest. Furthermore, one cannot escape the wrath of God through any action other than prayers of forgiveness.

The clearest role for God as divine judge was in the judicial court of the duel. In this procedure, God oversaw a battle and gave strength to the cause on the side of right justice who was then able to find victory. Thietmar’s \textit{Chronicon} demonstrates that this

\textsuperscript{100} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, IV.59.

\textsuperscript{101} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, VI.82.
was a common form of trial in the period because Thietmar mentions it as commonplace. In one example, the Emperor is attending to business and Thietmar mentions that he ordered the “thieves who had been defeated in duels” to be assembled and put to the rope.\textsuperscript{102} That Thietmar offered no details and treated it as a regular occurrence demonstrates its frequent use and is reflective of a practice with an established history. It is vital for historians to be aware that the uncommon, the unnatural, is far more likely to appear in the records than the everyday occurrences. Furthermore, the reality of trial through battle and its subsequent judgment proved to be striking only in more unique cases where complex circumstances were at play.

Thietmar told of a Count Gero whom Waldo had accused before the Emperor. Once the two men were brought together, all the “leading men of the realm” came together to witness the trial. In this case, the two men fought on an island. Thietmar described the blows landed by each party. There came a point when Waldo landed a crushing blow, causing Gero to admit that he could not continue, thus showing Waldo to be the victor. Interestingly enough, Waldo died of his wounds shortly after the duel. This demonstrates that trial by battle was not necessarily about who died first. In this duel, because Gero conceded the fight itself, losing the duel, the fate of Waldo himself was not of importance in trial results. As the trial had found Gero guilty, the Emperor had Gero beheaded.\textsuperscript{103}

This instance is also interesting because Thietmar explains that various men of the realm were on both sides. Thietmar stated that only a small number were pleased with

\textsuperscript{102} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, VII.52.

\textsuperscript{103} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, III.9.
the outcome of the battle. Duke Otto of Bavaria rebuked the Emperor, angered that he allowed such a “great man to be condemned on such a petty charge.” Thietmar described the actions of Abbot Liudolf of Corvey, who on the morning of the duel, as on all mornings, was singing the mass and saw Count Gero’s head floating above the altar. According to Thietmar, Liudolf received this vision because God had chosen to reveal it to him. Immediately Liudolf began a mass for the dead, removed his vestments and left the church. He summoned his brothers, informed them of Gero’s fate, and asked them to offer prayers on his behalf. ¹⁰⁴

This example demonstrates some of the criticisms of trial by battle. Duke Otto described the charges as petty and hollow. The first problem with trial by battle is that the sentence, particularly in a case such as this, can be unfitting for the crime itself. Secondly, because the trial revolves around military prowess and fighting skills, it questions the extent to which God controls the duel. Waldo’s charge, though petty, was still legitimate necessarily because of his victory; God had to have backed Waldo according to the understood meanings of trial by battle. Still, many individuals had esteemed Gero and believed that he must have been innocent, though many would be slow to question the validity of God’s judgment seen in the duel’s outcome. Additionally, many felt that regardless of the legitimacy of Waldo’s claim, the punishment was incorrect, but this led one to put the Emperor in the wrong. Thietmar noted that the course of events “pleased no one except Archbishop Adalbert and

Margrave Dietrich.”\textsuperscript{105} Thietmar himself makes little in the way of judgment on this matter.

As a bishop, Thietmar said nothing to the implication that God did not mediate the duel, though Leyser offers his own interpretation when he suggests that Gero “failed the duel” rather than being found guilty.\textsuperscript{106} It is likely that if Thietmar did harbor conflict about the outcome, he might have seen the ruling as reflecting some unknown transgression of Gero, perhaps one in no way related to Waldo’s charge. Similarly, Waldo’s death after the duel further complicates the matter. Whether God was displeased by the shallow nature of Waldo’s claims or whether Waldo himself had sins requiring punishment, the witnesses surely would not have seen his death it as coincidence. If God is sitting in judgment, he is surely aware of the entire record of both the accuser and the accused.

Thietmar and his contemporaries were not the first to question aspects of trial by battle and other forms of judicial ordeal. Reconciling these questions and their implications was understandably of great importance. Historian Stephen White offers significant insight into how the practice of trial by ordeal in relation to these types of questions developed in eleventh-century France. White argues that the call for trial by ordeal was quite often a political move made either “from a position of great strength” or as an “act of desperation” and that people came to use the ordeal itself as a bargaining

\textsuperscript{105} Thietmar, \textit{Chronicon}, III.9.

\textsuperscript{106} Leyser, \textit{Rule and Conflict}, p. 99.
tool for self-empowerment in the legal process.\textsuperscript{107} He suggests that over time, people began to recognize the “human politics” at work in the ordeal. This could be things ranging from rigging the ordeal to the impact that a friendly versus a hostile judge could have and even to the refusal of one to see the relation between defeat in a duel and an “unfavorable judgment.”\textsuperscript{108}

This possibility for interference and human fallibility would interfere with God’s judgment, as theoretically the desire for a trial by ordeal was due to the belief that in placing the decision in God’s hands one “injected certainty into an otherwise unpredictable disputing process.”\textsuperscript{109} As “human politics” increasingly marred the process of ordeal, one would have to reconcile the thought that humans can actually interfere in God’s judgment. As humans are certainly not more powerful than God, the only explanation is that if humans are intent to commandeer the ordeal they are effectively making it no longer about God’s judgment but rather their own.

Judicial duels were not always affairs carried out between two individuals. Thietmar provided the example of an encounter between Duke Gottfried and Count Gerhard. He stated that the two men had long been in discord and that finally they and their supporters would meet in a judicial duel at an agreed upon location. It is of note that Thietmar referred to the duel as a route to “unquestionable judgment,” as he had


\textsuperscript{108} White, “Proposing the Ordeal”, pp. 98-99.

\textsuperscript{109} White, “Proposing the Ordeal”, p. 96.
expressed concern over a duel’s outcome previously in his work in the example of Gero and Waldo’s duel above, a case which in fact raises many questions. In this case of Gottfried and Gerhard, the duel played out as a major battle between two armies. Thietmar stated that Christ’s humility overcame Gerhard’s pride and his men took flight and he endured the loss of 300 men. The outcome declared that Duke Gottfried was the victor. Additionally, his army lost only 30 *milites*, a relatively low number of casualties.\textsuperscript{110}

The act of war and battle is only one of many incidents that Thietmar interpreted as God’s will. Interestingly, Thietmar suggested that God brought some catastrophes in the hope that they would renew the faith of his followers. Thietmar described an event in 1004 in which a fire destroyed a church in Paderborn and all of its possessions. He does not mention that this tragedy injured anyone, but that the incident moved the “hearts of the faithful” who witnessed the destruction. This coupled with their desire for the “heavenly reward” of salvation led the people to rebuild the church and strengthen their faith.\textsuperscript{111} Having endured firsthand the punishment of God, the faithful had renewed determination not to suffer God’s wrath again.

It was important to Thietmar for the reader to know that God did not rain wanton destruction upon his people, nor did he endanger those who have not truthfully earned his divine vengeance. The actions of God in this world were direct tactical strikes against his offenders. In the previous example, the fire and subsequent collapse of the church did not injure anyone because that was neither God’s desire nor his intention. When God

\textsuperscript{110} Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.62.

\textsuperscript{111} Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VI.17.
was seeking more than warning, he struck his target. Thietmar described a similar incident of a collapsing building wherein an entire house suddenly fell in on itself. Within the house, the king had been dispensing justice, through the law, to his people. Thietmar noted that only one priest was injured, and that this was a man who had been living a life of sin. He had been living “unjustly and knowingly” with a woman who was the wife of a man whom the church had previously excommunicated.  

112 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VI.9

This priest was the target of the incident and he alone suffered from it. That this is how the witnesses to this event understood it is reflective of the way they explained their circumstances. The only reason such an unfortunate thing would happen to a person was because of their sin and God’s anger.

There is another incident that Thietmar described in which he recalled the destruction of a number of buildings on the mount of St. John the Baptist, which was near Magdeburg and as Thietmar noted was “subject to [Magdeburg] in every respect.”  

113 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.58.

There was a particularly large lamp hanging in the dormitory that caught fire. As the brothers were sleeping at the time, when they finally came to realize what was happening, flames had already engulfed the building in its entirety. One brother ran into the flames to save some vestments, but he succumbed to the fire. He confessed his sins and the fire reduced him to ash. The remaining brothers told their abbot of what had happened, and

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112 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VI.9

113 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.58.
he recognized it as punishment for his sins and treated it seriously because “it could not be changed.”114

After detailing the extent of the fire and the total number of buildings involved, Thietmar told the reader that the brothers were yet able to save the relics and a good portion of the treasury. They recovered these items as well as the ashes of the fallen brother, which the brothers venerated and placed among his predecessors. Thietmar noted that the rescue of the relics came from “through the love of God and the great devotion” of the brothers who rushed to help.115 Additionally, when taken with earlier examples in which improper handling of relics resulted in divine punishment, one must realize that God, in addition to the holy dead, recognize the value of the relics of the saints and would protect them accordingly. The protection of the treasury also suggested that God watched out for the economic stability of his servants who would not be able to sustain their lives of devotion following the loss of the treasury.

This example also illustrates the way that different people explained the actions of God through their own individual experiences. Hemiko, the brother that died in the fire, offers no comment on the reasoning for the fire yet seemingly he is not angry at God as he confesses his sins and dies at peace spiritually. The brothers that survived saw an example of God interceding and aiding them in a time of peril and defending the church’s relics, their saints, from the fire’s “greedy jaws”.116 Lastly, the abbot saw it as punishment against himself for his sins against God. Following the fire, he recognized

114 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.58.

115 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.58.

116 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.58.
the seriousness of the matter. He knew that he needed to reform his ways and he needed to seek forgiveness. Unfortunately, the destruction of the church and surrounding buildings could not be undone.

Thietmar argued that many of the events that befell his countrymen were acts of God serving out punishment for their collective sins. Thietmar recalled an invasion into Franconia by Hungarian forces that utterly decimated the region. Understanding that a reader might be confused as to how an enemy travelled so far into foreign lands and was able to lay waste to a region of significant population, Thietmar stated that God motivated the invaders as vengeance toward Thietmar’s people for their sins. Thietmar reasoned that their failure is in their refusal to humble themselves in fear of the Lord while they enjoyed times of prosperity. If one is enjoying a relatively good period of economic prosperity and there is no plague or famine, one can often forget to seek forgiveness for their sins. This behavior angered God and Thietmar explained that having made no attempt to reconcile with God, they were “not heard when [they] cried out” for protection.¹¹⁷

The idea that invading forces were a sign of God’s disapproval continues within Thietmar’s work. In yet another battle, similar to the previous example, the Saracens had invaded Lombardy. Although greatly outnumbered and cut off from the possibility of retreat, the Saracen king and his warriors still managed to fight bravely and extend the combat. In this instance, God was “placated by the groans of the pious” and inspired the enemy to flee. Thietmar’s Chronicon emphasizes that every Christian should approach God in humility and pray that, by his mercy, one can turn away such plagues and “obtain

¹¹⁷ Thietmar, Chronicon, II.7.
the security necessary for peace.” Furthermore, it was important to Thietmar for the reader to realize that God would never forsake his flock, and that there was a difference between a vengeful God and an unforgiving one. There are times when Thietmar explained that the actions of God on the battlefield were not merely for or against one side. Thietmar recalled a time when forces under Boleslav invaded Bohemia. When the time came that they were finally driven out, Thietmar wrote that while the expedition had been against the enemy, Boleslav’s forces, it nevertheless had “inflicted many wounds on us, the victors, because of our sins.” God could judge one guilty, even if he were not the official guilty party.

Thietmar clearly understood tragedy to be as a result of sin. It was a divine punishment from God, a sentence of divine justice. Thietmar recounted that 1018 was the year of “the great sorrow” during which outside forces descended on the Empire. Tradition stated that this slaughter was like none seen since the days of Charlemagne. Thietmar questioned how his country could be devastated in such a way and experience so many losses without the enemy suffering losses of their own. He answered that anyone who “meditates rightly” should come to but one conclusion: it is impossible to fight if, by his guilt, he is “brought down by the punishment of God.” This was a judicial battle to Thietmar. It is important to understand that just as trials could take the

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118 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.45.

119 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VII.64.

120 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VIII.30.

121 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VIII.30.
form of a planned duel or battle, a seemingly random conflict between two parties could be a form of trial.

To understand how Thietmar came to this conclusion, it is important to return to Geary’s processes for memory and his example of this process through the case of Arnold and the Pannonian dragon which warrants discussion at length. Geary suggests that the brain creates a memory through visual association, analogy, logic, and lastly by assigning a name or label. Geary explains the story of Arnold, a Bavarian monk, who around 1030 visited Pannonia. Geary explains how, some time after his return, Arnold recalled seeing a dragon. What is interesting in this case is that Arnold recognized what he saw as a dragon, though as Geary notes, Arnold had never seen a dragon and it differed significantly from the referents Arnold had of what a dragon was supposed to look like. Arnold related what he saw to Job’s Leviathan over contemporary representations of dragons yet still called it a dragon whereas Job’s Leviathan is never identified as such.122 Furthermore, Geary states that based on what he saw, Arnold recognized that the pictures he had seen of dragons with wings and feet were decidedly false because his dragon did not have these features.123

Geary’s analysis of Arnold serves as perfect example for how to understand Thietmar’s remarks on the year of “great sorrow.” Arnold saw a dragon. He applied knowledge from historical precedent and explained what he saw even though it did not match the expected forms. In the same way, Thietmar explained a time of great sorrow that was not part of a formal dispute and was without the traditional forms of an ordeal

122 Geary, Phantoms of Remembrance, pp. 160-161.

123 Geary, Phantoms of Remembrance, p. 162.
and saw God’s judgment at work. Understanding that Thietmar was able to see the form of ordeal in other applications as well as view a negative experience as evidence that God had found one guilty, allows some of the previously mentioned examples from Thietmar’s work to gain added meaning. In the example of Gunther in particular, one can recognize the martyrs’ actions in terms of an ordeal to prove Gunther’s worth as a potential bishop.124

God interceded in the temporal world to provide guidance and direction. Thietmar believed that God revealed his wishes through his actions. Often subtle at first, these quickly became large scale actions in the face of a society that had either missed the initial message or was slow to get the message. God could be a protector, defending his paupers and servants from those who would harm or wrong. God also appeared as a vengeful God. When God dispensed his wrath, the only respite to be found was through prayers of forgiveness. Additionally, when the hand of God struck at offenders, it was sharply aimed and largely without collateral damage.

In Thietmar’s *Chronicon*, God was most often a divine judge, dispensing justice through the medium of the ordeal. Thietmar and his contemporaries did not find ordeal without its share of potential contradictions, all of which were distressing, particularly to Thietmar and other members of the clergy. Furthermore, judicial duels were not limited to battle between individuals, but could also include full-scale battles. Thietmar explained that wrath of God, seen in its many forms, could encourage and renew religious faith within the community. Also, the wrath of God was not mindless destruction. People often survived or only came near to death. This is evidence that they were

124 See above, pp. 45-46.
intended to learn from the experience. It is important to note that Thietmar and his contemporaries understood much of their circumstances as directly tied to God’s pleasure or anger with members of the community. Medieval society saw God’s anger in fire, disaster, and invading armies. Often, they saw God’s action as punishment for their sins. They had been judged and were to be punished. As with Arnold’s dragon, they took from their established base of knowledge, and fit what they saw into their model for understanding. Such actions were rarely seen as coincidence.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

Thietmar’s *Chronicon* contains a wealth of knowledge. Historians who refer to this source have historically tended to use it for understanding into the political workings of Ottonian Germany. However, work by scholars such as Geary and Ward have shifted how scholars envision and understand the place of the dead in medieval society and the impact and place of memory in historical studies. This has changed primarily through new arguments concerning medieval beliefs pertaining to miracles and the relics of martyrs and saints. One must not see a naïve, superstitious society, rather one with a complex knowledge of the relationship between the living and the dead. Few works attempted to analyze Thietmar’s *Chronicon* from the perspective of how the past influenced Thietmar’s present. The few that have done so struggled to reconcile the numerous stories involving the dead. All too often, historians have dismissed the supernatural stories of the dead and the miracles in medieval texts because they make no sense to us. It is vital that scholars approach their sources on the author’s terms with knowledge of their beliefs.

This thesis has suggested that through Thietmar’s work, one can gather understanding about the social stratification and social order of Thietmar’s society. God had created the world and thus was at the top for Thietmar. The Kings were next, whom God placed as rulers in the temporal world. Following them in this structure of society
were the Dukes, though the Bishops were arguably next in the chain of administrative power. Thietmar firmly believed in the bonds of oaths, particularly those of loyalty. Thietmar reminded the reader of the necessity of a Bishop’s consecration, through which one received God’s blessing and became official. Unfortunately, some members of society would not have made such a distinction or seen the consecration as that important. The King, as God’s ruler in the temporal world, was solely responsible for the filling of bishoprics, though he could grant this right out. Thietmar’s official purpose was to write of the Ottonian kings, though he regularly wrote of anyone from whom the reader could learn. Often, these were examples from the past, from the dead, suggesting that to Thietmar, the dead outranked the living in medieval society.

Thietmar saw the human soul as unique and thus humans owed a debt to God for the gift of life. Thietmar also believed that humans should look forward to heaven and their spiritual reward, the aim of all. This viewpoint worked actively to combat the fear of death and the devil. Heaven was a reward, a respite from the dangers of the temporal world. Memoria played a pivotal role in the relationship between the living and the dead, the realms of which only a porous membrane kept separated. One remembered the dead because one found examples and inspiration in the past. Thietmar explained the importance of acts of memoria in interceding on behalf of the deceased’s spirit and relates the acts of intercession and absolution. Thietmar employed the reader not to wait to focus on salvation of their souls, but demonstrated how one might find absolution through confession to one’s peers, and the importance of humility.

Thietmar looked back to the past for the sole purpose of finding inspiration, motivation, and information of how to better live a life aimed at the future of heaven. The
dead, more than the living, demonstrated the ways of right living. The dead gave offerings to the church and sang the morning praises. The dead conveyed important information to the living in dreams, visions, and in special cases through reanimation of the deceased. Thietmar delineated a marked difference between God’s miracles and the Devil’s magic. However, the dead could also exert real physical influence in the temporal world to Thietmar and his contemporaries.

I have also illustrated the presence of the dead in the world of the living and the interactions between both planes of existence. The living and the dead interacted frequently and in many ways served each other. Thietmar wrote of the translation of relics for the benefits they brought to a town. It is clear that Thietmar and his contemporaries saw relics as the saints and martyrs themselves. Accordingly, they were to be venerated and respected. Disrespecting the saints and martyrs through their relics carried grave penalties. There was also significant physical interaction between the living and the dead across the temporal boundary. The holy dead demonstrated through their actions the permanent connection between servants of the church and its living patrons. Additionally, just as the clergy and the living worked for the well-being of the souls of the deceased, saints and martyrs could be mediators between God and the living, granting worldly intercession.

Also exerting influence on the temporal world was the power of God. God interceded in the temporal world to provide guidance and direction. Thietmar believed that God revealed his wishes through his actions. Often subtle at first, these quickly became large scale actions in the face of a society that had either missed the initial message or was slow to get the message. God could be a protector, defending his paupers
and servants from those who would harm or wrong. God also appeared as a vengeful
God. When God dispenses his wrath, the only respite to be found was through prayers of
forgiveness. Additionally, when the hand of God struck at offenders, it was sharply
aimed and largely without collateral damage.

In Thietmar’s *Chronicon*, God was most often a divine judge, dispensing justice
through the medium of the ordeal. Thietmar and his contemporaries did not find ordeal
without its share of potential contradictions, all of which were distressing, particularly to
Thietmar and other members of the clergy. Furthermore, judicial duels were not limited
to battle between individuals, but could also include full-scale battles. Thietmar
explained that wrath of God, seen in its many forms, could encourage and renew religious
faith within the community. Also, the wrath of God was not mindless destruction.
People often survived or only came near to death. This is evidence that they were
intended to learn from the experience. It is important to note that Thietmar and his
contemporaries understood much of their circumstances as directly tied to God’s pleasure
or anger with members of the community. Medieval society saw God’s anger in fire,
disaster, and invading armies. Often, they saw God’s action as punishment for their sins.
They had been judged and were to be punished. As with Arnold’s dragon, they took from
their established base of knowledge, and fit what they saw into their model for
understanding. Such actions were rarely seen as coincidence.

This thesis has demonstrated that within Thietmar there is significant evidence
supporting the analysis that Thietmar and his contemporaries experienced God in their
daily lives and that they understood life and society through historical forms. In all of
these areas, Thietmar’s work continually illustrates the importance of historical memory.
The members of this society related their circumstances and also understood the actions of God in terms of historical precedent and looked to God’s example in the past in preparation for the future. The order of society, the expectations of the dead, and the guidelines for living a life pleasing to God, were all in the past. The past was home to the examples and illustrations for the workings of the world. Discussion has largely focused on the actions of God around and through the actions of the holy dead as well as interpretations for and explanations of God’s justice and divine wrath. God dispensed justice as punishment for sins and when people failed to adhere to the earlier examples he had given them, they realized their punishments were a final warning and often the actions moved them to repent. God acted through history and in forms recognizable to his people by their precedent in the memory of the period.
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