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EDITED BY

ALFRED COBBAN, M.A., Ph.D.

Professor of French History in the University of London

Assistant Editor: R. R. DAVIES, B.A., University College, London

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THE BATTLE AT THE LECH, 955.

A STUDY IN TENTH-CENTURY WARFARE*

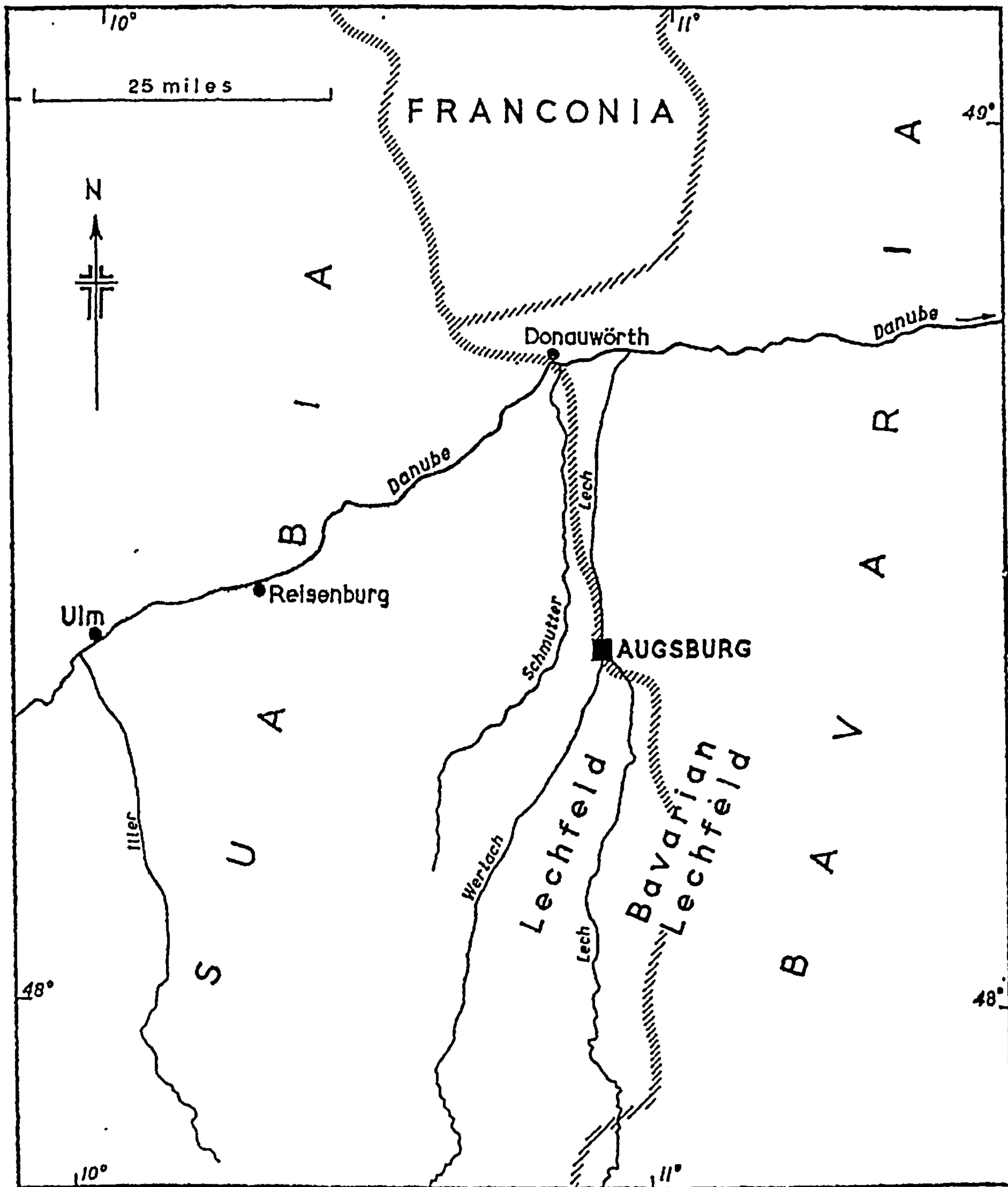
KARL LEYSER
Magdalen College, Oxford

955 WAS THE *annus mirabilis* of the nascent German kingdom and all those who had hitched their stars to the fortunes of its Saxon ruler, Otto I. The last embers of a great feud which had divided the royal house and the aristocratic clans in all the duchies were stamped out. The Magyars whose crippling razzias had at one time tested the defences of Saxony and Bavaria to their limits, suffered a defeat in a pitched battle, of such magnitude that it could not be avenged and forced them to live in their new homes between the Middle-Danube and the Carpathians henceforth on the defensive themselves. Lastly the enemies of the Saxons nearer home, the Slavs between the Lower Elbe and the Oder who had used the troubles of the *Reich* and the Hungarian raids to counter-attack Saxon overlordship, were crushed in another pitched battle that was fought under conditions no less critical than those at the Lech on 10 August. This second engagement Otto and his margraves endured and won in Eastern Mecklenburg by the river Recknitz on 16 October, late in the campaigning season. From now onwards Saxon domination inexorably advanced, tribute flowed in from ever-larger regions and the conquerors' religion moved across the frontiers into their strongholds on Slav soil. The way to empire lay wide open.

Of these events the battle at the Lech must be reckoned by far the most important. It was the last act in the great civil war of the previous two years and without it the excessive strain on Saxon military resources which had been acutely felt in the 940s and 950s would have made the conquests in Slavania during the next decade far less likely. On the outcome of the *bellum publicum*, the term by which contemporaries distinguished the battle against a *hostis communis* from their current feuds, the fragile structure of the *Reich* hung. War was the perennial occupation of the German nobles, their *milites* and the Magyars in the tenth century. Both waged it for economic and social as much as for political reasons. To understand the encounter at the Lech and the campaigns that led

* A map of the part of Central Europe including the battlefield is provided. The author wishes to point out that in this period the city of Augsburg was somewhat to the south of the confluence of the Wertach and the Lech.

to it, is worthwhile not only for the devotees of military history or 'Decisive Battles'. We can learn from these events much about the growing Ottonian empire, about the ways and means of its success.



By 955 the Hungarians (or Magyars) had been raiding Western Europe for sixty years. We must ask why, if we want to know the reasons for their defeat and its meaning for the regions they had infested. They were originally not one people but several who in the ninth century inhabited an area the Byzantines named Lebedia, probably west of the Don and on the banks of Lake Maeotis.¹ Advancing across Southern

¹ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, c. 38, ed. Gy. Moravcsik (Budapest, 1949), p. 171 and the *Commentary*, ed. R. J. H. Jenkins (London, 1962), p. 147. N. Fettich, *Die Metallkunst der landnehmenden Ungarn*, *Archaeologia Hungarica*, xxi (1937), pp. 162 ff. For a general survey of early Hungarian history see B. Homan, *Geschichte des Ungarischen*

Russia these tribes of hunters, fishermen, horse-and-cattle nomads had come into contact with richer and better-equipped peoples like the Chazars, the Rus of Kiev and the Byzantines and had acquired some of the products of their civilization. Our main sources for their fortunes in the steppes and along the rivers of this region are the Greek government compilations, Leo VI's *Tactica* and above all Constantine Porphyrogenitus's *De administrando imperio*.² In the latter the Hungarians were called Turks but we also learn that dissident elements from the Chazars joined them and formed one of their tribes. The dangers of their situation amidst the Pechenegs pressing from the east, the Byzantine empire, the Bulgars and the Rus forced them into, at any rate, the beginnings of a more ambitious political organization and brought to the fore the dynasty which eventually ruled over all the Hungarian peoples, the Arpads, and a number of other princely clans who also had powers over more than one tribe. The mounted warrior became in the ninth century the backbone of their society and this aristocratic nomadism determined both its means and its ends. The economy to maintain the princes and horse-archers needed a large and continuous supply of precious metals and artefacts and the Magyars of the period of settlement in the late ninth century already owned products of very superior craftsmanship as their magnificent silver sabretache-mountings and wrought ornaments show.³ The resources to satisfy these demands, slaves, fabrics, gold and silver, came their way through war or commerce with their neighbours in Southern Russia. When in 895 the Pechenegs forced the Magyars out of their camping areas in Atelkuzu, 'the land between the rivers' west of the Dnieper, across the Carpathians and into the Danubian basin, they also dislodged them from the sources of their precious metal supplies and other necessities. The Magyars did not find it difficult to establish themselves in the valleys of the Theiss, the Danube and their tributaries, nor was the country unsuited to them, but the *Landnahme* was a great crisis in their nomadic existence all the same, not least of all an economic crisis. The raids into Western Europe served in the first instance as a substitute for their former contacts with the great Russian trade-routes which were now for the most part barred to them. They opened up new sources of precious metals, artefacts and fine cloths as well as opportunities for capturing slaves and women which they would have needed if Constantine Porphyrogenitus's story of the Pechenegs' attack on their South-Russian camps is to be believed. According to him the families of the Magyars were destroyed while the mass of the warriors had been on an expedition westwards.⁴ Among the atrocity tales in East-Frankish annals describing early Hungarian inroads one

Mittelalters (Berlin, 1940), i, pp. 32 ff. For a discussion of the raids from a Hungarian viewpoint see T. v. Bogayay, *Lechfeld Ende und Anfang. Ein ungarischer Beitrag zur Tausendjahrfeier des Sieges am Lechfeld, 955* (Munich, 1955).

² Cc. 38-40.

³ N. Fettich, *op. cit.*, pp. 221 ff.

⁴ *De administrando imperio*, c. 40, *ed. cit.*, pp. 176-7.

at least lends some colour to the emperor's report. The *Annales Fuldenses*, under the year 894, mentioned one of the first raids into Pannonia, then a vast Bavarian march, and they relate that the Hungarians killed all the men and old women, dragging the young ones away with them.⁵

The pattern of camps developing into settlements which served as bases for long-distance raids and where the raiders stored their loot, treasures and dependants continued after the *Landnahme*, the occupation of the plains on both sides of the Middle-Danube by the Magyars. It would however be a mistake to assume that the fierce razzias against which the military and political organization of the late-Carolingian world failed at first so lamentably, served only economic ends. The Hungarians had to reconnoitre their new frontiers and they soon discovered that their neighbours were firmly settled agriculturists living in conditions very different from those of the steppes or the thinly populated Danubian plain. The Bavarians to the west moreover had a stake in Pannonia, the old Carolingian march between the Raab and the Danube, which they were determined to defend.⁶ The devastation of this area and of Moravia to the north of it served a political purpose for it secured the new camping grounds against surprise attacks and created a no-man's-land between them and the East-Frankish kingdom. But the raids were also a way of life. The Magyars arrived in South-Eastern and Central Europe as nomads and their aristocracy knew no other mode of existence. The Slav settlements they found in or near their new areas of occupation could be subdued and exploited and these areas themselves and adjoining territories like Croatia offered room enough for nomadic migrations. Even in the twelfth century, Otto of Freising who had travelled through Hungary on the Second Crusade tells us, the inhabitants still lived summer and autumn in tents.⁷ But nomadism at home or 'nomadism in one country' was not enough because it offered no rewards. The raids also helped to preserve a social order that favoured the horse-borne warriors and their leaders and left sedentary functions to the base of the population whether Magyars, their captives or Slavs, though the Hungarian historian Gyula Török, who has recently presented and interpreted new archeological evidence of the *Landnahme*-period, has perhaps overdrawn the distinction between the peaceful

⁵ *Annales Fuldenses*, ed. F. Kurze, *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* = S.R.G. (Hanover, 1891), p. 125 and *Annalista Saxo* for the year 906, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptorum Tomus*, vi = M.G.H. SS. pp. 591 f. Cf. also Liudprand of Cremona's *Antapodosis*, ii. c. 28 in *Die Werke Liudprands von Cremona*, ed. J. Becker (Hanover and Leipzig, 1915), p. 51.

⁶ In a famous letter addressed to Pope John IX in 900 and sent in the name of the Bavarian episcopate, clergy and people, Pannonia is described as 'nostra maxima provincia'. For the text see *Codex diplomaticus et epistolaris regni Bohemiae*, ed. G. Friedrich (Prague, 1907), i, p. 32. For the history of the late-Carolingian frontiers see E. Klebel's articles, 'Die Ostgrenze des Karolingischen Reiches' and 'Herzogtümer und Marken', both in *Die Entstehung des Deutschen Reiches*, ed. H. Kämpf, *Wege der Forschung*, i (Darmstadt, 1956), pp. 1 ff., 42 ff. and pp. 58-9.

⁷ *Ottonis et Rahewini Gesta Friderici I. Imperatoris*, i. c. 32, ed. B. von Simson, S.R.G. (Hanover and Leipzig, 1912), p. 50: 'Toto estatibus vel autumpni tempore papiliones inhabitant.'

settlers and a belligerent aristocracy, Finno-Ugrian cattle-breeders ready for arable farming, and a Turkish upper crust interested only in war and the spoils of war. His conclusion that the peace-loving agrarian Hungarians of the common people were the main formative and progressive influence in the tenth century remains open to question.⁸

As nomads, however, the raiders did not conquer, let alone settle, more lands than they had already secured. They devastated, sacked and took prisoners. 'Depopulatio' was the usual expression used by the chroniclers to describe the havoc they wrought but this could mean anything from the abduction of hundreds to the temporary flight of rural populations frightened by rumours. At the same time the leaders of the Magyars came to know their West- and South-European enemies, to conclude alliances and mercenary treaties with them, exact tributes and exploit their feuds as a means of maintaining their military ascendancy. Between 898 and 955 Italy, the East-Frankish kingdom, Burgundy, Aquitaine and the West-Frankish regions, suffered some thirty raids, the worst of them during the earlier three decades, although some areas, especially Lower Lotharingia, were not hit until 954. Some of these expeditions differed very markedly from the rest not only as military enterprises but also in the make-up of the Magyar hosts and the enormous distances covered, notably those of 926, 937 and 954. We shall have to return to them.

It is now time to look at the other side. The distribution of the Hungarian attacks in time and place suggests that only for Bavaria and Saxony with Thuringia, the duchies of the eastern frontier, did they present a real threat to their existence. Elsewhere these expeditions only exposed the widespread insecurity and the want of an accepted political order, which were in fact a legacy of late-Carolingian times. The dynasties and adventurers who had seized their thrones when Carolingian blood or prestige failed were not yet taken for granted and could not count on the support of their leading vassals. Conversely, the Carolingians in France in their struggle to survive found themselves at the mercy of princes who wanted to discredit and ruin them, as Hugh the Great and his allies tried to do when they allowed the countryside round Reims to be pillaged by the raiders and Louis d'Outremer had to remain inert at Laon for want of their troops in 937.⁹ The monastic and episcopal historians of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries moreover convey a false impression of the terms on which *christianitas* and *barbaries*, the pagan Magyars, met during these decades. The Italian kings, Berengar I, Hugh and Berengar II, established mutually advantageous relations with Hungarian armies and found even the payment of tributes helpful because it enabled them to tax the churches and the poor

⁸ Gy. Török, *Die Bewohner von Halimba im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert*, *Archaeologia Hungarica*, xxxix (Budapest, 1962), pp. 112-13, 122-3.

⁹ Richer, *Histoire de France*, ed. R. Latouche (Les Classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen Age, Paris, 1930), i, p. 138: 'Rex enim, copias non habens, ignominiam pertulit... utpote a suis desertus.'

for their own purposes, as Liudprand of Cremona complained.¹⁰ The house of Arnulf of Bavaria entered into political connections, perhaps even a marriage alliance, with the marauders which lasted up to the very eve of the battle at the Lech.¹¹ The behaviour of Christian rulers towards the Magyars thus varied with circumstances and this is true even of the Saxon dynasty. In 924 Henry I made a truce and paid tribute after the lucky capture of a Hungarian prince.

Nor must it be thought that the methods of waging war used by the German frontier peoples and its purposes differed so very much from those of their fast adversaries from the Danubian plain. The Hungarians, as has been said, never attempted the wholesale conquest or occupation of the older settlements in the German stem-duchies; they wanted to strip, plunder and impoverish them by tribute and for a time they came near to success. But the Bavarians and Saxons themselves made war to impose tribute and to have other *gentes* serve them, as Widukind vividly conveys. The Saxons hunted for slaves quite as savagely as the Hungarians did in their wars against the Slavs: they killed those whom they did not want and took back the rest, often to resell.¹² It does not appear that the plunder which successful armies captured from Magyar swarms they intercepted on their way home in Italy, France and Bavaria was returned to the original owners. Nor did either the Germans or the French during these decades avoid all peaceful contacts with the raiders. A bishop was able to redeem a monk of Orbais from them; the captured daughter of a Suabian count was offered for sale by the Hungarians at Worms and bought by an inhabitant of that city.¹³

These incidents and the dealings which individual princes, nobles and even religious houses had to enter into with the Hungarians are evidence of harsh realities. Monastic foundations on the whole suffered most under the attacks but if the marauders singled them out for pillage and destruction it was not because they warred against Christianity as such but because monasteries were usually rich in movables and easy to seize.¹⁴ Later monastic writers often complained that the lay nobility had not defended the monks but had looked only to their own safety.

¹⁰ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, v. c. 33 (p. 151), wrote about Berengar II's tax to buy off the Magyars in 947: 'Fecit autem hoc non ut populi curam haberet, sed ut hac occasione magnam pecuniam congregaret. Quod et fecit.'

¹¹ K. Reindel, 'Herzog Arnulf und das Regnum Bavariae', *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte*, xvii (1954), pp. 219-21 and in *Die Entstehung des Deutschen Reiches*, Wege der Forschung, i, pp. 249 ff. Reindel however rejects a marriage alliance between Arnulf and a Hungarian princess.

¹² *Die Sachsengeschichte des Widukind von Korvey*, i. c. 35, ed. H. E. Lohmann and P. Hirsch, S.R.G. (Hanover, 1935), p. 50: 'Puberes omnes interfecti, pueri ac puellae captivitati servatae.' This was the fate of the inhabitants of Jahna, a town of the Daleminzi, later in the March of Meissen.

¹³ *Flodoardi Historia Remensis Ecclesiae*, ii. c. 10, M.G.H., SS. xiii, p. 458. For the count's daughter see *Lantberti Vita Sancti Heriberti*, c. 1, M.G.H., SS. iv, p. 741. The story suggests that prisoners bought of the Hungarians *en route* remained slaves. An Italian margrave in 921, according to Liudprand (*Antapodosis*, ii. c. 62, p. 65), with great presence of mind concealed his identity and was ransomed as a mere 'miles' by one of his own vassals.

¹⁴ For an attempt to negotiate and purchase immunity for the monastery of Lobbes in 954 see Folcwin's *Gesta Abbatum Lobbiensium*, c. 25, M.G.H., SS. iv, p. 66.

There was no great solidarity in opposing the Magyars or even in regarding them as the common enemy. From 926, however, it is possible to speak of a steadily more successful resistance to the raiders in areas where they had hitherto found the going easy. Henry I's victory at Riade in 933 is here perhaps less important than the fate which a Hungarian attack on Saxony suffered in 938, in the middle of the seething rebellion against Otto I. The new fortifications now proved themselves not so much as places of refuge standing sieges but as centres from which counter-raids could be launched and the Hungarians worn down. They lost heavily in men and horses and part of their force was destroyed in a marsh on the Lower Elbe. After 938 Saxony did not see them again as invaders.¹⁵

Even more encouraging were the wars fought by the Bavarians from 943, when Duke Arnulf's brother Berthold, a friend of the Ottonian regime, won a victory at Wels in the Traungau (now in Austria) which surpassed anything achieved so far against the Magyars in the judgement of Adalbert of St. Maximin, the continuator of Regino of Prüm's chronicle.¹⁶ Duke Berthold had superseded the sons of Arnulf who in his day had been on good terms with his new eastern neighbours and there may have been domestic reasons for this war with them. It is the site of the battle which must be noted: Wels lies on the Traun, the southern tributary of the Danube nearest to the valley of the Enns which at that time marked the frontier. When Otto's brother Henry received the duchy in 948 the fighting began again and once more seems to have been close to the no-man's-land, if not inside it, rather than in the Bavarian hinterland which the Magyars had penetrated so frequently on their expeditions further west. In 950, moreover, Henry for the first time led a host right into Hungary and broke through to the settlements of his enemies. His methods were not so very different from those the Pechenegs had employed against the Magyars in the steppes of Southern Russia. Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim in her *Gesta Ottonis* exultantly described how Henry seized the spoils they had collected there from all over the world and carried away not only their booty but also the women and offspring of their nobles.¹⁷ The Hungarians no longer commanded the initiative and their situation grew worse because Bohemia had been drawn more closely to the *Reich* by Otto I at the same time. It became critical two years later when Henry received the marches of Verona and Aquilea as his part of the spoils from the German invasion of Italy in 951.¹⁸ The way into Italy had always been open to the Magyars and although her many cities were not entirely suited to their style of warfare they could threaten to pillage and devastate the open country in

¹⁵ Widukind, *Res Gestae Saxonicae*, ii. c. 14, p. 79.

¹⁶ *Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis chronicon Cum Continuatione Treverensi*, ed. F. Kurze, S.R.G. (Hanover, 1890), p. 163 under the year 944.

¹⁷ *Hrotsvithae Opera*, ed. P. Winterfeld, S.R.G. (Berlin, 1902), p. 215, ll. 390-4.

¹⁸ *Continuatio Reginonis*, ed. cit., p. 166 and R. Köpke and E. Dümmler, *Kaiser Otto der Grosse* (Jahrbücher der Deutschen Geschichte, Leipzig, 1876), p. 208.

order to be bought off with tributes. Besides, Lombardy and Aquileia had usually served them as their route back from expeditions to France, Burgundy and Aquitaine. Key-points on this route in the hands of an enemy could bar it or make it unsafe. The established routines of the *razzia*, the mode of existence of the militant tribes and their princes, were thus threatened. Something out of the ordinary had to be done to save them.

Mention has already been made of certain Hungarian raids which differed from the rest. That of 937 afflicted at least eight *patriae*, Franconia, Suabia, Lotharingia, *Francia Minor*—the dioceses of Reims and Sens—the Duchy of Burgundy, Aquitaine and Italy.¹⁹ Its purpose is far from clear. On a march which led further and further west and then southwards it was impossible to take slaves because the raiders' movements would eventually have been paralysed by their growing column of captives. It is unlikely that they mounted them, and yet we hear of men and women being seized everywhere in Lotharingia and France. There was much arson and casual murder and people died of maltreatment, exposure and hunger, suffered when they were taken haphazardly and dragged along the roads by the invaders.²⁰ But Flodoard and other monastic writers also mention escapes and evidently prisoners were often abandoned or so carelessly guarded that they could get away.²¹ Nor can it have been easy to move accumulating booty further and further into hostile regions. The great raid of 937 then seems oddly aimless unless its purpose was merely to terrorize and make the most of the insecurity and instability inevitably attending the recent accession of new rulers: Otto I in the East-Frankish kingdom, Louis d'Outremer in the West.

The great raid of 954 can be seen much more clearly as a political enterprise designed to break the chain of setbacks and misfortunes of the last few years and to make the most of the feuds among the Hungarians' most dangerous enemies, the masters of the Saxon *Reich*. There is at least one source, the *History of the Bishops of Cambray*, which reveals a personality in command of the expedition, the *karchas* Bulksu.²² Constantine Porphyrogenitus explains that the office was the third-highest amongst the Hungarian tribes and it appears to have been hereditary.²³ If Bulksu was not a member of the house of Arpad he had, all the same,

¹⁹ For the course and direction of the 937 expedition see R. Lüttich, *Ungarnzüge in Europa im 10. Jahrhundert*, Historische Studien, lxxxiv (Berlin, 1910), pp. 88–93 and P. Lauer, *Le Règne de Louis IV d'Outremer*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études 127 (Paris, 1900), pp. 20–7. G. Fasoli, *Le Incursioni Ungare in Europa nel Secolo X*, (Florence, 1945), pp. 163–71.

²⁰ For a general, if highly coloured, description of Hungarian atrocities in 926 and 937 see Adso's *Miracula et Translatio Sancti Basoli Confessoris*, cc. 7, 8 and 9 in Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae*, cxxxvii, 663–64 and v. Flodoard's *Historia Remensis Ecclesiae*, i. c. 25 (M.G.H., SS. xiii, p. 447) for the burning of villages round a monastery in the Rémois.

²¹ Escapes are mentioned in the St. Basle miracles as reported by Flodoard (*op. cit.*, ii. c. 3, p. 451) and in his *Annales*, ed. P. Lauer (Collection de textes pour servir à l'étude et à l'enseignement de l'histoire, Paris, 1905), p. 67. Cf. also n. 13 *supra* where Flodoard retold the tales of 'captivi reversi'.

²² *Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium*, M.G.H., SS. vii, p. 428: 'rex Bulgio'.

²³ *De administrando imperio*, c. 40, pp. 178–9.

more authority than the princely heads of individual tribes. He had been baptized during a visit to Constantinople sometime between 945 and 948. The emperor himself received him, loaded him with gifts and also bestowed on him the rank of *patrikios*. These were high honours for a barbarian prince and the condition attached to them must have been to leave the empire's provinces unharmed in future. At any rate, according to the late eleventh-century Byzantine historian Johannes Skylitzes, Bulksu broke his pact with God by violating Greek territory again.²⁴ This in itself however shows that his interests ranged from the southern to the north-western frontiers of the Hungarian settlement. He stood for the razzias and the nomadic organization that went with them at a time when they had outlived their usefulness and could not be fitted into the changed military and political environment of the Magyars in Central Europe. The attempt to preserve them ended on the banks of the Lech.

The troubles of the *Reich* which Bulksu sought to exploit had begun in 953, a year before he and his army intervened. Liudolf's rising against his father Otto and his uncle Henry of Bavaria was, like the first great crisis of Otto I's reign, that of 937-40, a disruptive and incoherent affair. The interests of the king's opponents were diverse and conflicting. The feud in the royal house gathered behind it enemies of its recent advance into Bavaria and Lotharingia and these enemies took their places on both sides, that of the rebels and in Otto's camp. The rising grew out of the Italian expedition of 951-2, but it also had certain features which cannot be explained solely by the rancours of the moment: there was, to begin with, the clash between nephew and uncle, Liudolf's resentment against Henry of Bavaria whose position Otto had had to make as nearly regal and equal to his own as possible. Uncle-nephew feuds were common in the Saxon nobility and it was not accidental that the young prince drew two angry nephews of Hermann Billung, Otto's friend and trusted commander on the Lower Elbe, over to his side.²⁵ His *comitatus* moreover included not only Suabians from his duchy but also the pick of the younger generation of high-born Franks and Saxons. This too, the belligerent following of a king's son, was a Germanic institution older than the tenth century. Finally Liudolf's place in the royal house had become less secure since his father's second marriage in 951, to Adelheid, who brought with her the best available claim to the Italian crown. Duke Conrad of Lotharingia, Otto's son-in-law, had been alienated because his arrangements with Berengar II in Italy were all but disavowed by the king. Henry seems to have been very close to Adelheid in these conflicts and, of course, his own interest in Aquileia and Verona set him against any accommodation with Berengar.²⁶ Conrad's loss of

²⁴ In *Georgii Cedreni Historiarum Compendium*, ed. I. Bekker (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn, 1839), ii, p. 328.

²⁵ Widukind, *op. cit.*, iii, cc. 19 and 24.

²⁶ Henry escorted Adelheid to her future husband at Pavia. See Hrotsvitha's *Gesta Ottonis*, *ed. cit.*, p. 223, ll. 653-63, 681-2. For the effect of their alliance on Liudolf, p. 225, ll. 735-40.

face alone would have created a feud between the two men. To be even with Henry, whom they detested, Liudolf and his brother-in-law entered into relations with the Count-Palatine of Bavaria, Arnulf, one of the sons of the great duke Arnulf, who had not forgotten his family's former ascendancy in the duchy. Others of his house joined and so did Archbishop Herold of Salzburg. The biographer of Otto's youngest brother Archbishop Brun of Cologne had good reason to make his hero say to the young Liudolf that he was playing his enemies' game and not his own in heading the rebellion.²⁷ On the other hand Brun himself, who became Otto's representative in Lotharingia during this crisis, had to find strange allies in the noble clans which had not accepted Conrad's *ducatus* but wanted to restore one of their own, especially Count Reginar III of Hainault and his kin of the house of Duke Gisibert.

The war was fought treacherously and went badly for Otto who refused to abandon his brother. Henry's enemies got their revenge on him when they seized Regensburg and all his treasures in 953 and drove out his wife and children. Both Liudolf and Conrad had been willing to come to terms with the king but he wanted them to hand over their followers for punishment and this they refused to do. Their loyalty to their following engaged the sympathies even of Otto's men and the *Life of Brun* tells us that Liudolf could not be persuaded to accept his father's terms for his companions-in-arms: penalties coupled with vague promises for their eventual restoration.²⁸

The Hungarians appeared on the scene of the war in Bavaria late in February or early in March 954. The charge that Liudolf and his friends had called them in seems to have been made at once and led to violent scenes at the assembly at Langenzenn in mid-June when new attempts were made to restore peace and concord. At the time of their arrival the general situation was worse for Henry than for his enemies; he, if anyone, needed new allies. Liudolf claimed that the raiders had been enticed against him so that he was compelled to treat with them for the protection of his people.²⁹ Only the Liutpoldings, the family of the count-palatine, had ready access to the Magyar princes and perhaps this was their way of fighting for their inheritance. But Bavaria suffered from the large Hungarian army under Bulksu and it is clear that the invaders came on their own account using the feuds in the *Reich* as they advanced.³⁰ Liudolf and Conrad can be found each busy on his own. Distances were great and this may explain the disjointed character of these internal wars. One of Liudolf's Frankish friends, Count Ernst, had a

²⁷ *Ruotgeri Vita Brunonis Archiepiscopi Coloniensis*, c. 18, ed. I. Ott, S.R.G. Nova series x (Weimar, 1951), p. 17: 'Causam tuam tractas cum inimicis tuis.'

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 'Si paulo iratior est seductoribus tuis, cito mitescet.'

²⁹ Widukind, iii. c. 32, p. 119: 'Conductos adversum me pecunia, fateor, obtinui, ne me mihique subiectos laederent.' He gave them guides into Franconia so that his own duchy, Suabia, was spared. See also *Continuatio Reginonis*, p. 168 and Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, ii. c. 7, ed. R. Holtzmann, S.R.G., Nova series ix (Berlin, 1955), p. 46.

³⁰ Widukind (*loc. cit.*) has Duke Henry say at Langenzenn: 'quia hostes . . . maligne ac pessime conducerentur, quo via eis iterum laedendi aperiretur'.

thousand *familiae* of agrarian dependants taken off his lands.³¹ At Worms the Hungarians were able to cross the Rhine as Conrad's allies and were given a regal feast with presents of gold and silver. Conrad undoubtedly wanted to use them against his enemies in Lotharingia, Brun and Reginar, but they do not seem to have allowed themselves to be so employed. At Maastricht they parted from their patron and flung themselves on the monasteries and dioceses of Belgium and Northern France, notably Lobbes and Cambray, regions where they had never been before, though they did not find themselves unopposed there, especially at Cambray.

The most important consequence of their raid through Southern Germany was to tilt the balance of advantage against Liudolf and Conrad. Otto's immediate march to Bavaria with an army to fight the *hostis communis* was a regal gesture and the progress of the Magyars through Lotharingia further discredited the rising.³² It lost its justification as a feud. By April 955 Regensburg, its last stronghold, surrendered. Liudolf had already done so and lost Suabia and his vassals. Conrad had abandoned his cause in June 954 on slightly better terms: he lost his duchy but kept his station, his allods and a powerful *comitatus* of knights and was exiled only for the duration of a campaign against the Slavs of Brandenburg under the command of Margrave Gero.³³

For the Hungarians their success in 954 had not been altogether reassuring and the costs in casualties and from disease were high. But the German feuds subsided very slowly and this tempted them to try their luck again. Early in July 955 they sent an embassy to Otto I in Saxony to find out what they could about the situation. Their visit 'ob antiquam fidem et gratiam' in Widukind's words was scarcely over when messages arrived from Henry of Bavaria, barely restored to his duchy and ailing, that the enemy had swarmed over the frontier and had decided to fight it out with the king.³⁴ It seems as if the plan to attack once more was made and set in motion even before the embassy could have reported back and other sources too make it appear that this time the Hungarians came to stand their ground rather than raid, and fight a pitched battle rather than move on.³⁵ From what is known about them this was against most of their earlier practice, a last attempt to vindicate their power of ranging across Western Europe unhindered. Fighting first and foremost as horse-archers, they usually sought to avoid close-quarter action with German mounted troops. In 933 they fled as soon as they saw the new *miles armatus* of Henry I.³⁶ On other occasions it was

³¹ Widukind, iii. c. 30, p. 118.

³² It also gave the king an opportunity to lay waste Bavaria and so wear out his brother's enemies.

³³ *Ibid.*, iii. c. 42, p. 122.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, iii. c. 44, p. 123: 'statuuntque tecum inire certamen'. The Hungarian ambassadors received presents, a sign perhaps that Otto would have been glad of peace at this time.

³⁵ Cf. n. 48 *infra*.

³⁶ *Reginonis Chronicon*, p. 133: 'Perpaucos gladio, multa milia sagittis interimunt.' For the 933 campaign see Widukind, i. c. 38, p. 57.

rain hampering their archery which gave to Saxon and Lotharingian warriors their chance.³⁷ Their military success depended on speed, short combats and on eluding the slower-moving hosts of Western, Central and Southern Europe as they did in 954 when Otto found that they had gone when he reached Bavaria.³⁸ It is possible that they continued to count on the divisions amongst their enemies and hoped that Otto would not be able to collect an army so soon after the risings or keep it together and command it effectively at the critical moment. This had happened to Berengar I in 899 and to Louis the Child in 910. The very size of the Magyar effort in 955 suggests that the nomad aristocrats wanted to do more than to repeat their exploits of 937 and 954 and to take bigger risks to gain their ends.³⁹

The battle at the Lech is mentioned in contemporary and later annals widely but we possess only two sources which tell us much about it in detail: the *Res Gestae Saxonicae* of Widukind of Corvey and the *Life of Bishop Udalrich* of Augsburg.⁴⁰ Widukind was not an eyewitness nor did he write close to the scene of the events he described so well, but he may have had a good report from one of Otto's sparse Saxon following who had taken part in the fighting. Gerhard, the author of the *Life of Bishop Udalrich*, belonged to the great bishop's *familia* and became provost of the cathedral church.⁴¹ He was at Augsburg when the Hungarians besieged it in August 955, but he stayed with his lord when they moved away to fight Otto's army. Since Gerhard confined his work to what he saw and experienced in the household and the surroundings of Bishop Udalrich he denies us a detailed account of the battle. Nonetheless Gerhard's topography and his vivid narrative alone make it possible to locate the area where the main encounter took place. Besides Widukind and Gerhard, Ruotger's *Life of Brun*, Thietmar of Merseburg's *Chronicle* and the *St. Gallen Annals* only enlarge our knowledge by a few, albeit important, details. Lastly one must not ignore the traditions of Magyar historiography, the works of the Anonymous Notary of King Bela and of Simon of Keza. If their accounts cannot contribute much to the actuality of events in 955 they reveal the literary evolution of the memories left behind by the great catastrophe which ended the heroic age of Hungarian national history.

There has been much controversy about the site of the battle, so much that the question where it happened has almost blotted out the

³⁷ Widukind, ii. c. 14, p. 79: 'Urbani videntes hostes et ex itinere et ex pluvia, quae ingens erat, segniores, audacter erumpunt', in 938. Rain saved the monks of Lobbes in 954. See *Gesta Abbatum Lobbiensium* (M.G.H., SS. iv, p. 67): 'Subsequitur post haec pluvia pergrandis, quae gentilicium illis sagittandi artem cordarum distentione frustravit.' In later Hungarian tradition it rained at the battle of the Lech.

³⁸ Widukind, iii. c. 30, p. 117: 'Illi autem diverterunt ab eo', contradicting what he had written just before: 'disponerentque publico bello cum temptare'.

³⁹ So Ruotger thought. See *Vita Brunonis*, c. 35, pp. 35-6: 'Aggravata est ultra modum superbia . . . gentis Ungorum, seducta, credo, superioris anni successu.'

⁴⁰ *Gerhardi Vita Sancti Oudalrici Episcopi*, M.G.H., SS. iv, pp. 377 ff.

⁴¹ On Gerhard see W. Wattenbach, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter*, ed. R. Holtzmann (Tübingen, 1948), i. 257 and M. Manitius, *Geschichte der Lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1923), ii, pp. 203 f.

questions of what happened and how it happened. Some medievalists, driven perhaps rather than supported by the formidable Delbrück, the German military historian, have sought to locate it on the Bavarian, the right, bank of the Lech.⁴² Widukind, who strangely interrupted his account of the battle's first phase to tell his readers about the anxieties and set-backs of the Saxons' simultaneous war against the Slavs, wrote: 'While these things were done in Bavaria.' But it seems perverse to prefer the evidence of Widukind, writing in distant Corvey, to that of Gerhard from whose narrative it appears that the two armies must have met somewhere to the north-west of Augsburg on the left bank of the Lech well beyond the place where it is joined by its tributary, the Wertach.⁴³ More serious evidence for the right bank is to be found in the Salzburg Annals edited by Bresslau. But the bald text which reads: 'A very large Hungarian army was killed in Bavaria by the River Lech' does not purport to be either a close account of events or a precise location.⁴⁴ A great many Magyars undoubtedly were killed on Bavarian soil on 10 August and afterwards. The Salzburg annal cannot over-ride the careful narrative of the preliminaries and the aftermath of the main encounter which Gerhard provides and Widukind fills in neatly. Let us follow the story of St. Ulrich's biographer and comment on its problems:⁴⁵ the Magyars poured into Bavaria in numbers larger than ever before and crossed the Lech into Suabia where they burnt down the Church of St. Afra, now in, but then just to the south of, Augsburg. They swarmed over the whole country from the Danube up to the southern forests as far as the next western tributary of the Danube, the Iller. This is an important point: they did not move further west but allowed themselves to be found by the royal army. On 8 August they

⁴² H. Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst* (Berlin, 1907), iii, pp. 113 ff., 684 ff. W. Erben, *Kriegsgeschichte des Mittelalters*, Beiheft 16 der Historischen Zeitschrift (Munich and Berlin, 1929), pp. 70 f., 74 f.

⁴³ D. Schäfer, 'Die Ungarnschlacht von 955', *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (philosophisch-historische Classe), xxvii (1905), pp. 552 ff. and Lüttich, *Ungarnzüge*, pp. 153 ff. A battle site to the north-west of Augsburg runs counter to local tradition and to the view held by many historians, notably by H. Bresslau (*Historische Zeitschrift* = *H.Z.* 97, 1906, pp. 137 ff.) and R. Holtzmann, *Geschichte der Sächsischen Kaiserzeit* (Munich, 1943), p. 163, according to which the battle was fought on the left bank of the Lech but south of Augsburg, on the ground known as the Lechfeld. The evidence for this rests on a vision of St. Udalrich many years before the battle in which St. Afra took the bishop to the Lechfeld and later showed him the 'loca belli', the places where the Hungarians would be fought (*Vita Sancti Oudalrici*, c. 3, p. 389). It is by no means a necessary conclusion from the text that these must be on the Lechfeld. The difficulty is that Otto and his relief-army would then have had to arrive from the west and manœuvre well to the south of Augsburg to be able to approach from that direction, a time-wasting movement which makes his concentration even harder to explain. Had he then been defeated his communications with Franconia and Saxony would have been cut and his only refuge an Alpine redoubt of the kind Hitler may have contemplated in 1945. This was no plan for a Saxon king in the tenth century. B. Eberl, 'Die Ungarnschlacht auf dem Lechfeld (Gunzenlé) im Jahre 955', *Schriftenreihe des Stadtarchivs Augsburg* 7 (Augsburg, Basle, 1955), pp. 38 and 69, attempted to have the best of both sides of the Lech by arguing that the decisive encounter took place on 11 August on the Bavarian Lechfeld and that the action on the 10th was only a beginning. His view, however, works the sources much harder than they can bear. Many details, e.g. the site of the Hungarian camp, must remain uncertain.

⁴⁴ *Annales ex annalibus Iuvavensibus antiquis excerpti*, M.G.H., SS. xxx, ii, p. 743: 'Ungarorum maximus exercitus occisus est in Baiowaria iuxta flumen Lemannum.'

⁴⁵ *Vita S. Oudalrici*, c. 12, M.G.H., SS. iv, pp. 401 f.

laid siege to Augsburg. The city, the area round the cathedral, the bishop's seat and one or two other foundations, possessed walls which Udalrich himself had caused to be built many years ago against earlier Hungarian attacks in Suabia.⁴⁶ But it must be remembered that the last of these had passed through the duchy in 937 so that in this emergency the fortifications looked poor. There was an enclosure of stone, essential for protection against the raiders, but it lacked height and, above all, towers. Bishop Udalrich rose to the situation. His knights had coped with the first Hungarian assault outside the eastern gate (St. James) facing the Lech where the enemy thought they could rush the fortifications. All night the besieged were working to patch up the ramparts and to build block-houses on them at places which the bishop had chosen himself. It must have been a sombre and moving scene inside the enclosure, for while the men were working the women in the city at Ulrich's orders held processions and prayed for its delivery.⁴⁷ The crisis came next day when the bishop's knights, commanded by his brother Count Dietpold, had to sustain the assault from all sides. The Hungarians, according to Gerhard, approached with siege-engines, a sign that they were trying to learn from their enemies. Stone walls had hitherto for the most part defeated them and were regarded as the only safe refuge since the raiders lacked both the skill and the staying-power for prolonged sieges. Their assault on 9 August began cautiously: they fought shy of closing with the defences and had to be driven forward by the lash. Battle had not yet been joined however when the Hungarians learned that Otto with his army was approaching. Their informant was Berthold the son of the same Bavarian Count-Palatine Arnulf who had fought in vain and lost his life for the recovery of his family's position in the previous year. Berthold came from a castle on the southern bank of the Danube, the Reisensburg, some twelve miles downstream from Ulm. He is thus a crown-witness for Otto's approach from the north-west and a battle site in that direction from Augsburg. His action is evidence also that the Hungarians could still count on allies in the stem-duchy when the existence of a great family was at stake. On receiving the news, the Magyar leader at once called off the attack, held an assembly and moved his whole army away to meet Otto in the field. Gerhard has the besiegers' reason that if they won the pitched battle not only Augsburg but the whole *Reich* would be at their disposal.⁴⁸

Otto had left Saxony at an uncertain date in July with only a small following of Saxon warriors. More could not be spared from the threatened Slav frontiers.⁴⁹ He had little time to concentrate an army against an enemy already in the field and Ruotger may be trusted when

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, c. 3, p. 390 and E. Herzog, *Die Ottonische Stadt*, Frankfurter Forschungen zur Architekturgeschichte, ii, ed. H. Keller (Berlin, 1964), pp. 186-90.

⁴⁷ *Vita S. Oudalrici*, p. 401. Gerhard speaks of 'religiosae mulieres in civitate congregatae' rather than 'sanctimoniales'. The city at that time did not yet possess a nunnery.

⁴⁸ Gerhard, *Vita* (p. 402): 'et in occursum gloriosi regis ire coepit, ea ratione, ut illo cum suis superato, victor rediens civitatem et totum regnum libere habere potuisset'.

⁴⁹ Widukind, iii. c. 44, pp. 123 f.

he reports that this was the king's greatest anxiety.⁵⁰ A date had been fixed for a Lotharingian contingent to join him which Archbishop Brun of Cologne was unable to meet.⁵¹ From Widukind's narrative it is almost impossible to reconstruct the times and places of Otto's concentration. As he drew nearer Augsburg and pitched camp, perhaps still on the northern banks of the Danube, Frankish and Bavarian contingents joined him, the latter most likely sent by his brother from Regensburg where Henry lay ill, slowly dying.⁵² The best arrival of all was Conrad's—Widukind still calls him *dux*—with a strong force of mounted men. How high military skills ranked in tenth-century East-Frankish society can be seen from the Corvey historian's brave words that at his coming the knights did not wish to postpone battle any longer in the hope of further reinforcements. But by this time a Bohemian contingent had joined and also the Suabians under their new duke, Burchard, Henry's son-in-law.⁵³ Only Liudolf was missing, looked after and detained regally at Bonn by his uncle who may have rendered a by no means unimportant service in this way.⁵⁴ But Brun's biographer found it necessary to put forward yet another explanation for the absence of the Lotharingians at the Lech: the Hungarians might after all give Otto the slip and plunge westwards as they had done before.⁵⁵ It was no more than a hopeful apology belied by the situation and meant that the forces available for the battle were not very large, smaller than the Magyars'. This impression is strengthened by an important detail related by Gerhard. When night fell on 9 August, Count Dietpold with the knights of the see of Augsburg left the city and joined Otto's host.⁵⁶ The Hungarians too had moved off but it left the place undefended and its clerical inhabitants had to wait anxiously on their walls for the outcome of events they could not see. Marauding troops from both armies had made contact so that both knew that battle was imminent.

At this point it is necessary to ask how strong the forces engaged actually were. For the Hungarians this is an almost impossible question to answer. They had, in the opinion not only of Gerhard but also of other authorities, brought exceptionally large numbers and one writer, Adalbert of St. Maximin, imputed to them the boast that unless the earth swallowed them or heaven collapsed they could not be beaten.⁵⁷ But Hungarian armies always seemed much more numerous than they were because of their habit of swarming over large areas in small

⁵⁰ *Vita Brunonis*, c. 35, p. 36: 'Imperatoris quidem spiritus agitabatur in ipso, quia non erat ei tempus exercitum congregandi.'

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, c. 36, p. 37: 'Cum videret se ad prestatum diem seniori et fratri suo . . . cum auxiliaribus copiis non posse occurrere.'

⁵² Schäfer, *op. cit.* (p. 561), thought that Otto's army gathered close to Blenheim.

⁵³ Widukind, iii. c. 44, p. 125.

⁵⁴ Ruotger, c. 36, p. 37. In 936, at the time of Otto I's coronation, his brother was similarly detained in Saxony and kept out of the way. Cf. Widukind, ii. c. 2, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Ruotger, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁶ Gerhard, *Vita S. Oudalrici*, p. 402.

⁵⁷ *Continuatio Reginonis*, p. 168, and cf. Flodoard, *Annales*, p. 141: 'Hungari cum inmensis copiis et ingenti multitudine. . . .' The St. Gallen annalist spoke of 100,000 (M.G.H., SS. i, p. 79).

groups when there was no enemy in the field against them. They could afford to do this also because they knew how to re-concentrate very quickly with the help of smoke signals.⁵⁸ During the years of their greatest successes they may often have been less strong in numbers than the armies that sought to oppose them. We know that Berengar I at the Brenta in 899 outnumbered them so heavily that they were willing to surrender their booty, remounts and prisoners to be allowed to go home.⁵⁹ It was otherwise in 955. The victory of few, trusting in God's miraculous powers, over many was common ground between Ruotger and Gerhard as writers of bishops' Lives and the battle at the Lech a shining example.⁶⁰ In Widukind it was *virtus* and, as shall be seen, better weapons which overcame superior numbers.⁶¹ We may be fairly certain that the Hungarians had an advantage though we do not know how great the disparity was. Their enemies had motives for making it seem large.

Is there any chance of calculating Otto's strength at the Lech? To begin with, even small numbers of well-equipped, mounted warriors trained to fight *in acie* mattered and represented an important military investment in the tenth century. At the battle of Lenzen in 929 fifty horsemen were decisive.⁶² The loss of fifty under Margrave Dietrich in a mishap during the Slav war of 955 caused alarm and fears throughout Saxony while the king was in the south.⁶³ At Birten in 939 only a hundred of Otto's knights fought and won against his brother Henry and Duke Giselbert of Lotharingia whose host was said to be 'magnus satis'.⁶⁴ We owe these details to Widukind but they should warn us to treat his figures for the battle at the Lech with caution. He divided the Ottonian army of 955 into *legiones* and by *legio* in general the Saxon historian meant a force of *milites* capable of independent action in the field. He cited the strength of the Bohemian *legio* as a round one thousand,⁶⁵ a suspect figure, and Otto's own following, he informs us, was the largest formation of all for he picked a select band from all the tribal contingents as well as keeping his own Saxons about him. But

⁵⁸ Widukind, i. c. 38, p. 57: 'more suo igne fumoque ingenti agmina diffusa collegerunt' (933) and *Ekkeharti (IV.) Casus Sancti Galli*, ed. G. Meyer von Knonau, *Mitteilungen zur Vaterländischen Geschichte* xv, xvi (St. Gallen, 1877), p. 199: 'Nam hostes non simul ibant; sed turmatim, quia nemo restiterat. . . . Silvis quoque centeni vel minus interdum latentes eruperant' (926).

⁵⁹ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, ii. c. 13, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Ruotger, *Vita Brunonis*, c. 35, p. 36: 'Fiduciam habuit (Otto) per Christum ad Deum, qui potens est salvare in paucis, sicut in multis.' Gerhard, *Vita S. Oudalrici*, c. 12, p. 402: 'Rex igitur cum tantum exercitum Ungorum perspexisset, aestimavit, non posse ab hominibus superari, ni Deus omnipotens eos occidere dignaretur.'

⁶¹ Widukind, iii. c. 46, p. 127: 'Superamur, scio, multitudine, sed non virtute, sed non armis.'

⁶² *Ibid.*, i. c. 36, p. 53 and W. Brüske, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Lutizenbundes*, *Mitteldeutsche Forschungen*, 3 (Münster, Cologne, 1955), pp. 17 f.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, iii. cc. 45, 46, pp. 126-7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ii. c. 17, p. 82. They were only part of Otto's force divided from the rest by the Rhine. We do not know how large a part, but could they have defeated an enemy much more than three or four times as strong?

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, iii. c. 44, p. 125: 'electi milites mille' suggesting well-armed horsemen exclusive of servants.

these contingents themselves Widukind also called *milia* so that *legiones* and *milia* were used to denote the same thing: the units of a host.⁶⁶ With two *legiones* of Suabians, one of Franconians, three of Bavarians and the two already mentioned there would thus have been an army of over eight thousand mounted men available for the battle and this leaves attendants and perhaps further Slav auxiliaries to be counted.⁶⁷ It is the synonymous use of *legiones* and *milia* which makes it difficult to accept one thousand literally as the strength of these contingents. *Legio* was a literary importation and whether the *milia* were derived from ancient divisions of Germanic peoples or the Old Testament they too furnished Widukind with the imagery to fashion and give stature to his story. Set against his and also Thietmar of Merseburg's sober figures elsewhere, a thousand men for a *legio* is far too many. Duke Boleslas of Poland's best gift to Otto III after their meeting at Gnesen in the year 1000 was a force of three hundred *loricati* for his Roman expedition.⁶⁸ Would these not have been a *legio*? The strength of the legions we meet in the works of the two greatest Saxon historians of the Ottonian period remains uncertain; it varied, but must be counted in hundreds which rarely, if ever, reached the one thousand mark. It is therefore hazardous to assume a figure greater than three to four thousand for the entire Ottonian host at the Lech. Comparisons are more useful than guesses and there is at least some rough-and-ready evidence to show that the German and Slav forces at the Lech were much smaller than the army Otto I had led into France in 946.⁶⁹

The 10th had been fixed for the battle and on the 9th the troops were ordered to fast and prepare themselves. Next morning they rose at dawn and swore peace and mutual help to one another.⁷⁰ This was not unusual nor an idle ceremony, for the king's host included the bitter enemies of last year: Conrad and Duke Henry's men, the Augsburg

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 124 f.: 'In quinta, quae erat maxima, . . . ipse princeps vallatus lectis ex omnibus militum milibus alacrique iuventute.' The figurative use of 'milia' as an equivalent for 'legiones' occurs also in Thietmar's *Chronicon* (vi. c. 58, p. 346) and in the Magdeburg Annals where Thietmar's thirty legions of Slavs (*Chron.* iii. c. 19, p. 120) are turned into thirty 'milia' (M.G.H., SS. xvi, p. 157).

⁶⁷ W. von Giesebrecht, *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit* (5th ed., Leipzig, 1881), i, p. 831 construed a figure of at least eight thousand on this basis and Köpke-Dümmeler, *Otto der Grosse*, p. 256 n. 1, wanted the legions to be even larger. R. Holtzmann, *Geschichte der Sächsischen Kaiserzeit*, p. 163, reckoned with legions of a thousand men each. D. Schäfer, *Die Ungarnschlacht von 955*, p. 563 n. 2, calculated a total of at least 6500. Delbrück counted between seven and eight thousand expert mounted warriors (*Gesch. der Kriegskunst*, iii, p. 113) but more recently B. Eberl, *Die Ungarnschlacht auf dem Lechfeld*, p. 35 and n. 56, thought that his figures and Schäfer's were too low. The only Ottonian host for which we possess precise details in the tenth century numbered 2100 'loricati'. Whether it was raised to enable Otto II to fight the Saracens in 982 or to avenge his defeat a year later, it would be rash to assume that the German troops already with the emperor amounted to more or even as many. See M.G.H. *Constitutiones et Acta Publica*, ed. L. Weiland (Hanover, 1893), i, pp. 632 f. and M. Uhlig, 'Der Fürstentag zu Mainz im Februar-März 983', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, lviii (1950), p. 283.

⁶⁸ Thietmar, *Chron.* iv. c. 46, p. 184.

⁶⁹ The strength of the army in 946 Widukind gave as thirty-two legions as against only eight at the Lech (*Res Gestae Saxonicae*, iii. c. 2, p. 105). Thietmar thought Otto's host in 955 small for the occasion. See *Chron.* ii. c. 9, p. 48: 'Collegit undiques secus octo tantum legiones.'

⁷⁰ See Widukind, i. c. 36, p. 52 for a similar oath before the battle at Lenzen against the Slavs in 929.

knights and former followers of Liudolf. Treachery in action against the Hungarians or the Slavs was not unknown in the tenth century.⁷¹ The advance towards Augsburg from the north-west, under banners erect, was deliberately routed through difficult and rough country so that the Magyars should not be able to break it up by their archery, their chief weapon.⁷² The Lech lay within sight not very far on the left; closer still a small stream, the Schmitter, parallel to it, does not seem to have been more than a minor obstacle.⁷³

Widukind's use and adaptation of Roman military terms must not lead one to the conclusion that Otto's forces moved in well-drilled formations. The Bavarians forming three *legiones* came first—their stem-land having been over-run it was their right to be in the van. The Franks, placed under Conrad, followed them. The fifth group was Otto's own and like his father in 933 he had an *angelus*, a St. Michael's standard carried in front of him, a reassurance of past victory.⁷⁴ The sixth and seventh units were made up by the Suabians; the last, where all the baggage and transport had been placed as well, was the Bohemians' under their duke Boleslas. In modern military parlance all this would be called an advance to contact before deployment. The Hungarians saw to it that it was otherwise. They crossed the Lech to the right bank—a detachment may have been stationed there from the start—and then recrossed it further downstream and, moving round the rear of the last *legio*, began to break it up by their arrow-fire before finally launching an attack with their well-known cries.⁷⁵ The Bohemians were worsted at once with heavy casualties in dead and prisoners and lost the baggage of the entire host. Their rout soon involved the Suabians as well; they too were overcome, badly mauled and scattered. It was the crisis of the battle, more or less at its very beginning, which brought near-disaster and probably eliminated a good part of the three groups hit from the frontal collision to come. Now there must have been a good deal of space between the various *legiones* or Otto would not have been free to decide what he did. 'Seeing', so Widukind wrote, 'that there had been a misfortune and his rearward troops were in great danger' the king ordered the fourth *legio* under Conrad to turn about and cope with the enemy's surprise attack.⁷⁶ If the Hungarians' encircling move-

⁷¹ E.g. at the Brenta in 899. Liudprand wrote (*Antapodosis*, ii. c. 15, pp. 44 f.): 'Nonnulli plane Hungariis non solum pugnam non inferebant, sed, ut proximi caderent, anhelabant.'

⁷² Widukind, iii. c. 44, p. 124: 'erectis signis procedunt castris'. It meant being ready for imminent action. When his brother Henry and the Lotharingians approached Otto in 939 'erectis signis' before Birten it was a provocation which left the king with no doubts about their intentions.

⁷³ For the axis of advance see Schäfer, *op. cit.*, pp. 566–7.

⁷⁴ Widukind, *loc. cit.*, p. 125: 'coramque eo angelus penes quem victoria' and C. Erdmann, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens* (Stuttgart, 1955), pp. 17 f., 38 f. See also his article 'Kaiserliche und Päpstliche Fahnen im Hohen Mittelalter', *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Archiven*, xxv (1933–4), pp. 20–1.

⁷⁵ Widukind, *loc. cit.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 'Rex autem cum intellexisset bellum ex adverso esse.' I have followed W. Bulst (*Historische Vierteljahrschrift* 28, 1934, pp. 187 ff.) and H. Beumann, *Widukind von Korvei* (Weimar, 1950), pp. 83 f. for the translation of 'ex adverso'.

ment brought about the crisis, the Salian's intervention restored the situation for he not only flung them back again but also freed the prisoners they had taken, regained what had been looted and returned to his overlord in time for the frontal battle. The feat was helped to some extent by the circumstance that the Magyars had started to plunder rather than press their advantage and pursue the fugitives; but even so Conrad's deed astonished contemporary connoisseurs of warfare by its daring and success.⁷⁷

When battle came to be joined in front everything favoured the Germans. Otto himself led in his forward *legiones* carrying the Holy Lance. We do not know how he deployed them but to be effective they must have been formed into a line, an *acies*, however irregular. In close-quarter fighting with spears and especially swords the great majority of the Hungarians had no chance against the heavier arms and the much better protective equipment of their opponents. Widukind allows us to see where the balance of advantage lay in Otto's address before the decisive attack: 'We know that they are for the most part destitute of all arms.'⁷⁸ Not only offensive but also defensive weapons must be included here, shields, iron helmets and above all hauberks which could resist the heavier swords of the assailants. It is clear that only a few Hungarians, the leaders, had the equipment to fight with Otto's host hand to hand on anything like equal terms.⁷⁹

Widukind's description of the battle almost ends with Otto himself riding into the attack at the head of his troops. There was little more to be said. The bolder Hungarians at first resisted but were dumbfounded when they saw their fellows turn tail and flee. The braver warriors thus found themselves isolated and surrounded by Otto's *armati* and so perished in the midst of their enemies.⁸⁰ These are the last details relating to the battle proper which Widukind told his readers. The remainder of his recital is devoted to the pursuit, the casualties and the execution of the Hungarian princes. The very brevity of his account of what was after all the main combat, the frontal encounter, is perhaps significant.⁸¹ It has already been noted that the Magyars did not usually seek or, if they could help it, accept action at close quarters with their western enemies. From Widukind's bald sentence about the end of the fighting it appears that even the battle of 10 August 955 was, tactically speaking, no exception. Many fled as soon as the frontal

⁷⁷ That they looted either reveals a slackening of their much-praised discipline or, more likely, their inability to fight a long-drawn-out engagement to the end.

⁷⁸ iii. c. 46, p. 127: 'Maxima enim ex parte nudos illos armis omnibus penitus cognovimus.'

⁷⁹ This situation still held good in the middle of the twelfth century. According to Otto of Freising the Hungarian country knights were in the process of adopting the heavier fighting equipment of the Germans then and learning how to use it from the foreign mercenaries of the king's household and immigrants. See *Gesta Friderici*, i. c. 32, p. 51.

⁸⁰ Widukind, *loc. cit.*, p. 128: 'Hostium audaciores primum resistere, deinde, ut socios viderunt terga vertere, obstupefacti nostrisque intermixti extinguuntur.'

⁸¹ Widukind's descriptions of battles are usually generous and, Saxon noble that he was, his interest in them did not stem only from readings in Sallust. The account of events at the Lech in 955 is one of his best battle-pieces, the least likely to have been bungled, and it makes sense.

attack of Otto's *legiones* came in and those who stayed to receive it had not got a chance. One must ask how they ever expected to win when they decided to stay their ground outside Augsburg and risk a pitched battle. Evidently they pinned their hopes on the turning movement which they executed so skilfully at the very beginning and they counted on achieving a decision by the confusion and disorder that would follow. This agrees with what is known about their methods elsewhere and the experiences recorded in the Byzantine handbook, Leo's *Tactica*.⁸² When the ruse miscarried they had played their trump-card and lost. The development of the battle itself thus seems to confirm the impression that the whole Hungarian enterprise in 955 strained the resources and capacities of the invaders beyond their limits.

Defeat alone however would not have annihilated the Magyar army or altogether discouraged it from returning and continuing as far as possible the expeditions into Western and Southern Europe. The raiders had suffered setbacks before and this even during the early and most successful decades of their attacks. What turned the defeat at the Lech into an irreparable disaster was the relentless pursuit of the vanquished by Otto's host and the Bavarians, alerted and stationed along the many rivers which had to be crossed on the retreat to Pannonia. For the inhabitants of Augsburg the sight of the Hungarians returning was at first not reassuring but they rode past the city and crossed the Lech abandoning both their camp and their captives. Gerhard is here once again an eyewitness and he tells us that Otto's forces came hard upon the heels of their opponents and were able to close with some of them thus causing further casualties.⁸³ The Hungarians must have mounted at day-break, like the Germans and Bohemians, and it is not surprising to learn that their horses were tired out by the early afternoon when their army began to disintegrate. Many took refuge in the nearest villages for a brief rest and were surrounded by the *armati* of Otto's host who simply set fire to the buildings and burnt their enemies inside them.⁸⁴ It was therefore not only the Magyars who caused damage, destruction and food-shortages on the estates of the see of Augsburg at this moment.⁸⁵ The flight across the Lech claimed more victims because having to make for the eastern banks at random men and horses were drowned when

⁸² *Annales Alamannici* (M.G.H., SS. i, p. 54) for 910: 'Ungari . . . bello insperato multos occiderunt.' Regino of Prüm, borrowing from Justinus, gave one of the best western descriptions of the Hungarians' style of warfare (*Chron.*, pp. 132 f.) in which surprise, turning movements and simulated flights played a great part. Leo's *Tactica*, xviii, 55-7 in A. F. Gombos, *Catalogus Fontium Historiae Hungaricae* (Budapest, 1937), ii, pp. 1420, 1438 (Latin translation).

⁸³ *Vita S. Oudalrici*, p. 402.

⁸⁴ Widukind, iii. c. 46, p. 128.

⁸⁵ Gerhard, *Vita*, c. 13 (pp. 402-3) described the shortages, devastation and fire-damage on Bishop Udalrich's and his clerks' lands. The tenth-century warrior did not have to be far from home before he behaved as if he were on enemy territory. Another duchy was almost as much in the East-Frankish kingdom. Widukind's phrase: 'ab utriusque exercitus latrocinantibus agminibus' (iii. c. 44, p. 124 and cf. *supra*, p. 15) shows that Otto's army too plundered the country-side as it drew nearer Augsburg in 955. For a later example of a Saxon army's behaviour on the estates of one of their own margraves see Thietmar, *Chron.* vi. c. 56, p. 344. They took everything except the slaves and there was arson.

they could not gain a footing. By about four o'clock Otto himself reached Augsburg where he spent the night with Bishop Udalrich before setting off into Bavaria on 11 August. Orders had been given, perhaps already the previous evening, for all ferries and fords of the rivers further east to be guarded. To many of the Hungarians they became death-traps. Lastly the fortified places of the duchy, just as those of Saxony in 938, did their best service as bases for counter-attacks and from them the destruction of the fleeing Magyars was completed.⁸⁶

All these details can be pieced together from Widukind and Gerhard. A St. Gallen annal adds to them the news of another action fought by the Bohemians, perhaps during the pursuit, when a Hungarian prince, Lel, fell into their hands.⁸⁷ The honours of capturing him and another leader and of taking a share of the rich jewellery and accoutrements by which they were distinguished from the rank and file were claimed also for the knights of the Count of Ebersberg.⁸⁸ However, the most important prisoner picked up in the rout was Bulksu himself who may be regarded as the heart and soul of the 955 expedition. He and his fellow-princes were taken to Regensburg and together with many others executed by hanging. Widukind's account suggests that the deed was Duke Henry's, the other contemporary or near-contemporary sources only mention the bare events: capture and the gallows. Later traditions held Otto responsible and it is doubtful whether Henry who, it is true, had suffered most by the invasion of 955 and was savage in his revenges, acted without his brother's orders or consent. The murder of the Hungarian leaders must be seen through the eyes of tenth-century commentators, especially again Widukind's.⁸⁹ They suffered an evil death, a fate that was shameful and terrible for a warrior, let alone for a prince. But the Saxon monk thought they deserved nothing better and from the silence of the others it seems that few would have disagreed with him. Yet it was one of the earliest executions, if not trials, of war-criminals in Europe and Bulksu at least nominally a Christian and Byzantine dignitary. Later generations were not so sure about the justice of the treatment meted out to them. The twelfth-century Bamberg author of the *Vita Heinrici II, Imperatoris* who mentioned the executions was anxious to legalize them and spread the responsibility, asserting that Otto caused this to be done by the judgement of his princes.⁹⁰ The Hungarian heroes

⁸⁶ Gerhard, c. 12, p. 402 and Widukind, *loc. cit.*

⁸⁷ *Annales Sangallenses Maiores*, M.G.H., SS. i, p. 79.

⁸⁸ *Chronicon Eberspergense*, M.G.H., SS. xx, p. 12. The detailed description of their golden bells and necklaces and the silver cruciform shield-bosses out of which Count Eberhard had a chalice and other church ornaments made lends some colour to the story of the eleventh-century Ebersberg chronicler who wrote the history of the comital house and its monastic foundation. According to him the Hungarian princes were brought to the castle before being sent to Regensburg.

⁸⁹ Widukind, iii. c. 48, p. 128. According to Simon of Keza the Hungarians massacred all their German prisoners as a reprisal when they heard of their princes' death. Though greatly exaggerated this may contain a vestige of truth. See Gombos, *Catalogus*, iii, p. 2144.

⁹⁰ *Adalberti Vita Heinrici II, Imperatoris*, i. c. 3, M.G.H., SS. iv, p. 792: 'et reges eorum . . . Ratisponae, principibus hoc fieri adiudicantibus, in patibulo suspendit.' The judgement of the 'principes' may also have been introduced to reconcile the deed with the constitutional

and victims of 955 had become the ancestors of Christian kings and neighbours.

Why were they killed? If the slaughter of prisoners was not unusual in the tenth-century wars between the Saxons and the Slavs, the hanging of the Hungarian princes must be set against the Liudolfing dynasty's, indeed Otto's, own earlier dealings with these enemies. In 924, as has been mentioned already, the capture of a Hungarian chieftain enabled Henry I to negotiate a peace-treaty with his people. In 938 Otto I himself accepted a ransom for one of their leaders and if treasure was especially useful to him at this moment when he had to fight for his survival on the throne, it counted for much with a German king at all times.⁹¹ Otto was a hard and ruthless man but not insensate; his severities were calculated. The reason for this grim aftermath of the battle must be looked for once again in the make-up of Hungarian tribal nomad society. Their leaders alone gave cohesion to the mounted hosts on the raids. The Magyars were extremely sensitive about their fate and not only, as has been seen, offered ransoms to redeem them from captivity but even for the recovery of their mutilated bodies. On the expedition of 954 a noble, possibly a kinsman of Bulksu's, was killed outside Cambray and his head displayed on the walls by the defenders.⁹² Unable to avenge the injury the Hungarians in the end offered to restore all the booty and prisoners they had taken in the district as well as peace in return for the head. During the first day of the siege of Augsburg in 955 they abandoned the assault on the eastern gate when one of their leaders fell and, having recovered his body, they retreated to their camp in dismay.⁹³ Otto I must have known these characteristics of the Magyars and in killing off their princes he probably hoped to paralyse and disrupt them for many years to come, particularly those forces in their midst which lived for and by the *razzia*. Gerhard in his *Life of St. Ulrich* seems to support this interpretation when he made the hangings take place 'in ignominiam gentis eorum'.⁹⁴ Nor was Otto disappointed in his expectations. There is no evidence for any Hungarian activity on the Bavarian marches between 955 and 973; on the contrary, part of the lost no-man's-land was slowly reoccupied from the west in this period. In 956 the Hungarians were anxious to establish friendlier relations with Byzantium while the victors, significantly, received a Greek embassy with rare presents and congratulations from the *basileus*, a sign of their rising prestige.⁹⁵ Seven years later Pope John XII, now hostile

proprieties of the twelfth-century empire where princes could not be condemned in so summary a fashion or suffer such penalties.

⁹¹ Widukind, ii. c. 14, p. 79: 'pretio magno redimitur'. Only seven weeks before the executions the king had treated Hungarian ambassadors with the customary diplomatic decencies. V. *supra*, n. 34.

⁹² *Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium*, M.G.H., SS. vii, p. 428.

⁹³ Gerhard, *Vita*, c. 12, p. 401: 'Caeteri denique, cum eum terra tenus mortuum cadere viderunt, magno timore et lamentatione eum rapientes, ad castra reversi sunt.'

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁹⁵ Widukind, iii. c. 56, p. 135 and Cedrenus, *loc. cit.*

to the man he had crowned emperor, sought to stir up new raids against the *Reich* but to no avail.⁹⁶ Amongst the many embassies that elbowed their way at Otto's last Easter-court, held at Quedlinburg in 973, there was an especially large one from Hungary with the gifts of honour due to a powerful neighbour. The diplomacy of conversion and official encouragement for Bavarian missionaries was under way.⁹⁷

The Ottonian victory had neither been easy nor uncostly.⁹⁸ Here too the casualties amongst the nobility counted foremost: Dietpold, the brother of Bishop Udalrich and Reginbald his nephew, an ancestor of Hermann of Reichenau the historian and scholar, amongst the Suabians, and above all Conrad, the ancestor of the Salians, whose bravura had turned the scales. His contribution to the victory and his death expiating his alliance with the Hungarians a year before the battle were widely recorded in the chronicles.⁹⁹ Widukind's account of it poignantly underlines the importance of the superior defensive armour on the winning side. The 10th of August was a hot day and Conrad, to rest for a moment and recover his breath, loosened the straps of his helmet when an arrow hit him in the throat.¹⁰⁰ Possibly the helmet was joined to his hauberk by a curtain of mail similar to that worn by some knights on the Bayeux Tapestry.¹⁰¹ The quality and efficiency of armour amongst the victors varied too with the standing of their owner. At the battle of Birten in 939 Henry, Otto's brother, was struck on the arm and badly bruised but his *triplex lorica* protected him against worse injury.¹⁰² What weighed in the eastern and Hungarian wars of the Ottonian armies were the mailshirts, better weapons and appropriate skills of the rank-and-file *milites*, the *miles armatus* of Widukind's stories. Their ascendancy over superior numbers can be traced as late as 990 when the Bohemian duke, Boleslas II, was advised not to fight a Saxon host under Archbishop Giselher of Magdeburg and seven Saxon counts because though small it was of superb quality and all iron-clad.¹⁰³ Not for nothing did the pagan Slavs in one of their chief sanctuaries, the Rethra, dress the effigies of their gods in helmets and hauberks.¹⁰⁴

Only the secular history of the battle at the Lech has been told here. It had a religious, liturgical and ideological import in shaping the Ottonian empire and determining its coming links with Rome. Most

⁹⁶ Liudprand, *Historia Ottonis*, c. 6, p. 163.

⁹⁷ For these developments see R. Holtzmann, *Geschichte der Sächsischen Kaiserzeit*, p. 224.

⁹⁸ This is reflected in the chronicles. E.g. *Annales Hildesheimenses*, S.R.G. (Hanover, 1878), p. 21: 'Otto rex Ungarios cum magno periculo sui suorumque magna et cruenta cede prostravit.'

⁹⁹ For references see Köpke-Dümmler, *Kaiser Otto der Grosse*, pp. 259-60. His jewellery and accoutrements were recovered years later from the Slavs in the March of Merseburg.

¹⁰⁰ Widukind, iii. c. 47, p. 128.

¹⁰¹ Sir James Mann, 'Arms and Armour', in *The Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. Sir Frank Stenton (London, 1957), pp. 58 ff.

¹⁰² Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, iv. c. 24, p. 118.

¹⁰³ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, iv. c. 12, p. 144: 'Exercitus hic quantitate parvus, qualitate sua optimus et omnis est ferreus.'

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, vi. c. 23, p. 302: 'interius autem dii stant... galeis atque loricis terribiliter vestiti'.

recent work on the victory of 955 has been concerned with these problems, the shape of ideas rather than the conditions which gave rise to them, so that historians in asking new questions of the sources are in some danger of neglecting their older, primary uses.¹⁰⁵ The patron saint of 10 August was St. Lawrence and to him Otto I had vowed the foundation of a bishopric at Merseburg if by his intervention Christ would deign to give him victory and life.¹⁰⁶ It was as the defender of churches and the grateful recipient of God's favour in the most critical hours of his reign that Otto I appeared at his coronation, not as the *imperator* proclaimed by his troops of Widukind's wish and suggestion.¹⁰⁷ We do not know exactly how the victors celebrated their triumph and honoured their commander on the morrow of the battle, but the aristocratic Saxon historian was not alone in regarding these festivities as an imperial coronation preferable to the Roman one.¹⁰⁸ Officially, however, the victory at the Lech was remembered and extolled in the papal privilege sanctioning the archbishopric of Magdeburg and her suffragan sees, in the veneration of St. Maurice who came to be associated with the Holy Lance Otto had carried into the battle and in the special honours paid to St. Lawrence on 10 August when the archbishops of the *Reich* wore their *pallia*.¹⁰⁹ Otto, therefore, although he accepted his new dignity at the hands of the pope gave it manifestations which reconciled it with the sentiments of his aristocratic warriors. It is clear that he himself wanted the feast of St. Lawrence kept so solemnly to express the causal link between the battle and the *Reich* he was trying to build. It furnished a justification for it and a standard of values which the German nobles of the tenth century understood and more or less accepted. The quality of Otto's generalship has been much disputed but there can be no doubt that the military and political uses he made of his victory did not fall short of the visions of a Clausewitz.

A period of great disturbance and uncertainty in Central, Western and Southern Europe was brought to an end in 955. It is safe to date the economic rise and development of many regions from the middle of the tenth century although it is far less certain how much the Hun-

¹⁰⁵ The thousandth anniversary of the battle at the Lech and of Otto I's imperial coronation brought forth a spate of studies, largely, though not exclusively ideological. For a bibliography see *Deutsches Archiv*, 12 (1956), pp. 595 f. and H. Beumann's valuable article 'Das Kaisertum Ottos des Grossen', *H.Z.*, 195 (1962), p. 530 and H. Büttner's 'Der Weg Ottos des Grossen zum Kaisertum', *Archiv für mittelhochdeutsche Kirchengeschichte*, 14 (1962), p. 44, n. 1. Both these also in 'Das Kaisertum Ottos des Grossen', *Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte* (Konstanz, 1963). It is possible that the reaction against 'positivistic' history amongst German scholars has gone too far.

¹⁰⁶ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, ii. c. 10, p. 48.

¹⁰⁷ See the much-commented passage in Widukind, iii. c. 49, p. 128: 'Triumpho celebri rex factus gloriosus ab exercitu pater patriae imperatorque appellatus est.'

¹⁰⁸ Another monument to this kind of imperial tradition is the 'Modus Ottine' a generation behind Widukind. See *Carmina Cantabrigiensia*, no. 11, ed. K. Strecker, S.R.G. (Berlin, 1955), p. 33 and the important articles of K. Hauck in *Liber Floridus, Mittellateinische Studien Paul Lehmann . . . gewidmet* (St. Ottilien, 1950), pp. 230 ff. and in *Geschichtsdenken und Geschichtsbild im Mittelalter*, ed. W. Lammers, Wege der Forschung, xxi (Darmstadt, 1961), pp. 181 f.

¹⁰⁹ Beumann, 'Das Kaisertum Ottos des Grossen', *H.Z.* 195 (1962), pp. 552 ff. and separate edition pp. 30 ff.

garians alone can be blamed for economic stagnation and losses at its beginning. The battle ending the razzias helped to create the conditions in which a renewal of literary, artistic and religious life east of the Rhine and in Lotharingia became possible and it gave birth to a new order among the contestants for the Carolingian inheritance, the 'neophyte kings' as Cardinal Humbert later called them, by exalting the standing of the Saxon dynasty and its warriors in Western and Southern Europe and even in Byzantium.¹¹⁰ For the destruction of the Magyar army in 955 was felt to be an event of European significance noted by chroniclers well beyond the frontiers of the *Reich*.¹¹¹ The well-wishers of the Ottonian house were not the only ones to sing its praises for having freed Europe from a calamity. Over a century later Bonizo of Sutri, Gregory VII's apologist, said nothing less.¹¹² There may have been little solidarity or sense of common interest amongst the feud-ridden aristocracies of late- and post-Carolingian Europe as their dealings with the Magyars sometimes show. But the battle at the Lech and its historiography helped to create such sentiments, and too much scepticism about their existence or relevance can no more help the historian than too little.

¹¹⁰ *Humberti Cardinalis libri tres adversus simoniacos*, ed. F. Thaner, M.G.H., *Libelli de lite imperatorum et pontificum* i, p. 211.

¹¹¹ The references are collected in J. F. Böhmer, *Regesta Imperii* ii, *Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Herrschern aus dem sächsischen Hause 919-1024*, ed. E. von Ottenthal, Erste Lieferung (Innsbruck, 1893), pp. 121-2.

¹¹² *Bonizonis episcopi Sutriti Liber ad amicum*, ed. E. Dümmler, M.G.H., *Libelli* i, p. 581.