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An Account of the Election of Lothar III as King of the Romans

*Lothar of Supplinburg, Duke of Saxony, was elected as King of Germany (and hence emperor-elect) after the death of the childless Emperor Henry V in 1125. This important account, the fullest one known of one of the most significant royal elections in German medieval history, is a strictly contemporary one, written soon after the event. The author is anonymous, but he would appear to have been a cleric from Austria, who may have been a follower of Archbishop Conrad of Salzburg,¹ an adherent of the reform party in the Church who was one of Lothar's principal supporters. The view of the election presented is certainly a very clerical one, especially in the penultimate paragraph, where the author suggests that the terms of the Treaty of Worms, agreed between the Emperor Henry V and the papacy only three years earlier, were substantially modified. The text survives in only one, late twelfth-century, manuscript from the abbey of Göttweig, and the only later author who may have been aware of it is Bishop Otto of Freising; it has been suggested that his very brief account of the election in his *Chronica* has verbal echoes of the *Narratio*.²*

Translated from Narratio de Electione Lotharii in Regem Romanorum, ed. Wilhelm Wattenbach, MGH SS xii.509-12.

What took place at a court recently celebrated at Mainz is worthy of record. We have briefly drawn up this account of how the election of the king took place. There were for this reason gathered there princes, the legates of the lord pope,³ archbishops, bishops, abbots, provosts, clerics, monks, dukes, margraves, counts and other nobles. The court took place with more of them present, and men of greater importance, than at any other of our time, even though it had not been summoned by the imperial power as [was the case] previously, but necessity required it for the greater benefit of the community. On the first day the election of the bishop-elect of Brixen was discussed and confirmed by all, and he was then solemnly consecrated as

¹ Conrad I, Archbishop of Salzburg 1106-47.

² *Otonis Episcopi Frisingensis Chronica sive Historia de Duabus Civitatibus*, ed. A. Hofmeister (MGH SRG, Hanover 1912), VI.17, p. 333.

³ Gerard, cardinal priest of S. Croce from 1123 onwards (later 1144-5 pope as Lucius II) and Romanus, cardinal deacon of S. Maria in Portico 1119-34, R. Hüls, *Kardinäle, Klerus und Kirchen Roms 1049-1130* (Tübingen 1977), 164, 236-7.

bishop by many other prelates. ⁴ The princes of the Saxons stationed themselves on the far side of the Rhine, where they honourably pitched their camp in large numbers, and above them was Margrave Leopold, along with the duke of Bavaria, accompanied by a great following of knights. ⁵ However, Duke Frederick, along with the bishop of Basle and the rest of the Swabian princes, and various [other] nobles stayed on the other side of the Rhine. ⁶ The group of princes there was by no means small. The duke had a clear ambition for the throne and behaved as though he was certain to be elected, but professing fear of the men of Mainz he postponed his arrival at the main gathering. He was prepared to be elected as king, but not to elect a king. He wished first to find out whose assent he might secure from among all the princes [present].

All the princes of the kingdom except him were therefore gathered together, and encouraged by the lord cardinal they invoked the grace of the Holy Spirit with the antiphon *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. First they chose ten princes from each of the provinces of Bavaria, Swabia, Franconia and Saxony, who were among the shrewdest in counsel, to make the election, and the rest promised that they would agree to their choice. ⁷ In this meeting they then selected the three out of all of them who were outstanding both through wealth and character, namely Duke Frederick, Margrave Leopold and Duke Lothar, and they decided that the one out of those three who was pleasing to all should be elected as king. In the absence of Duke Frederick, the other two who were present humbly renounced the name and power of king, should this be given to them, kneeling on the ground and weeping profusely. This was most honourable and memorable, but hitherto unheard of, that now in our time the Lord has granted to his Church that such holy humility should be shown by illiterate laymen in not seeking greater things, while damnable ambition perniciously corrupts the clergy and the learned (*literati*) in chasing after things of little importance rather than concentrating on spiritual matters.

⁴ Reginbert, abbot of St. Peter, Salzburg, had been controversially appointed to the see of Brixen through the influence of Archbishop Conrad, in place of a royal candidate. He subsequently held office until his death in 1140.

⁵ Leopold III of Babenberg, Margrave of Austria (d. 1136): Henry 'the Black', Duke of Bavaria 1120-6, the leader of the Welf family at this period.

⁶ Frederick, Duke of Swabia (d. 1145), grandson of the Emperor Henry IV through his mother Agnes: Berthold, Bishop of Basle 1123-31. The view of the 'far' and 'near' side of the Rhine is from someone looking from the east. Hence the Saxons and Bavarians were on the west bank, and the Swabians on the east.

⁷ *Primo decem ex singulis provinciis Bawariae, Sueviae, Franconiae, Saxoniae principes consilio utiliores proposuerunt.*

Then Duke Frederick, blinded by ambition, and hoping that what he had seen humbly refused by those two had in consequence been reserved [for him], and indeed seemed as though it would undoubtedly be conferred upon him, now entered the city without a safe-conduct, although previously he had been afraid to enter without such a safeguard, and he joined the gathering of the princes, standing prepared to be elected as king. The archbishop of Mainz ⁸ then rose up and sought agreement from the aforesaid three princes: whether without contradiction, retraction or envy each of them was willing to obey the third who was elected by the princes acting in common. At these words Duke Lothar, as the day before, humbly asked that he not be chosen, and he promised to obey whosoever was elected as his lord and the Roman Emperor. Margrave Leopold publicly professed the same, and wanted to renounce on oath [any] ambition for the kingdom and jealousy against a future king. But when Duke Frederick was asked whether he like the others wished to do what they had done, for the honour of the whole Church and kingdom and in perpetual commendation of a free election, he claimed that he neither wished to nor could he reply without the advice of the rest of his men who were in [his] camp; and since he realised that the opinion of the other princes was never going to be unanimous in raising him [to the throne], he then ceased to play a part and left the court.

Seeing the duke's ambition to be so great and so violent, as though he were demanding the power due to him even before he had been promoted to become their ruler, the princes united in refusing to be ruled by him. The next day they met together in that same place. Since Duke Frederick was absent, and with him the duke of Bavaria, the archbishop of Mainz asked whether each of the princely nominators in the election who were present, having refused previous designation for themselves, wished to offer their assent to a particular person amicably and freely chosen by the princes. Each of them humbly and devotedly agreed to this, and as if no longer eager [for the kingship] themselves, but eager to elect some other person, they sat together in one body. Afterwards, having sent out those now nominated, the princes were asked if, having taken advice and after careful discussion, they had chosen somebody whom they nominated for the kingdom, following God and the honour of the Church.

⁸ Adalbert I, archbishop 1111-37.

Suddenly a clamour arose from some of the laymen: ‘Let it be King Lothar!’ Lothar was seized, raised up on men’s shoulders, and although unwilling and protesting was acclaimed with the royal *laudes*.

Many of the princes, and in particular the bishops from the province of Bavaria, were unhappy that this momentous event had taken place so suddenly and without proper discussion, and they rose angrily from their seats, prepared to leave the others and entirely abandon the compromised proceedings of the court. The archbishop of Mainz and some of the other princes ordered the doorkeeper to prevent anyone entering or leaving. Meanwhile those inside were announcing [the election of] their king by applauding, while others were running around outside making a noise to acclaim a king whose identity they did not know. Finally, as the argument among the princes grew warmer, and Lothar, much annoyed by his seizure was threatening vengeance, while the bishops were lamenting their plight and seeking to break out, the lord cardinal and the rest of the princes of wiser counsel just about succeeded in quieting the tumult by voice and hand [gestures]. They persuaded everyone to return to their seats and resume the discussion. Inspired by the grace of God, the lord cardinal gathered the bishops around him, sternly reproached them for the division, and warned them that unless they returned to peace and concord, and guided those less educated through their intellectual leadership (*informatio*), they would bear the responsibility for the plundering, massacres, arson and all sorts of other ills that would spring forth through this dissension. Finally, given the opportunity to speak, the archbishop of Salzburg and the bishop of Regensburg,⁹ discussing the issue most honestly, both on their own behalf and for the honour of the kingdom, laboured to bring the various parties to a peaceful agreement, although they said that they could conclude nothing about the kingdom without the duke of Bavaria, who was absent. Furthermore, they demanded due justice from the leading men with regard to the ill-advised violence of those who had seized control [of the election],¹⁰ both on their own behalf and for the most serious blow struck against the honour of the royal majesty. As a result this was done; so that those who by the sin of their impatience

⁹ Hartwig, bishop 1108-26.

¹⁰ *raptores*: the implication is of those who had both figuratively seized control of the election and literally seized hold of Lothar.

had stirred up this discord made the humble satisfaction demanded, and were then restored to grace.

The duke of Bavaria was thus summoned, and now the grace of the Holy Spirit worked to unite the minds of everyone towards a common purpose, and with the unanimous consent and petition of the princes Lothar was now raised to the kingship, as a king pleasing to God. Therefore, all the princes of the realm being in agreement in the election of a king, it was [now] agreed by an enduring decision what pertained as of right to the secular power of the royal dignity, and what the priesthood ought to have, as pertaining to the freedom of the heavenly queen, that is of the Church, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the boundaries of both jurisdictions (*honores*) were defined. The Church shall have the freedom that it had always wanted; and the kingdom shall have lawful power over everything that pertains to Caesar;¹¹ these shall be brought under its control, but in a benevolent way and without brutality. The church shall have free election to spiritual posts, nor shall it be influenced by fear of the kingdom, nor as before coerced by the presence of the prince, or restricted by any petition; [while] the imperial dignity shall have [the right] freely and solemnly to invest the [bishop-] elect, after he has been canonically consecrated, with the regalian rights by the sceptre, and provided no payment has been made, and the latter shall pledge himself by binding oath to render faithful and properly willing service, saving the rules of his order.¹²

Finally, on the following day Lothar, who was the unanimous choice elected by everyone, presided over the assembly of princes. He first received the due fealty as was customary from the twenty-four bishops who were present there, and from a great many abbots, for reverence for the empire, for confirmation of the unanimous agreement and to secure perpetual peace between the kingdom and the priesthood. However, he neither sought nor received homage (*hominium*) from any of the spiritual figures who were there. Then the princes of the kingdom gathered round, and they confirmed their fealty both by homage and by oath to the lord king, and rendering proper honour to the king they [in turn] received from him those things that were of

¹¹ *Matthew*, xxii.21.

¹² This would imply a modification of the procedure in episcopal elections agreed at the Treaty of Worms in 1122: translated by Brian Pullan, *Sources for the History of Medieval Europe from the mid-eighth to the mid-thirteenth Century* (Oxford 1966), pp. 157-9.

the kingdom. ¹³ Then Duke Frederick, seeing that there was no counsel or power against the Lord, ¹⁴ who against all expectation had joined as one the minds of so many and so great princes, was on the third day guided by the advice and prayers of the Bishop of Regensburg and the rest of the princes to return to the council. He very honestly refused the two hundred marks with which the lord king had promised to enfeof him [*inbeneficiare*], and he now showed due respect to his lord the king, and he freely and securely returned to his grace and friendship. Finally, after all these matters had been arranged, the aforesaid king pronounced under the aegis of his royal majesty a firm peace in the whole German kingdom, to be applicable everywhere, until the Nativity of the Lord, and from then onwards for a further year. If anybody should breach this they would be liable to suffer a most severe penalty, in accordance with the law and justice of each province.

¹³ That is fiefs and regalian rights held directly from the monarch.

¹⁴ Cf. *Proverbs*, xxi.30: there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord'.