INTRODUCTION

Noble society in the twelfth-century German kingdom was vibrant and multi-faceted. Many of the men born into aristocratic families spent their lives in the violent pursuit of land and power, building castles and fighting for their lords, their relatives and themselves. Many of the women born into these families managed households as wives, mothers and widows and acted as leading patronesses of the religious life. Other nobles, both male and female, dedicated themselves to prayer and spiritual improvement in a monastic community, while others walked a middle course between the lay and religious spheres as influential prelates who oversaw both their Christian flocks and their churches' extensive political and territorial interests. Regardless of which roles individual noblemen and noblewomen played in society, the members of this elite are the people whose words and actions have been preserved in the vast majority of sources that survive from the German kingdom in the central Middle Ages. Noble culture, in both its secular and ecclesiastical forms (if it is appropriate to draw a distinction between the two), permeates our extant evidence.

This volume aims to illuminate the diversity of the aristocratic experience by providing five texts, translated into English for the first time, that show how noblemen and women from across the German kingdom lived and died between approximately 1075 and 1200. The subjects of these works – a margrave, a bishop, a *magistra*,[1] an abbess and a count – were all prominent figures in the German kingdom. To read these five sources together is to appreciate how interconnected political, military, economic, religious and spiritual interests could be for

1 In the two texts translated here, in which the title *magistra* appears, it refers to the leader of the women's side of a double monastic community; the *magistra* was under the authority of the abbot or provost who was the head of the male side of the community. For more on this term, see the introduction to *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont*.

some of the leading members of the twelfth-century nobility – and for the authors who wrote about them. Whether fighting for the emperor in Italy, bringing Christianity to pagans in what is today northern Poland, or founding, reforming and governing monastic communities in the heartland of the German kingdom, the subjects of these texts call attention to some of the many ways that elite culture shaped European society in the central Middle Ages.

In the twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts that preserve these five Latin sources, scribes employed the terms *vita* ('life') and *gesta* ('deeds') to describe the texts and their contents. Both terms reflect the biographical character of these sources; a single person is the subject of each text. Both terms also embed these works within rich literary traditions in the medieval West. The word *gesta* is a common one in biographical writing from the period, well known to historians of the medieval German kingdom through a variety of important texts, including Wipo's *Deeds* of Emperor Conrad II (d. 1039) and Otto of Freising's *Deeds* of Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (d. 1190).[2] In addition, *gesta* is a term used to label biographical sources about many other leading members of European society more generally, including popes, dukes, bishops and abbots.[3] On rare occasions, medieval authors wrote about the 'deeds' of lords of lesser rank as well, and two of the texts translated here belong to this category.[4] The term *vita*, in contrast, tends to be associated most commonly in modern scholarship with hagiography, that enormous body of sources that preserves accounts of the lives and miracles of saints – or at least of people thought to be saintly, regardless of whether or not they had been formally canonized.[5]

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2 Wipo, *The deeds of Conrad II* and Otto of Freising and Rahewin, *The deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*. For secular biographies in this period, see Morrison's introduction to *Imperial lives and letters of the eleventh century*, 40–2.

3 See, for example, *The deeds of Pope Innocent III*; *The 'Gesta Normannorum ducum'* [*The deeds of the dukes of the Normans*]; *A warrior bishop of the twelfth century: The deeds of Archbishop Albero of Trier*; and William of Malmesbury, *The deeds of the bishops of England*. For more on *gesta*, see Sot, *Gesta episcoporum, gesta abbatum* and the brief but excellent discussion of one *gesta* tradition in Nicholas Paul, *To follow in their footsteps*, 21–4.

4 For the rarity of such works, see Vogtherr, 'Wiprecht von Groitzsch und das Jakobspatrozinium', 39–40.

5 For hagiography, see the classic treatment in Delehaye, *Legends of the saints* and, more recently, Bartlett, *Why can the dead do such great things?* For some examples of important hagiographical *vitae* in English translation, see *Soldiers of Christ: saints and saints' lives from Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages* and *Medieval hagiography: an anthology*.

However, modern scholars must be careful not to draw too sharp a distinction between the terms *vita* and *gesta*. In the medieval period, they could have very similar connotations. There are, for example, *vitae* of non-saintly rulers. The Roman author Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* was a model for Einhard's *Life* of Charlemagne (d. 814), and there is a *vita* of the decidedly un-saintly German ruler Henry IV (d. 1106) as well.[6] There are also *vitae* for other leading secular nobles – Donizo of Canossa's *Life* of Margravine Matilda of Tuscany (d. 1115), for example – as well as for popes and bishops who were never canonized or associated with large numbers of miracles.[7] As several of the sources translated here attest, medieval authors seem to have used the words *vita* and *gesta* interchangeably without any sense that they represented two distinct literary genres.[8] All five of these works can therefore be read together fruitfully as a cohesive set of sources for elite society in the twelfth-century German kingdom.

Medieval forms of biography – whether labelled 'lives' or 'deeds' – rarely if ever align neatly with modern conceptions of how one ought to write the life of another person.[9] The hagiographical baggage attached to the term *vita*, in particular, tends to give medieval biographies an air of fiction. Unbelievable miracle stories, repetitive *topoi* that seek to embed the text's subject in long traditions of saintliness, and unreliable historical details fill some of the best-known saints' lives.[10] While all of the texts translated here contain these hagiographical features in varying amounts, none is completely overwhelmed by them, because of the five men and women who are the subjects of these texts, only one was ever formally canonized: Bishop Otto I of Bamberg (d. 1139). He became a saint approximately forty years after the composition of the *vita* translated here. Only one of the other texts, *The life of*

6   Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*; Einhard, *The life of Charlemagne*; and *The life of Emperor Henry IV*. See also *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: the lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer.*

7   Donizo of Canossa, *Donizonis Vita Mathildis*. See also the papal lives translated in *The papal reform of the eleventh century* and the *Vita Burchardi* about Bishop Burchard of Worms.

8   For example, in the opening poem of the *The life of an unnamed magistra of Admont*, the phrases *fulgida vita* and *pia gesta* both appear in the first three lines. For a different perspective on the genre question, see Sot, *Gesta episcoporum, gesta abbatum*, 18.

9   Cf. Bartlett, *Why can the dead do such great things?*, 519.

10 See *Saints and cities in medieval Italy*, 4–7, for a good recent overview of some of the challenges of using hagiographical sources.

Mechthild of Diessen (d. 1160) by Engelhard of Langheim, may have had the canonization of its subject as one – but certainly not its only – goal. The authors of *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* (d. 1124), *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont* (d. mid-twelfth century), and *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* (d. 1185) showed little if any interest in recording their subjects' miraculous or wondrous activities. In other words, none of these texts was written about someone who had already been canonized, and the authors of three of the five had no intention of asserting the saintliness of their subjects. As a result, although the collection of *vitae* and *gesta* translated here may not offer readers the types of biographical information they expect to find in modern biographies, these works do illuminate the lives and times of their subjects in ways that few other surviving sources from this period can.

Thus, this volume seeks to provide scholars and students alike with a set of texts that can deepen their understanding of elite society within the German kingdom of the twelfth century. Since the year 2000, there has been an impressive surge in the number of Latin sources available in English translation for earlier periods of German history.[11] Scholars have been especially interested in translating works of *Reichsgeschichte*, or imperial history, meaning that numerous accounts of high politics are now available in English for the centuries prior to the twelfth. For example, many of the most important narrative sources for the Ottonian period (918–1024) have been translated.[12] The Salian century (1024–1125), which includes what is quite possibly the most famous event in all of medieval German history, the Investiture Controversy (1075–1122), has also seen a new round of translations of important chronicles.[13] Most of the twelfth century, in contrast, is not as fortunate. The greatest historian of the period, Bishop Otto of Freising (d. 1158), has had both of his narrative works of history – *The two cities* and *The deeds of Frederick*

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11 See the Bibliography for an extensive list of sources from the medieval German kingdom in English translation.

12 *Ottonian Germany: the chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*; Widukind of Corvey, *Deeds of the Saxons*; Liudprand of Cremona, *The complete works*; *Queenship and sanctity: the lives of Mathilda and the epitaph of Adelheid*; *History and politics in late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: the chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*; and *Warfare and politics in medieval Germany, ca. 1000: on the variety of our times by Alpert of Metz.*

13 *The annals of Lampert of Hersfeld*; *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest*; *Eleventh-Century Germany: the Swabian chronicles*; and for Bohemia in this period, Cosmas of Prague, *The chronicle of the Czechs.* Older translations for this century include *Imperial lives and letters of the eleventh century* and Adam of Bremen, *History of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen.*

Barbarossa – translated into English, but these translations are now more than sixty years old.[14] More recently, scholars have produced translations of a small number of other texts for the reign of Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, making him the twelfth-century German ruler with the most source material available in English.[15] Popular interest in the woman who may be the best known figure from this period in German medieval history, Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), has also generated a variety of good translations, not only of her own works but of works about her as well.[16] However, the remaining source material available in English for the twelfth-century German kingdom is scattered across a wide range of publications, some of them decades old.[17] As a result, there is no other cohesive body of works in translation comparable to this one for the lived experience of twelfth-century German noblemen and women.

The five people who are the subjects of the texts translated here cut across many of the strata of German elite society. Wiprecht of Groitzsch, though he had no noble title for much of his life, moved in prominent circles at the imperial court and in Saxony during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. He eventually obtained the title of margrave, giving him authority over part of the border region along the Elbe River in the north-east of the German kingdom. Thus, his life highlights some of the opportunities that were available to ambitious lords, especially in the decades around 1100, to rise from relatively obscure beginnings into the uppermost levels of the German nobility. The subject of the second text, Bishop Otto I of Bamberg, was born into the Swabian nobility in the south-west of the kingdom; though little is known about his family background, he became a leading figure at the imperial court before obtaining the bishopric of Bamberg. Like Wiprecht, therefore, his career points to the possibilities for upward mobility that some nobles enjoyed in the early twelfth century. In contrast, both Ludwig of Arnstein and Mechthild of Diessen came from families of comital

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14 Otto of Freising, *The two cities*; and Otto of Freising and Rahewin, *The deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*.

15 See also *Barbarossa in Italy* and *The crusade of Frederick Barbarossa*. This ruler is also the subject of a monumental new biography in English: Freed, *Frederick Barbarossa*.

16 See, for example, Hildegard of Bingen, *The letters of Hildegard of Bingen*; Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*; and *Jutta and Hildegard: the biographical sources*.

17 See, for example, *The life of Godfrey of Cappenberg*; *The life of Otto, apostle of Pomerania*; *A warrior bishop of the twelfth century*; *Vita sancti Eckenberti*; *Elisabeth of Schönau: the complete works*; Helmold of Bosau, *The chronicle of the Slavs*; *The chronicle of Henry of Livonia*; and Eidelberg, ed. and trans., *The Jews and the crusaders*.

rank that were already, at the time these two were born, leading lineages in the Rhine River valley and in western Bavaria respectively. Both of them, in other words, belonged from birth to the regional elites that dominated local life in the twelfth century. The unnamed *magistra* of Admont, on the other hand, came from a ministerial family, meaning she was of unfree status; she was therefore not a member of the free nobility. Nevertheless, as her rise into a leadership position at the prominent monastic house of Admont attests, ministerials in many regions were becoming the de facto lower nobility during the twelfth century, giving them a significant role to play in elite society.[18] These five sources, when read together, thus offer a rich picture of multiple levels of German elite society, from some of the leading families of the nobility to people whose lives were lived in the ambiguous zone between free and unfree status.

German noble society in the central Middle Ages

The sources translated here span the reigns of the German kings and emperors Henry IV (1056–1106), Henry V (1106–25), Lothar III (1125–37), Conrad III (1138–52) and Frederick I Barbarossa (1152–90). All five of these rulers have roles to play in the texts, and their courts are important centres of patronage at key moments for some of the men and women discussed in these works. Nevertheless, imperial court politics are not the principal subject of any of the sources in this volume. Instead, much of the action in these texts unfolds on a much smaller scale at the level of local societies: in castles, small towns and religious communities. Because noblemen and women were central figures in these societies, situating the nobility within the local landscape of the twelfth-century German kingdom is essential background for introducing these sources.

   As scholars have long argued, the period c. 1075 to 1200, covered in this book, was an important one in the history of the medieval German nobility.[19] The significance of this period is partially the product

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18 For more on this point, see below.

19 Good discussions of this subject in English can be found in Reuter, 'The medieval nobility'; Arnold, *Princes and territories in medieval Germany*; Freed, 'Reflections on the medieval German nobility'; and Fuhrmann, *Germany in the high middle ages*. For a recent German overview of the scholarship in this field, see Hechberger, *Adel im fränkisch-deutschen Mittelalter*.

of the dramatic increase over the course of this century and a quarter in the source material available to study elite society. There is relatively little extant evidence for the structure of the nobility and for individual noble families prior to the year 1050; in contrast, many of the lineages that would come to dominate aristocratic society during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries first emerge from obscurity in the decades around the year 1100.[20] This increase in sources is particularly striking in the case of charters: archival documents that record property donations and exchanges as well as confirmations of rights and privileges. These survive in far greater numbers for the twelfth century than the eleventh. Issued by kings, bishops, monastic communities and nobles, charters have traditionally been the most valuable sources for studying the German nobility. They make it possible to reconstruct the genealogies of many noble lineages and also provide evidence for some of the ways aristocratic lordship functioned on the ground: how nobles acquired territory, built and maintained networks of relatives and friends, protected their rights and privileges, divided their inheritances and preserved their memories after death.[21] Other types of sources, including the *vitae* and *gesta* translated here, are also much more common from the later 1000s onwards. Thus, the decades between 1075 and 1200 are a key transition period in the study of the medieval German nobility, because it is possible for historians to study many more aspects of elite society during these years than during the preceding ones.

However, the increase in surviving sources is not the only reason why scholars have identified this period as a critical one. There were also significant changes occurring within noble society itself that would have far-reaching consequences for the German kingdom in subsequent centuries. Three of these changes in particular will be highlighted here, because they provide important context necessary for understanding the five texts translated in this volume. First, the Investiture Controversy and its aftermath saw a decline in royal authority that created opportunities for nobles – many of them from relatively obscure backgrounds – to acquire more power and influence at the local level. A second change, closely connected to the first, was a transformation in the nature of lordship; from dukes to counts to unfree ministerials, members of all the strata of elite society in the German kingdom exercised their rights and authority in very different ways in the mid-twelfth century

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20 Lyon, *Princely brothers and sisters*, 16–32.

21 For charters as sources for medieval German history, see Freed, 'German source collections' and Freed, 'Medieval German social history'.

than their predecessors had a hundred years earlier. Finally, this trans-
formation of lordship was tied to the emergence of new aristocratic
lineages that would come to play a pivotal role in promoting and
supporting the new calls for monastic renewal and reform in the decades
around 1100. The wave of monastic foundations during this period
would have been unimaginable without the changes taking place
simultaneously within the nobility. All five of the texts translated here
were written at religious communities founded between the 1070s and
1130s, at the height of this surge in interest in the spiritual life, and
all of them describe in various ways the noble culture that was taking
shape during the same decades.

The Investiture Controversy and its aftermath

'The Investiture Controversy' has become a useful – if admittedly
misleading – term for explaining a wide range of different aspects of
German history during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.
At its core, it refers to the dispute initiated by Pope Gregory VII
(1073–85) over whether or not the German ruler Henry IV – and
eventually other Christian kings as well – had the right to appoint
bishops in his own territories and to invest them with their episcopal
authority.[22] German kings and emperors had routinely chosen the prelates
in their lands for over a century prior to the 1070s, but Gregory VII
sought to put an end to the practice. His dramatic excommunication
of Henry IV in 1076 – and Henry's subsequent pleas for forgiveness
in the snows outside Canossa – were the famous beginning of a long-
running conflict over the nature of secular and spiritual authority in
medieval Europe. As *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg* translated here
attests, Henry IV was still appointing members of his own court to
German bishoprics in the years after Gregory's death. The 1122 agree-
ment known as the Concordat of Worms, which was arranged by Emperor
Henry V and Pope Calixtus II (1119–24), was a compromise solution.[23]
The German rulers agreed to intervene in episcopal appointments only
in cases where there was a disputed election, and they were to invest
bishops only with the *regalia* – those elements of episcopal authority
that derived from the king (including lands and other forms of income)

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22 For more detailed discussions of the Investiture Controversy in English, see Robinson,
    'Reform and the church, 1073–1122'; Weinfurter, *The Salian century*; Blumenthal,
    The Investiture Controversy; and Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany 1056–1273*.

23 For an English translation of this agreement, see Miller, *Power and the holy in the
    age of the Investiture Conflict*, 120–1.

– but not the spiritual elements of the bishop's office. This was certainly not the end of questions about the limits of secular and spiritual authority; there was not a sharp line dividing 'Church' and 'State' in the German kingdom after 1122.[24] As *The life of Mechthild of Diessen* and *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* both show, though in strikingly different ways, the two spheres continued to overlap during later decades of the twelfth century.

The clash between emperors and popes at the centre of the Investiture Controversy was only one feature of the shifting political and social landscape of the German kingdom in the period between 1075 and 1200. Prior to the outbreak of the conflict, Henry IV had already faced an uprising by discontented members of the secular and ecclesiastical elite in Saxony. Pope Gregory VII's excommunication of Henry IV in 1076 added fuel to the fire, and the Saxons soon joined with other nobles from the south of the German kingdom in their opposition to Henry's rule. With Gregory's support, they denied Henry's claim to the kingship and elected the duke of Swabia, Rudolf of Rheinfelden, as the new German king (or anti-king, as he is more commonly known). Henry IV survived this threat to his rule, but Rudolf's death in 1080 did not put an end to his troubles in Saxony.[25] As *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* describe at length, both Henry IV and his son Henry V would continue to face significant Saxon opposition throughout the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

Pope Gregory VII's and his successors' assertion of papal authority over the Church and all spiritual matters – in combination with the Saxons' and other nobles' challenges to German royal authority – undermined the rule of both Henry IV and Henry V. All of this had ramifications for later rulers as well. After Henry V's childless death in 1125, the German secular and ecclesiastical princes asserted their right to elect his successor, and a majority chose the Saxon duke Lothar rather than Henry V's closest male relative, the Swabian duke Frederick II from the Staufen lineage. The electoral nature of German kingship would become stronger in subsequent years, and the imperial court increasingly came to be a place where the rulers were expected to make decisions with the consent of the princes. The kings and emperors were conceived of, at least in noble circles, as the first among equals, and the princes in later centuries maintained the right to depose the German

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24 Dale, 'Inauguration and political liturgy' and Benson, *The bishop-elect*, 303–15.

25 For a more detailed discussion in English of events in Saxony in the later eleventh century, See Robinson, *Henry IV*.

king and elect another if they deemed it necessary.[26] The five texts in this volume all reveal various aspects of this distinctive political culture during and after the Investiture Controversy. The German kings and emperors do not dominate the action in these sources; they are sometimes present, typically at the edges, only occasionally at the centre. Members of the secular and ecclesiastical elite are the ones who drive the action in these texts, and their decisions can be seen shaping life inside and outside the Church, from one end of the German kingdom to the other – and sometimes even beyond its frontiers.

The transformation of noble lordship

The decline of German royal authority during the period of the Investiture Controversy elevated the power and influence of the nobility; in the process, the nature of noble authority and lordship underwent a series of transformations at all strata of elite society. This was evident even at the uppermost levels of the nobility, with the princes who held the title of duke (*dux*). There had been only five dukes in the German kingdom in the tenth century: the dukes of the Swabians, Bavarians, Saxons, Franconians and Lotharingians. Beginning in the later eleventh century, the number of dukes increased significantly as the German rulers divided the older duchies and created new ducal titles to reward loyal followers. In the process, the title lost much of its original meaning. Instead of being the leaders of the various peoples of the kingdom, the dukes increasingly became linked to territories, especially to the landed holdings of individual noble lineages.[27] Thus, in Swabia during the early twelfth century, the Staufen lineage possessed the title of duke of Swabia, but two other lineages – the Welfs and Zähringens – also held ducal titles and exercised lordship over their lands in Swabia independently from Staufen ducal authority. Further east, Emperor Frederick I separated the march of Austria from the duchy of Bavaria and elevated it into a new duchy in 1156; the new ducal title was based first and foremost on the family holdings of the Babenberger lineage, which had controlled Austria since the later tenth century.[28] In those marches that did not become duchies during this period, the title of margrave (*marchio*) underwent a comparable transformation to that of duke; increasingly, it

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26 Weiler, 'Suitability and right'; Schneidmüller, 'Rule by consensus'; and Weinfurter, *The Salian century*, 159–79.

27 For this process, see Arnold, *Medieval Germany, 500–1300*, 68–74.

28 For all of these lineages, see Lyon, *Princely brothers and sisters*, 16–32.

became hereditary in noble lineages, meaning that important territories in border regions began to move further outside of royal control.[29]

This change in the meaning and significance of noble titles is even more striking in the case of counts. In the Carolingian period, *comes* referred to a royal official, appointed by the rulers, who possessed judicial and military authority within a specific region of the Carolingian empire; the office was not hereditary, and the counts sometimes did not even possess their own properties and rights in the counties where they exercised their authority.[30] During the Ottonian and Salian periods, this gradually changed, and by the early twelfth century, the holders of the comital title bore little if any resemblance to their Carolingian predecessors. Noble lords increasingly considered the title hereditary and used it – regardless of whether it had been given to them by a ruler or not – to indicate their regional prominence. Many of these lords were from lesser noble families, but in the absence of effective royal authority in the decades around 1100, they were able to dominate society at the local level by building new stone castles, clearing new lands and consolidating their lineage's rights and properties.[31] They also acquired the advocacies over local monasteries, giving them responsibility for defending and exercising judicial authority on the extensive estates of monastic communities.[32] *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* is an excellent source for understanding the nature of this new form of comital lordship in the twelfth century. Wiprecht of Groitzsch, who appears sporadically in extant sources with the title of count before he became margrave, is another local lord who spent much of his life strengthening his control over the territories around his castle of Groitzsch on the north-east frontier of the kingdom. As *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* attest, the German kings and emperors had a very limited role to play in regulating how these lords exercised their authority.

Below the level of the counts, the societal transformations of the eleventh and twelfth centuries are not always as easy to observe. In general, it appears that the lowest strata of nobles and other freemen (*liberi*) were in the process of contracting. There were various factors behind this decline, but the most significant was the rise of the unfree

29 Arnold, *Princes and territories in medieval Germany*, 121–5 and more recently Stieldorf, *Marken und Markgrafen*, 587–97.

30 Goldberg, *Struggle for empire*, 215–7.

31 For a good example of this type of lordship, see Freed, *The counts of Falkenstein.*

32 For monastic advocacies in this period, see Lyon, 'Noble lineages, *Hausklöster*, and monastic advocacy in the twelfth century'.

ministerials (*ministeriales*) in many parts of the German kingdom. During the violent upheaval of the period of the Investiture Controversy, secular and ecclesiastical princes increasingly began to rely on unfree members of their own households to fulfil military and administrative functions in their territories. Because these ministerials were of servile origin, they could not marry without their lord's permission and could not alienate most forms of property; in other words, they did not have the same kinds of rights that freemen had. By turning to these unfree ministerials as their key base of support, rulers, bishops, abbots and abbesses, dukes, margraves and counts were able to depend upon households of reliable fighters and administrators who were firmly under their control. In return, as these ministerials took on more and more responsibilities, they essentially absorbed and replaced the lower strata of freemen at the local level. Over the course of the twelfth century, these ministerials even competed with the lesser nobility in some regions of the German kingdom, and their unfree status did not diminish the prominent part they were able to play in elite society.[33] *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont* demonstrates this very well; Admont in the mid-twelfth century was a well-respected double monastic house to which many of the leading noble families of the south-east of the German kingdom sent their sons and daughters, yet this woman of servile origin was able to attain the highest position of authority within the female community. Other ministerials also appear in important roles in some of the other texts translated here.

Finally, another significant transformation within the society that is the setting for this volume concerns the term *miles*. The most straightforward translation of this word is 'knight', and by the close of the twelfth century – by which time chivalric culture had begun to influence German noble society – this is an appropriate English rendering of the term. For the period before 1150, however, the issue is more complicated, and scholars have spilled a significant amount of ink debating what a *miles* was during these decades.[34] Most important to emphasize for the texts translated here are the term's military connotations; a *miles* was a member of a lord's household who fought on horseback and

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33 The most detailed discussions of German ministerials in English include Freed, *Noble bondsmen*; Arnold, *German knighthood*; and Freed, 'Nobles, ministerials and knights'. See also Althoff, *Family, friends and followers*, 133–4.

34 See, for example, Bachrach, '*Milites* and warfare in pre-crusade Germany'; Mortimer, 'Knights and knighthood in Germany'; Freed, 'Nobles, ministerials, and knights'; Arnold, *German knighthood*; and more generally, Kaeuper, *Medieval chivalry*, 71–7.

thus performed a key function in medieval warfare. In most cases, they were probably unfree during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, meaning they overlapped to a certain extent with the ministerials. However, regional variations make it impossible to generalize for the whole German kingdom; in those places where *milites* tended to be freemen, 'vassals' may be an appropriate translation.[35] Because of the complexity of the problem, the term *miles/milites* has been left untranslated in this volume – as is common in some other recent translations – in order to avoid romantic notions of chivalric knights or, on the other hand, too generic a rendering like 'warrior', which does not quite capture the specific functions of these men in the texts translated here.[36]

Because of all the changes affecting the nature of noble power and authority over the course of the twelfth century, readers of the five *vitae* and *gesta* in this volume should come to the texts expecting to encounter a flexible social and political order. German elite society in this period was not rigidly hierarchical – and it certainly was not 'feudal' in the classic sense of the term.[37] Personal ability and personal initiative enabled some men and women in this society to have remarkably successful careers, despite relatively obscure family origins. Other nobles, even those born into prominent lineages, were not forced to fulfil roles in elite society that they did not want to play; they had choices about how to live their lives. For example, Bishop Otto of Bamberg's dedication to missionary work in Pomerania, as detailed at length in the *Life* translated here, was highly unusual for an imperial prelate of his generation. And as *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* show, Ludwig's decision to convert his castle into a religious house and abandon the violent lifestyle of the secular nobility was very much a personal choice. This was a noble society in flux, open to numerous different trends and developments, and all five sources reveal the broad range of opportunities and possibilities available to its members.

Noblemen, noblewomen and monastic reform

The texts translated here provide rich evidence for the character of monastic life between 1075 and 1200, a pivotal period for the development

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35 Freed, 'Nobles, ministerials, and knights', 581–4.

36 *Ottonian Germany*, 64; Cosmas of Prague, *The chronicle of the Czechs*, 23; and *The histories of a medieval German city, Worms c.1000–c.1300*, 28.

37 See Brown, 'Tyranny of a construct'; Reynolds, *Fiefs and vassals*; and more recently for Germany, Dendorfer and Deutinger, eds., *Das Lehnswesen* and Patzold, *Das Lehnswesen*.

of many religious orders in Latin Christendom. Scholars have long recognized that the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries were a time when a chorus of voices inside and outside the Church denounced the divisions, disorder and decline in the religious life of their day. They called for change, for a *reformatio*, a renewal of the monastic and spiritual life.[38] This was a far-reaching call, for religion was embedded deeply in this society. Monastic communities, for example, were not just spiritual centres: they were also economic hubs, because of the vast landed estates many of them controlled; they were nodes in political and social networks at the regional level and sometimes beyond; and they were places of memory and commemoration for the nobles who founded and endowed so many of them. 'Reform' is therefore a concept that touches on numerous aspects of medieval European life.

It is also a concept that has come under increasingly intense scrutiny and critique, because too many scholars have used it unthinkingly as a catch-all term and as a simplistic explanatory model for a whole range of discrete eleventh- and twelfth-century phenomena.[39] Recent scholarship has argued that the monasteries of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries were not necessarily in a state of physical or spiritual decline; instead, they simply did not conform to the expectations of younger generations of secular and ecclesiastical leaders who had developed new ideas – and new rhetoric – for how to institute the ideal monastic lifestyle. Viewed from this perspective, reform becomes a fluid and multi-faceted process – not a single moment or event – that followed a different course in each community rather than a standardised blueprint. In other words, reform was implemented idiosyncratically by individuals and informal networks of churchmen, founders and patrons, often over multiple generations; it was not a coherent institution directed from the top down.[40] Historians have also critiqued older arguments about reform that tended to exclude women from their discussions, or to cast women in a negative light, rather than taking seriously the medieval sources that show women's enthusiasm for reforming the Church and

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38 Constable, *The reformation of the twelfth century*, 3; Robinson, 'Reform and the church, 1073–1122'; Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy*, 1–27; and Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 262–98.

39 See Howe, *Before the Gregorian Reform*, 6–7 and Tellenbach, *The church in western Europe*, 157–8 for especially pointed remarks about this problem.

40 See especially Vanderputten, *Monastic reform as process* and, more generally, Melville, *The world of medieval monasticism*, 180–5. For an excellent study of the complexities of reform in a German setting, see Eldevik, 'Driving the chariot of the Lord'.

their active engagement in reform processes.[41] The sources translated here lend support to both of these recent trends in the secondary literature; they describe lay and religious leaders founding new monasteries – and 'reforming' older ones – in the rhetorical language of monastic improvement and spiritual renewal that is so commonplace in surviving twelfth-century works.

While current historiography is pressing for new perspectives on 'church reform', it is nevertheless an older scholarly argument that helps to explain why issues of monastic renewal are so prevalent in the texts in this volume. For more than half a century, historians have stressed that the medieval German nobility was not antagonistic to monastic reform movements, as earlier generations of scholars had assumed, but was in fact pivotal to the spread of reformist ideals.[42] Secular noblemen and noblewomen founded and endowed many of the religious communities that were central to implementing ideas of reform and to promoting a more rigorous monastic lifestyle; the new lineages of counts and other lords rising to prominence in the decades around 1100 liked to support these reformed houses to show their piety and their concern for the spiritual well-being of their families. *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* and *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* are both rich sources for the close relationship between secular lords and reformers. Monastic houses like Wipecht's foundation at Pegau and Ludwig's at Arnstein offer some of the most tangible evidence for the nobility's interest in reform, but evidence can be found in numerous other places as well. Across the German kingdom, noblemen and noblewomen often placed their younger sons in monasteries, or sent them to be educated at cathedral schools; they frequently offered their daughters to convents as well. Many of these children later attained prominent positions in the Church – as bishops and abbots or abbesses – meaning that these men and women of noble birth also led the way in implementing reform agendas. *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg* describes Otto as working tirelessly to improve the monasteries controlled by the bishopric of Bamberg, as well as those he founded or acquired. And *The life of Mechthild of Diessen* discusses how Mechthild, the daughter of a count, was elected abbess of the women's community at Edelstetten in order to reform the women's conduct and their commitment to the religious life.

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41 See especially Griffiths, 'Women and reform in the central Middle Ages'.

42 For a classic treatment of this topic, see Schmid, 'Adel und Reform in Schwaben'. For an overview of the subject in English, see Howe, 'The nobility's reform of the medieval church'.

The rich variety of different monastic reform movements that developed during the period 1075 to 1200 is also evident in the sources in this volume. The Rule of St Benedict had been one of the most important guides for the monastic life in medieval Europe since the sixth century, and many of the reformers of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries called for a return to the tenets of this Rule. While Cluny in France is unquestionably the most famous Benedictine centre of reform during this period, there were Benedictine houses in the German kingdom that also became focal points for spreading reform ideas. One of the earliest and most influential of these in the territories east of the Rhine was Hirsau in the Black Forest, which borrowed heavily from the Cluniac way of life.[43] Hirsau's influence spread through the monastery of Corvey to Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch's foundation at Pegau, as his *Deeds* describe. Further to the south and east, the Benedictine community at Admont was founded in 1074 by Archbishop Gebhard of Salzburg (1060–88), a prelate who was deeply committed to promoting spiritual reform in his archdiocese.[44] As *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont* explains, Admont's reputation as a community that followed an especially exemplary form of the monastic life led to the *magistra* frequently travelling to other religious houses to be a model for nuns in those convents.

Two other religious groups that were of great significance for the twelfth-century German kingdom also have important roles to play in some of the texts translated here. During the late eleventh century, there developed alongside the orders of cloistered monks a group known as regular canons; these were clerics who embraced many reform ideas, including clerical celibacy, and dedicated themselves with renewed zeal to the apostolic life and performing the divine office. They also adopted a rule, the Rule of St Augustine, which emphasized communal living for these canons along similar lines to the monastic lifestyle. This Augustinian Rule became especially popular in cathedral chapters, where many canons desired to follow a regulated, communal way of life while carrying out their duties of pastoral care.[45] Numerous secular nobles

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43 The classic treatment in German is Jakobs, *Die Hirsauer*. For more recent overviews of the Hirsau reform in English, see Melville, *The world of medieval monasticism*, 85–7 and Cowdrey, *The Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform*, 196–210.

44 Melville, *The world of medieval monasticism*, 130. For more detailed discussions in English of Admont's significance, see various articles in Beach, ed., *Manuscripts and monastic culture*.

45 Melville, *The world of medieval monasticism*, 125–35 and Constable, *The reformation of the twelfth century*, 54–6.

also found this group attractive and chose to establish Augustinian communities on their own lands. Double houses, which included both a men's community of canons and a separate women's community of canonesses, were common in this group, and Bavaria – the setting for much of *The life of Mechthild of Diessen* – was a region where the Augustinians were especially well-entrenched by the later twelfth century.[46]

The Premonstratensians, a religious group with origins in the early 1100s, also followed the Rule of St Augustine, but they were more rigid in some of their practices than other Augustinian communities and came closer to living a strict monastic lifestyle. Following the Cistercian model, the Premonstratensian houses organized themselves into an order, with common statutes and a general chapter, in order to bind their separate communities together more tightly.[47] The group's founder, Norbert of Xanten (d. 1134), was a larger-than-life figure: a wandering preacher, the founder of the religious community at Prémontré from which the order gets its name, and – in the final years of his life – archbishop of Magdeburg.[48] Norbert makes appearances in two of the texts translated here, *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* (which concerns the foundation of a Premonstratensian house at Arnstein) and *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg*. His presence in both these texts is just one of the many ways in which ideas of reform and monastic renewal can be seen running like a thread through the sources in this volume, weaving them together into an intricate, cohesive whole.

Reading the texts

Each of the five sources translated in this volume is preceded by a brief introduction, which is designed to provide the necessary background specific to the individual texts. As a result, the five sources can each be read separately as a stand-alone work. However, as this general introduction has emphasized, they have also been selected with the intention that they be read together, so that scholars and students alike

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46 Backmund, *Die Chorherrenorden und ihre Stifter in Bayern*, 29–46 and more recently Crusius, ed., *Studien zum Kanonissenstift.*

47 Melville, *The world of medieval monasticism*, 158–63 and Crusius and Flachenecker, eds, *Studien zum Prämonstratenserorden.*

48 *Norbert and early Norbertine spirituality*, 7–15 and Melville, *The world of medieval monasticism*, 115–20.

can gain a fuller picture of German noble society in the period between 1075 and 1200.

For any reader, there are several issues that should be kept in mind when considering the five sources together. As noted above, all of these texts were written inside monastic communities and reflect, to varying degrees, the interests of the monastic authors and/or their monastic audiences. *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* survives in a manuscript from the monastery at Pegau, a male community Wiprecht founded near his castle of Groitzsch and chose as his burial place. A monk at the house of Prüfening in Bavaria wrote *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg*; as the text describes in some detail, Otto was the founder of Prüfening. *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont* was written inside the female community at Admont by someone who probably knew the *magistra* personally. The Cistercian monk Engelhard of Langheim composed *The life of Mechthild of Diessen*, and one of the dedicatory letters makes it clear that the provost and canons at Diessen were part of the intended audience. Finally, *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* is extant in a manuscript from the Premonstratensian house at Arnstein, which Ludwig had not only founded but had also joined while still a young lord.

The monastic agendas of the texts' authors and compilers can be quite explicit at times. For example, both *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* and *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* contain detailed lists of the property holdings of the religious houses where the texts were written. Along similar lines, *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* and *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg* both include copies of important privileges for the monasteries that produced these works. Here, in other words, is clear evidence that the monastic authors intended these texts to preserve not only Wiprecht and Otto's memories but also key sources for their own communities' histories. Even the short text of *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont* includes brief passages praising the archbishops of Salzburg, under whose authority the community at Admont lay, in order to link the religious house to its most important patrons. *The life of Mechthild of Diessen*, in contrast, is more subtle in raising concerns specific to the canons and canonesses at Diessen in some of the later chapters of the work. Thus, while working with all of these texts, the reader must remember that the lives and deeds of the subjects of the individual works are being filtered through the lens of monastic perspectives and monastic self-interest.

The monastic milieu in which these texts were produced is also evident in the source material the authors used in the construction of

their works. Both monasteries and houses of canons were important centres of education in the twelfth-century German kingdom, and their libraries held not only Christian texts but also famous works from pagan antiquity. The *vitae* and *gesta* translated here rely to varying degrees on references to other sources, but all of these citations – from Virgil, Horace, Sallust, the Bible, Boethius, Gregory the Great and a host of other works – reflect monastic forms of education during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Of the five texts, *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* is the one that is least reliant on outside material; citations from the Bible and classical works are few and far between, though it does borrow in some places from other medieval narrative sources. On the other end of the spectrum is *The life of Mechthild of Diessen*, which frequently interweaves biblical citations and allusions into many of its chapters; its author, Engelhard of Langheim, assumed an audience very familiar with a wide range of stories from both the Old and New Testaments. Admittedly, the numerous references to other sources can be distracting at times in some of the texts translated here. For example, the second and third books of *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg* are modelled on Sulpicius Severus's fourth-century *Life of Saint Martin of Tours* to such an extent that some readers might grow suspicious of the veracity of the account of Bishop Otto's missionary work in Pomerania. This is a common problem in the *vita* and *gesta* source material from the medieval period, which is one reason why earlier generations of scholars dismissed these works as historically unreliable.

Nevertheless, more recent generations have shown how these works can be read against the grain to recover cultural attitudes and social practices.[49] For example, one fruitful approach to the texts translated here is to consider their differing perspectives on women inside and outside monastic communities. *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont* and *The life of Mechthild of Diessen* are not the only texts in which women play prominent roles. Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch's first wife, Judith of Bohemia, is a central figure in his *Deeds*, and the text frequently portrays her as one of the most generous supporters of the fledgling monastic foundation of Pegau. Likewise, Count Ludwig of Arnstein's wife, Guda, has an important place in his *Deeds*, since, according to the text's author, it was her inability to bear children that first prompted Ludwig to consider joining the religious life. Combining the

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49 See, for example, Schulenburg, 'Saints' lives as a source for the history of women, 500–1100' and more recently Webb's introduction to her *Saints and cities in medieval Italy*.

depictions of these two noblewomen with the depictions of Mechthild of Diessen and the unnamed *magistra* of Admont therefore offers the opportunity to explore numerous aspects of the role of noblewomen in the culture and society of the German kingdom.

Other cultural attitudes and social practices that readers will find discussed in multiple sources in this volume include those surrounding dying and death. With the exception of *The life of Otto of Bamberg*, which has very little to say about the bishop's passing, the other four texts translated here all offer detailed descriptions of their subjects' final days. *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch*, *The life of Mechthild of Diessen* and *The deeds of Count Ludwig of Arnstein* also give accounts of their subjects' burials. Such rich depictions of individuals' deaths are rare in other types of sources from the twelfth century.[50] Additional topics worth exploring across these sources include material culture – there are lengthy descriptions of numerous valuable objects, especially in *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* and *The life of Otto of Bamberg* – and the differences between society in the heartland of the German kingdom and society along its frontiers. In short, these are all sources that reward close reading.

Notes on the translations

I have sought to balance readability with due respect for the original Latin texts throughout the translations included in this volume. Thus, while I have preferred English grammatical structures to Latin ones in most places, I have tried to maintain the medieval authors' writing styles as much as possible without making sentences unnecessarily confusing or complicated. These are not quite word-for-word translations, but they try to capture the feel of the Latin originals without sacrificing the accessibility of the texts. With that in mind, I have tried to limit the number of words I have kept untranslated to a minimum; *miles/ milites* is one of the few exceptions, as noted above, and other exceptions are explained in the notes to the individual texts. In keeping with common practice, direct citations from other sources are italicized in the texts, while indirect references are indicated in the footnotes.

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50 The death scenes here can be read fruitfully alongside the description of Elisabeth of Schönau's death in *Elisabeth of Schönau*, 255–73. For the significance of death scenes in the hagiographical tradition, see Bartlett, *Why can the dead do such great things?*, 529–35.

Only two of the five texts translated here – namely *The deeds of Margrave Wiprecht of Groitzsch* and *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg* – can be found in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, the enormous and invaluable compendium of edited primary sources for German medieval history. Similarly, only one of the five – namely *The life of Bishop Otto of Bamberg* – exists in a modern German translation. This is not to suggest that the other sources in this volume are not well known to scholars; nineteenth-century German and Austrian historians were familiar with all of them, and every one of them has also attracted the attention of more recent scholars.[51] Nevertheless, most of these sources lack modern German translations and are not included in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, because the German-speaking scholarly community continues to hold a rather narrow view of what constitutes a historically significant and valuable primary source. By choosing to include here several texts that do not belong to the traditional canon of medieval German historical sources, my aim has been to introduce an English-reading audience to the rich material that survives for the twelfth-century German kingdom – even if much of this material has never been central to the grand narratives of medieval German history and *Reichsgeschichte* that have shaped scholarly traditions in the German and Austrian academic communities.

51 Wattenbach, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen* discusses four of the five texts translated here, omitting only *The life of an unnamed* magistra *of Admont*, which was first published in 1893. See the introductions to the individual texts below for more detailed discussions of the secondary scholarship concerning each work.