Henry the Fowler

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Henry the Fowler (German: *Heinrich der Finkler* or *Heinrich der Vogler*; Latin: *Henricius Auceps*) (876 – July 2, 936) was the duke of Saxony from 912 and the elected king of East Francia (Germany) from 919 until his death in 936. As the first non-Frankish king, he established the Ottonian Dynasty of kings and emperors, he is generally considered to be the founder and first king of the medieval German state, known until then as East Francia. An avid hunter, he obtained the epithet "the Fowler"[1] because he was allegedly fixing his birding nets when messengers arrived to inform him that he was to be king. By his death in July 936 Henry had prevented collapse of royal power, as had happened in West Francia, and left a much stronger kingdom to his successor Otto I. Henry died on July 2, 936 in his royal palace in Memleben, one of his favourite places. He was buried at Quedlinburg Abbey, established by his wife Matilda in his honor.

Contents

Family

Born in Memleben, in what is now Saxony-Anhalt, Henry was the son of Otto the Illustrious, Duke of Saxony, and his wife Hedwiga, daughter of Henry of Franconia and Ingeltrude and a great-great-granddaughter of Charlemagne. In 906 he married Hatheburg von Merseburg, daughter of the Saxon count Erwin. She had previously been a nun. The marriage was annulled in 909 because her vows as a nun were deemed by the church to

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Henry the Fowler

Henry's seal from a document of 30 March 925. He is portrayed as a warrior, with a spear and shield. The words are HEINRICUS REX (King Henry).

King of East Francia	
Reign	24 May 919 – 2 July 936
Predecessor	Conrad I of Germany
Successor	Otto the Great
Duke of Saxony	
Reign	30 November 912 – 2 July 936
Predecessor	Otto I, Duke of Saxony
Successor	Otto the Great
Born	c. 876
Died	2 July 936 Memleben
Burial	Quedlinburg Abbey
Spouse	Hatheburg Matilda
Issue	Thankmar Hedwig of Saxony Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor Gerberga, Queen of France Henry I, Duke of Bavaria Bruno the Great, Archbishop of Cologne
Dynasty	Ottonian
Father	Otto I, Duke of Saxony

remain valid. She had already given birth to Henry's son Thankmar. The annulment placed a question mark over Thankmar's legitimacy. Later that year he married Matilda, daughter of Dietrich of Ringelheim, Count in Westphalia. Matilda bore him three sons, one called Otto, and two daughters, Hedwig and Gerberga, and founded many religious institutions, including the Quedlinburg Abbey where Henry is buried. She was later canonized.

Mother	Hedwiga
Religion	Roman Catholic

Rule

Henry became Duke of Saxony after his father's death in 912. An able ruler, he continued to strengthen the position of his duchy within the weakening kingdom of East Francia, and was frequently in conflict with his neighbors to the South in Duchy of Franconia.

On December 23, 918 Conrad I, king of East Francia and Franconian duke, died. Although Henry had rebelled against Conrad I between 912 and 915 over the lands in Thuringia, Conrad recommended Henry as his successor. Kingship now changed from Franks to Saxons, who had suffered greatly during the conquests of Charlemagne and were proud of their identity. Henry, as Saxon, was the first non-Frank on the throne.
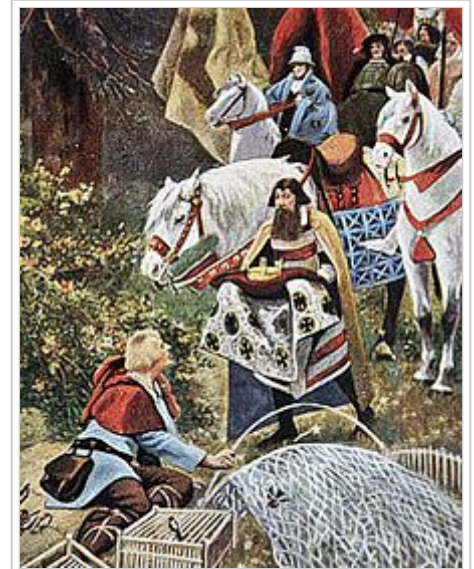
Conrad's choice was conveyed by his brother, duke Eberhard III of Franconia at the Imperial Diet of Fritzlar in 919. The assembled Franconian and Saxon nobles elected Henry to be king with other regional dukes not participating in election. Archbishop Heriger of Mainz offered to anoint Henry according to the usual ceremony, but he refused - the only king of his time not to undergo that rite - allegedly because he wished to be king not by the church's but by the people's acclaim.

Legend of the German crown offered to Henry, Hermann Vogel (1854–1921)

Henry, who was elected to kingship by only Saxons and Franconians at Fritzlar, had to subdue other dukes. Duke Arnulf of Bavaria did not submit until Henry defeated him in two campaigns in 921. Henry besieged his residence at Ratisbon (Regensburg) and forced Arnulf into submission. Arnulf had crowned himself as king of Bavaria in 919, but in 921 renounced crown and submitted to Henry while maintaining large autonomy and the right to mint his own coins. Duke Burchard II of Swabia soon swore fealty to the new King, but when he died, Henry appointed a noble from Franconia to be the new duke.

Henry was too weak to impose absolutist rule, and regarded his kingdom as a confederation of stem duchies rather than as a feudal monarchy and saw himself as *primus inter pares (first among equals)*. Instead of seeking to administer the empire through counts, as Charlemagne had done and as his successors had attempted, Henry allowed the local dukes in Duchy of Franconia, Duchy of Swabia, and Duchy of Bavaria to maintain large internal autonomy.

Wars over Lotharingia

In 920 king of West Francia Charles the Simple invaded and marched as far as Pfeddersheim near Worms, but retreated when he learned that Henry was organizing an army.[2] On November 7, 921, Henry and Charles met and concluded a treaty of friendship. Henry then saw an opportunity to wrest Lotharingia when a civil war over royal succession began in West Francia after coronation of king Robert I. In 923 Henry crossed the Rhine twice, capturing a large part of the duchy. The eastern part of Lotharingia was left in Henry's possession until October 924.

In 925 duke Gilbert of Lotharingia rebelled. Henry invaded the duchy and besieged Gilbert at Zülpich (Tolbiac), captured the town, and became master of a large portion of his lands. Allowing Gilbert to remain in power as duke, Henry arranged the marriage of his daughter Gerberga to his new vassal in 928. Thus he brought that realm, which had been lost in 910, back into the kingdom as the fifth stem duchy.

Wars with Magyars

The threat of Magyar raiders improved his situation, as all the dukes and nobles realized that only a strong state could defend their lands against barbarian incursions.

In 921 Magyars once again invaded East Francia and Italy. Although a sizable Magyar force was defeated near Bleiburg in the Bavarian March of Carinthia by Eberhard and the Count of Meran[3] and another group was routed by Liutfried, count of Elsass (French reading: Alsace), the Magyars continued raiding East Francia.

Henry, having captured a Hungarian prince, managed to arrange a ten-year-truce in 926, though he agreed to pay annual tribute. By doing so he and dukes gained time to build new fortified towns and to train a new elite cavalry force.[4] Henry adapted Anglo-Saxon method of building fortified towns to defend against Danish and Celtic invasions, and built similar fortified settlements as a defense against Magyar and Slav invaders. In 932 Henry refused to pay the annual tribute to Magyars. When they began raiding again, Henry, with his improved army in 933 at the Battle of Riade crushed Magyars so completely, that they never returned to the northern lands of Henry's kingdom.[5]

Wars with Slavs

During the truce with the Magyars, Henry subdued the Polabian Slavs who lived on his eastern borders. In the winter of 928 he marched against the Slavic Hevelli tribes and seized their capital, Brandenburg. He then invaded the Glomacze lands on the middle Elbe river, conquering the capital Gana (Jahna) after a siege, and had a fortress (the later Albrechtsburg) built at Meissen. In 929, with the help of Arnulf of Bavaria, Henry entered Duchy of Bohemia and forced Duke Wenceslaus I to resume the annual payment of tribute to the king.[6]

Meanwhile the Slavic Redarii had driven away their chief, captured the town of Walsleben and massacred its inhabitants. Counts Bernard and Thietmar marched against the fortress of Lenzen beyond the Elbe, and, after fierce fighting, completely routed the enemy on September 4, 929. The Lusatians and the Ukrani on the lower Oder were subdued and made tributary in 932 and 934, respectively.[7] In conquered lands Henry did not create march administration, which was implemented by his successor Otto I.

Wars with Danes

Henry also pacified territories to the north, where the Danes had been harrying the Frisians by sea. The monk and chronicler Widukind of Corvey in his *Res gestae Saxonicae* reports that the Danes were subjects of Henry the Fowler. Henry incorporated into his kingdom territories held by the Wends, who together with the Danes had attacked Germany, and also conquered Schleswig in 934.[8]

Family and children

As the first Saxon king of East Francia, Henry was the founder of the Ottonian dynasty. He and his descendants ruled East Francia, and later the Holy Roman Empire, from 919 until 1024.

German royal dynasties

Ottonian dynasty

Henry had two wives and at least six children.

- With Hatheburg:

1. Thankmar (908 – 938) - rebelled against his half-brother Otto and was killed in battle in 938

- With Matilda:

1. Hedwig (910 – 965) - wife of the West Francia's powerful Robertian duke Hugh the Great, mother of King Hugh Capet of West Francia
2. Otto I (912 – 973) - Duke of Saxony, King of East Francia and Holy Roman Emperor. In 929 Henry married Otto to Eadgyth, daughter of king of Wessex Edward the Elder
3. Gerberga (913 – 984) - wife of (1) Duke Gilbert of Lotharingia and (2) King Louis IV of France
4. Henry I (919 – 955) - Duke of Bavaria
5. Bruno (925 – 965) - Archbishop of Cologne and Duke of Lotharingia and regent of West Francia

Legacy

Henry returned to public attention as a character in Richard Wagner's opera, *Lohengrin* (1850), trying to gain the support of the Brabantian nobles against the Magyars. After the attempts to achieve German national unity failed with the Revolutions of 1848, Wagner strongly relied on the picture of Henry as the actual ruler of all German tribes as advocated by pan-Germanist activists like Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.

There are indications that Heinrich Himmler saw himself as the reincarnation of Henry, who was proclaimed to be the first king of Germany.[9]
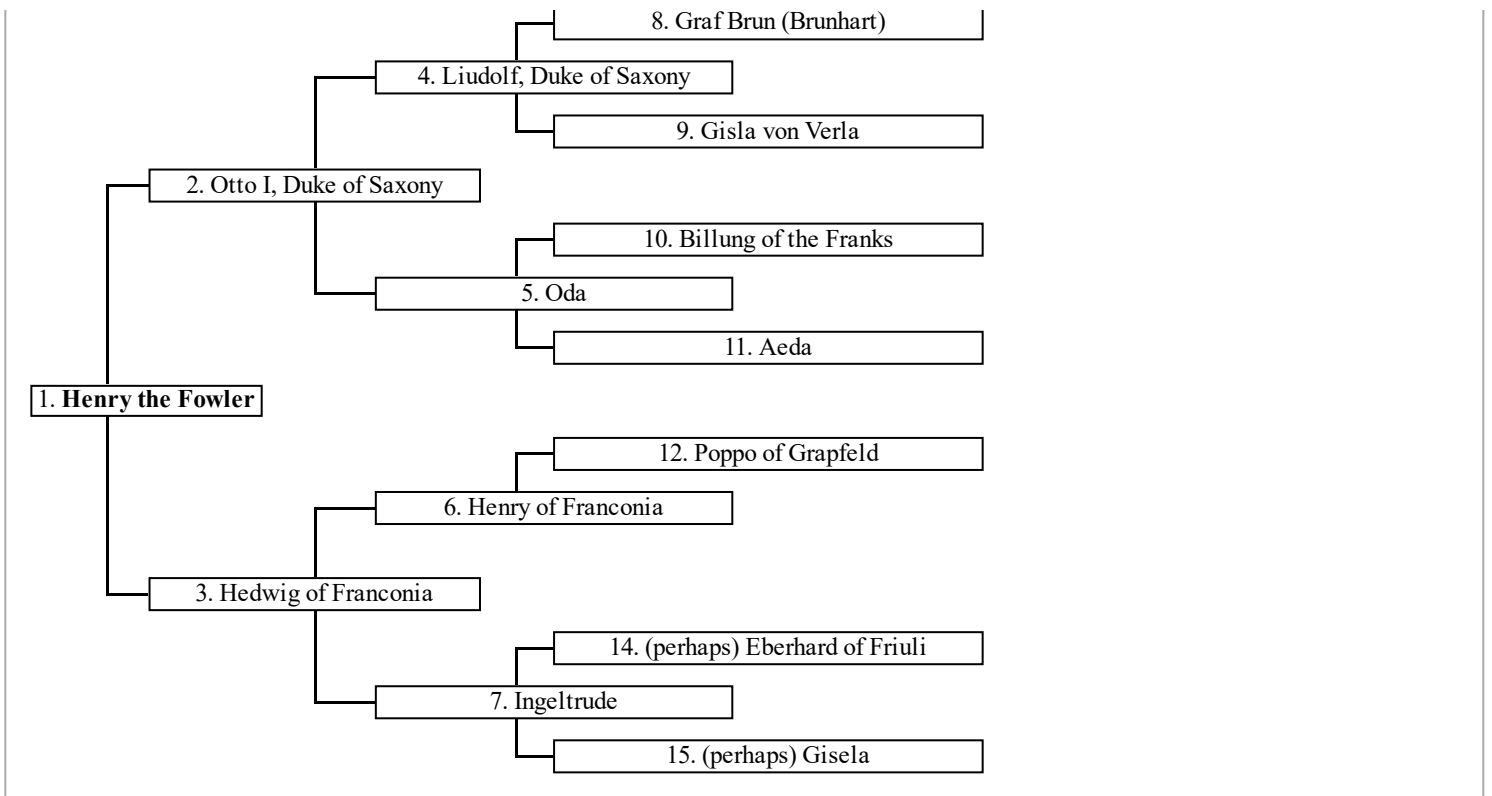

Himmler at Henry's grave, 1938

In the arts

- Henry the Fowler is a main character of Richard Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*.
- Henry is featured in the prologue of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* in 943 A.D. (in actuality he had died in 936), being confronted by a wizard who imprisons him in a runestone, then flash forwards one millennium later, playing on Heinrich Himmler's legend of reincarnation. In the game, Henry (who is renamed as Heinrich I) is portrayed as an immortal undead Anglo-Saxon prince bent on world domination until the wizard had imprisoned him and one thousand years later, the SS High Priestess Marianna Blavatsky frees him by anointing his Dark Knights, to which he thanks her by turning her into his undead slave before being confronted by Agent Blazkowicz, who has to kill Heinrich in a final boss battle.
- The novel Black Camelot by Duncan Kyle mentions Himmler's belief that he was the incarnation of Henry the Fowler.

Ancestry

Ancestors of Henry the Fowler

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                                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                                    │      8. Graf Brun (Brunhart)         │
                        ┌───────────┤                                      │
          ┌─────────────┤ 4. Liudolf, Duke of Saxony                       │
          │             │           │      9. Gisla von Verla              │
          │             └───────────┤                                      │
 2. Otto I, Duke of Saxony                                                 │
          │             │           │      10. Billung of the Franks       │
          │             ┌───────────┤                                      │
          │             │  5. Oda                                          │
          │             └───────────┤      11. Aeda                        │
1. Henry the Fowler                 │                                      │
          │             │           │      12. Poppo of Grapfeld           │
          │             ┌───────────┤                                      │
          │             │ 6. Henry of Franconia                            │
          │             │                                                  │
 3. Hedwig of Franconia │           │      14. (perhaps) Eberhard of Friuli│
          │             ┌───────────┤                                      │
          │             │  7. Ingeltrude                                   │
          │             └───────────┤      15. (perhaps) Gisela            │
                                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
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See also

- Kings of Germany family tree

Notes

1. A fowler is one who hunts wildfowl.
2. Gwatkin ,*The Cambridge Medieval History: Volume III. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926.*p 180
3. Menzel, W. Germany from the Earliest Period
4. Leyser, Karl (1982). *Medieval Germany and Its Neighbours 900-1250* (1st ed.). London: The Hambledon Press. p. 13. ISBN 978-0907628088.
5. A Short History of Germany (https://books.google.lv/books?id=hFcHAwAAQBAJ&pg=PA5&dq=conrad+I+of+germany &hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=snippet&q=duke%20henry%20saxony&f=false)
6. *Bohemia to the Extinction of the Premyslids*, Kamil Krofta, *The Cambridge Medieval History: Victory of the Papacy*, Vol. VI, ed. J.R. Tanner, C.W. Previt-Orton and Z.N. Brook, (Cambridge University Press, 1957), 426.
7. Gwatkin, The Cambridge Medieval History: Volume III.
8. A Short History of Germany (https://books.google.lv/books?id=hFcHAwAAQBAJ&pg=PA5&dq=conrad+I+of+germany &hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=snippet&q=duke%20henry%20saxony&f=false)
9. Frischauer, Willi. *Himmler, the Evil Genius of the Third Reich*. London: Odhams, 1953, pages 85-88; Kersten, Felix. *The Kersten Memoirs: 1940-1945*. New York: Macmillan, 1957, page 238.

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Further reading

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External links

- Deed by Henry I for Hersfeld Abbey, 1 June 932 with his seal, "digitalised image". *Photograph Archive of Old Original Documents (*Lichtbildarchiv älterer Originalurkunden*)*. University of Marburg.
- Publications about Henry I (http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_de/suche.php?thes=Heinrich+%3CR%C3%B6misch-Deutsches+Reich%2C+K%C3%B6nig%2C+I.%3E+%28919-936%29) in the OPAC of the *Regesta Imperii*

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Henry the Fowler **House of Otto**		
Born: 876		**Died:** 2 July 936
Regnal titles		
Preceded by **Conrad the Younger**	**King of East Francia** 919–936	Succeeded by **Otto the Great**
Preceded by **Otto the Illustrious**	**Duke of Saxony** 912–936	

Categories: Ottonian dynasty | 876 births | 936 deaths | People from Burgenlandkreis | German Roman Catholics | Roman Catholic monarchs | Kings of East Francia | Dukes of Saxony | 10th-century monarchs in Europe | 10th-century German people