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Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD

Old traditions and regional developments, continental sources  
and continental influences



The 7<sup>th</sup> century's royal follower's grave at mid-east Swedish Rickeby (Uppland) – the deceased one with his horse, several dogs, several raptor birds, several birds which represent the typical prey of falconry plus food gifts (drawing Ulla Malmsten).

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# Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD

Old traditions and regional developments, continental sources  
and continental influences

Edited by  
Oliver Grimm und Ulrich Schmölcke

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Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology (ZBSA)

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## Continental royal seats, royal hunting lodges and deer parks seen in the mirror of medieval written sources

By Martina Giese, Tübingen

*Keywords:* Royal seats (Königspfalzen), places of power, deer parks, hunting kings, Aachen, Bodfeld, Kaiserslautern

*Abstract: A striking feature of East Frankish-German monarchic rule in the Middle Ages was being on the road. The court travelled from place to place, and the king ruled “from the saddle”. The written sources providing evidence of three of these stopping places between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and documenting the great importance of hunting for the kingdom are introduced below. The places are Aachen in Carolingian times, Bodfeld (near Quedlinburg, Sachsen-Anhalt) in Ottonian and Salic times, as well as Kaiserslautern as the residence of the Hohenstaufen dynasty. Royal seats served as starting points for hunting in the surrounding area and also to some extent had game parks right next to them. These served prestigious purposes and thereby at the same time emphasized the character of the sites as places of power. On the basis of the three examples, central questions, methods and results of so-called Pfalzenforschung will be presented.*

“Itinerant kingship is specific to the East Frankish-German kingdom. This form of rulership without a capital meant that the king continuously traveled from place to place.” (EHLERS 2002a, abstract p. VII). The changing locations of ambulatory medieval kingdoms are well documented in charters that were drawn up by their rulers and which are preserved in large quantities. However, although these documents provide a precise place and date of their issue, there is often no information as to why the person stayed at the site in question. These coordinates of space and time provide a basis from which we can find a proper context for the historiographical notes in which there is a lack of information about location and time. A systematic analysis of these sources, as practised in historical science since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, permits the reconstruction of the routing (itinerary) of the kings and their courts and the identification of the whereabouts and the duration of sojourns (cf. DEUTSCHE KÖNIGSPFALZEN 1–8). Beyond the gathering of these basic facts, modern historical science has occupied itself more intensively with the qualitative exploitation and evaluation of the royal seats as places of power. The main result is the *Repertorium der Pfalzen, Königshöfe und übrigen Aufenthaltsorte der Könige im deutschen Reich des Mittelalters* (‘The German royal palaces: survey of the Pfalzen, royal courts and other places of residence of the kings in the medieval German Reich’) that has been published since 1983 and is still ongoing (DIE DEUTSCHEN KÖNIGSPFALZEN 2–4)<sup>1</sup>. As the title

<sup>1</sup> Cf. online at <http://www.koenigspfalzen.mpg.de/> [viewed 29.11.2011] with a complete list of the publications of this research project. For an overview, cf. EHLERS 2002b with a bibliography, 219–235; ZOTZ 2009.

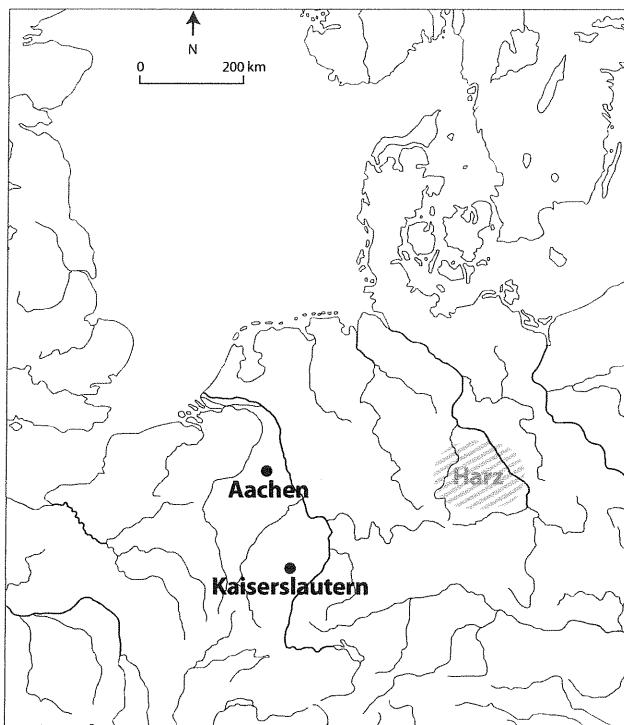


Fig. 1. Sites mentioned in the text.

indicates, the only locations taken into account were those which yielded material evidence of royal estates, whereas cases in which the king found a place to stay as a guest of others were excluded. The royal seats are termed “Königspfalz” (‘royal palace’) in the research (derived from Latin *palatium regis* or *regale palatum*), even though this terminology was not regularly used in the sources. In fact, there is little information about the topography, the appearance and appointments of individual royal seats in written sources. Therefore, *Pfalzenforschung* is a paradigmatic example of the necessity and efficiency of interdisciplinary cooperation. In the following, the written sources about hunting lodges and deer parks will be introduced for three royal palaces<sup>2</sup>: 1. the Carolingian Aachen, 2. the Ottonic and Salic hunting lodge at Bodfeld in the Harz Mountains and 3. the Hohenstaufen royal seat in Kaiserslautern (Fig. 1).

## AACHEN

Charlemagne had built a palace in Aachen that closely followed the example of Rome<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 2). The intention was to create architectonic echoes of the Roman Empire by bringing building materials and the statue of a rider to Aachen, and modern research has shown that the construction of the main church in Aachen might have had late classical precursors. Before this, Aachen had seen settlements since Roman times. The building activities of Charlemagne are comparatively well known from written sources, and the newly erected royal palace was fundamentally different from the other Frankish ones. From 794/95 Charlemagne regularly stayed with his court in Aachen during winter time, and he died there on January 28<sup>th</sup> 814. The royal palace (*palatum publicum*) was mentioned in a document for the first time in 769<sup>4</sup>. Besides the buildings of the palace, i.e. a monumental royal hall (*regia* or *aula*) and a church (Church of Our Lady, *basilica* or *ecclesia*), there was a fortified settlement (*villa*). The central written source about the Palace of Aachen in Carolingian times is an anonymous epic written shortly after the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor on Christmas Eve in the year 800 (Fig. 3; DE KAROLO REGE ET LEONE PAPA; cf. on the whole KAISERKRÖNUNG 2002). This poem deals mainly with the meeting of Pope Leo III and Charlemagne at Paderborn in Westphalia in the year

- 2 Heinrich BEGIEBING's (1905) dissertation from the early period of *Pfalzenforschung* has now been overtaken. – Cf. in general HAUCK 1963; RÖSENER 2005; LIDDIARD 2007; MILESON 2009; in future: GIESE in prep.
- 3 Cf. from the wealth of literature on the palace in Aachen, the more recent contributions by NELSON 2001; FALKENSTEIN 2002; SOT 2009; CAMPBELL 2010, 259–262; TSCHACHER 2010, 76–82, supported by historical as well as archaeological evidence of Aachen as an almost continuously used residence since 794.
- 4 The draft appears in a document of Charlemagne from 13<sup>th</sup> Jan. 769 (D Kar. 1 55). Cf. URKUNDEN DER KAROLINGER 1, 81–82, here 82 l. 8.

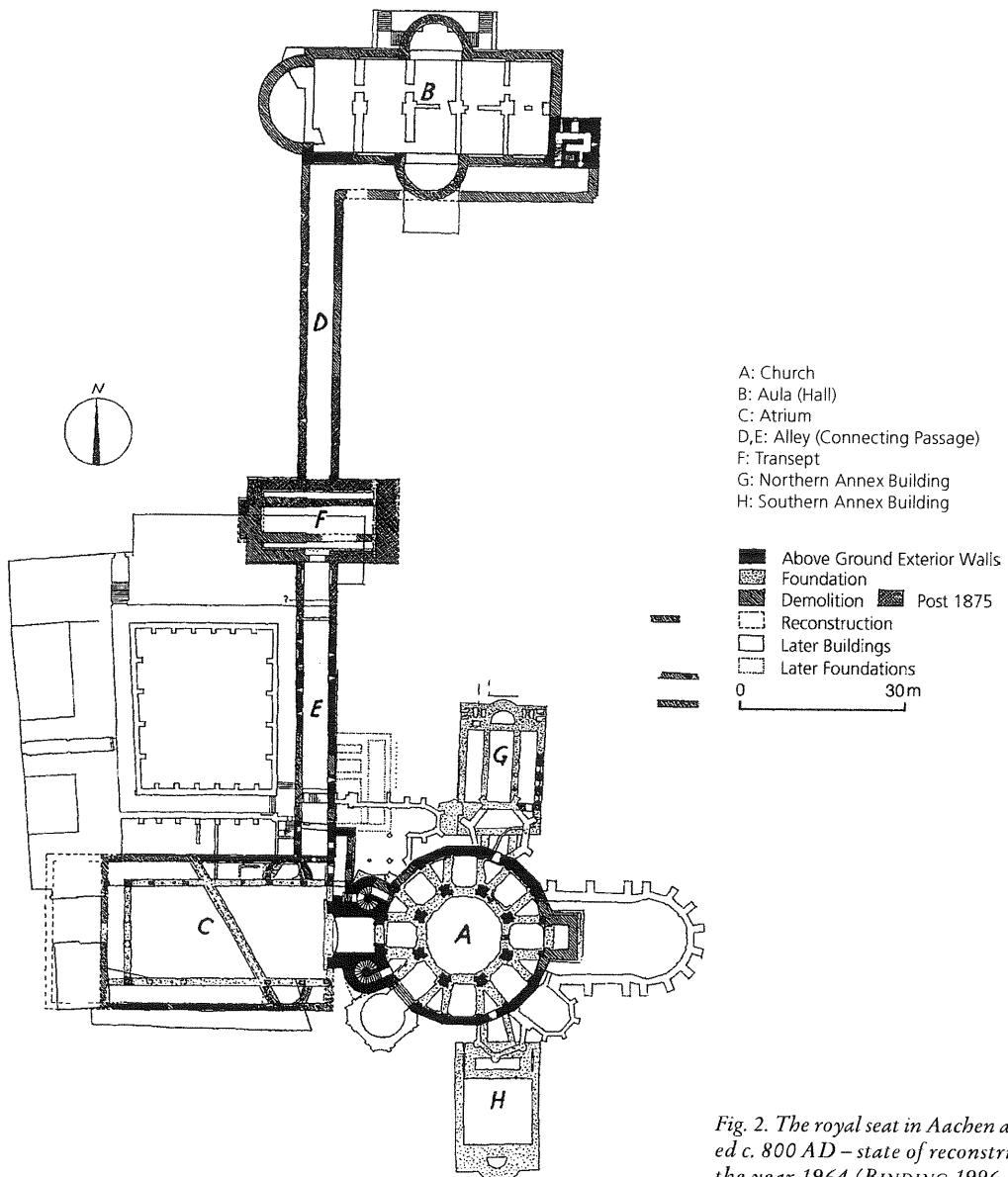


Fig. 2. The royal seat in Aachen as it existed c. 800 AD – state of reconstruction in the year 1964 (BINDING 1996, fig. 3).

799 and is therefore named *De Karolo rege et Leone papa*, a Latin title which is, however, not found in the only surviving manuscript of the poem. In it, not only are the building activities of Charlemagne as a ruler praised, but there is also a description of hunting in the deer park at Aachen, where the hunt took a whole day and the entire royal family and the royal court participated<sup>5</sup>. That there was a deer park at Aachen and that it was used by Carolingian kings for hunting is described in two more contemporary poems. According to one of them, the deer park with game birds and deer was located “close to the royal hall”, whereas the other states that one could see the park from the Church

<sup>5</sup> Cf. from a historical aspect LINDNER 1940, 392–395; the preceding text is closely paraphrased by RÖSENER 2000, 15–17; in addition HAUCK 1963, for Aachen 39–42, 46 and 54–55, for the poem 53; FENSKE 1997, 57–58; MEIER 1997, 284–285 and 294–295; SCHWEDLER 2005; at a glance GIESE 2011.

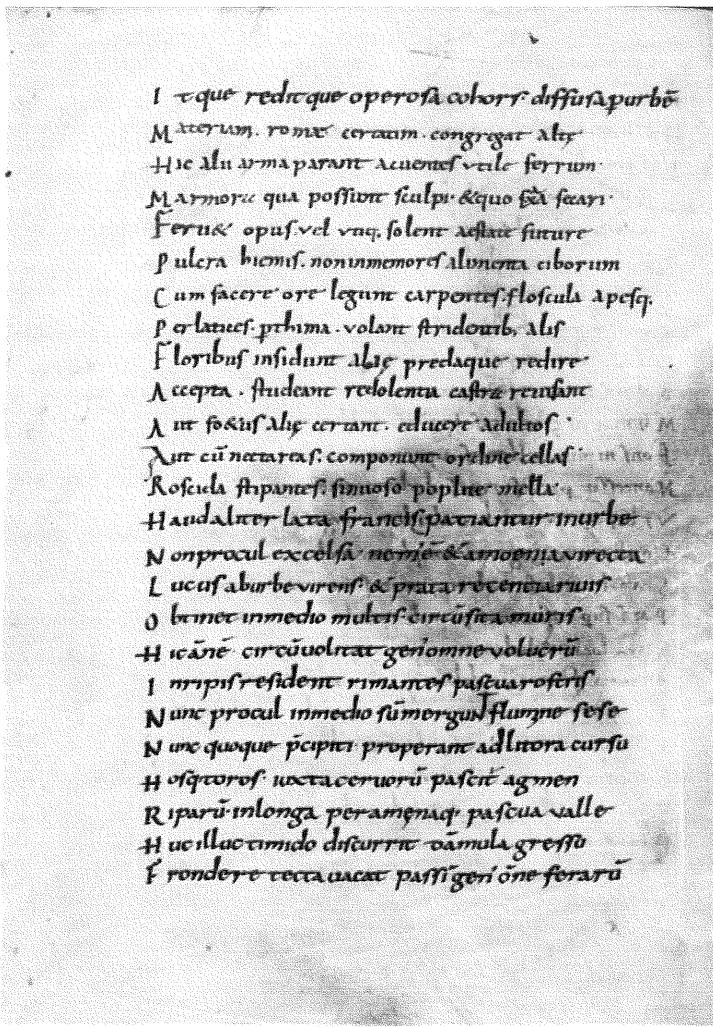


Fig. 3. De Karolo rege et Leone papa. Zürich, Zentralbibl., Ms. C 78, fol. 106v (9<sup>th</sup> c.); l. 15–17: Description of the deer park at Aachen: “Not far away from the high city is a forest with delightful glades, green flood-plains, and fresh grass meadows, with a stream running through it ...”.

of Our Lady (ERMOLDUS NIGELLUS, l. III, v. 1836, p. 140; HERREN 1991, v. 116–127, p. 126, the transl. p. 135). It can be concluded from a document of Henry II's from 1018 that the park lay south-east of the *palatium* (D H. II. 392, URKUNDEN HEINRICHS II., p. 504–505; cf. on localisation: FALKENSTEIN 2002, 161). In all three poems, the park is characterized as an idyllic natural setting, with a river flowing through it and surrounded by walls. The regulations about the royal estates of Charlemagne, the so-called *Capitulare de villis*, relate to the control over and the maintenance of deer parks, called *brogilos* (“Brühl”) by the common people, at some royal seats (*luci nostri, quos vulgus brogilos vocat*)<sup>6</sup>. Such parks were meant to belong to the usual appointments of a royal seat. There is no doubt that an interest in hunting went hand in hand with economic considerations. An exotic element can be seen in the case of the elephant that came to Aachen as a diplomatic gift in 802 after a long trip from Baghdad

<sup>6</sup> CAPITULARE DE VILLIS, c. 46, p. 60 l. 26–28 *Ut lucos nostros, quos vulgus brogilos vocat, bene custodire faciant et ad tempus semper emendent et nullatenus exspectent, ut necesse sit a novo reaedificare.* Cf. on the whole CAMPBELL 2010. – For the term cf. the lemma ‘*brogilos*’, which was not registered as used in classical antiquity, in the MITTELLATEINISCHES WÖRTERBUCH 1, col. 1583. For ‘*lucus*’ and ‘*brogilos*’ in the sovereign documents cf. briefly JEITLER 2008, 17, without retrospective dependence on research. See UDOLPH in this vol.

and, remarkably, survived until 810 in the inhospitable climate of the Frankish Empire<sup>7</sup>. The elephant points towards the later manorial menageries at residences, which are often, in their appearance and terminology, difficult to separate from deer parks for domestic animals (cf. fundamentally HAUCK 1963; with further lit. by GIESE 2008; PASTOUREAU 2008).

## BODFELD

Bodfeld (close to Quedlinburg, Sachsen-Anhalt) is situated in the Harz Mountains and therefore, for the Ottonian kingdom, in a central region, which is termed sacred country because of its close network of religious communities (cf. SCHULZE 2001). As a wooded mid-mountain region and because of mining (silver and iron ore), as well as iron smelting, the Harz Mountains possessed great economic relevance (cf. for examples KLAPPAUF 2008)<sup>8</sup>. Bodfeld has been known as an abode of the royal court since King Henry I (919–936)<sup>9</sup>. The central importance of this royal site was hunting-related inasmuch as it served as a starting point for hunting, and therefore Bodfeld is called a “Jagdpfalz” (“royal hunting seat”) in the scientific research. In historiography, Bodfeld occurs twice in connection with royal hunting. In 936, Henry I died after he had been hunting there in the usual manner (*solito more*) in the autumn of the year before<sup>10</sup>. In 1056, King Henry III died at Bodfeld, after having hunted there for a while<sup>11</sup>. A charter of 936 from King Otto I (936–973), the son of Henry I, which relates to the convent in Quedlinburg, states that animals were also hunted in the absence of the king, since a tenth of the hunting bag was donated (*decima pars ex omni venatione*) (D O. I. 1, URKUNDEN KONRAD I., p. 89–90, esp. 89 l. 44–45). This presupposes the presence of hunting personnel on location. King Henry II (1002–1024) donated the manor (*curtis*) of the royal seat in Bodfeld with its income from property plus the forestry and shooting rights to the convent in Gandersheim, but the donation did not relate to the royal hunting seat as such<sup>12</sup>. Bodfeld was used as a royal hunting seat until the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Altogether 17 sojourns between 944 and 1068 are documented<sup>13</sup>. Even though there are no further immediate sources about royal hunting at Bodfeld, except for those just mentioned, it is striking that the kings preferred to use Bodfeld in the autumn. This is an indication of hunting in a particular season and, as a result, allows conclusions about the types of game primarily hunted, since in the Carolingian

7 Cf. nowadays HACK 2011. In addition, one can refer to a contemporary illustration which presumably took Charlemagne's elephant called “Abul Abaz” as its model in a manuscript dating from the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> cent.: Paris, Bibl. Nat., ms lat. 2195, fol. 9v.

8 For the legendary association between royal hunting activity in the Harz Mountains and mining there cf. GIESE 2009, 547–548.

9 The exact location of the hunting seat at Bodfeld remains disputed to this day. Cf. for more on this WILLE 2010. – On Pfalz Bodfeld cf. ERDMANN 1940.

10 REGESTA IMPERII II, 1, n. 51a. The key source for the hunting context is the VITA MATHILDIS ANTIQUOR, c. 4, p. 120 l. 14–p. 121 l. 2 *His ergo sermonibus ita dispositis rex solito more venandi Borfelden adiit ibique gravi pestis occupatus est vexatione*; subsequently embellished by the VITA MATHILDIS POSTERIOR, c. 7, p. 158 l. 14–20.

11 LAMPERT VON HERSFELD, ad a. 1056, p. 69 *Inde [sc. from Goslar, where Henry III had spent the 8<sup>th</sup> September with Pope Victor II] profectus Botfelden, cum ibi aliquamdiu venationi deditus moraretur [...]. Nec multo post ipse corporis molestia correptus, cum VII aut eo amplius diebus lecto decubasset, diem clausit extreum*. Cf. from a historical perspective of hunting BEGIEBING 1905, 35 and 87 (repeated almost word for word by RÖSENER 2004, 105–106); LINDNER 1940, 404, both maintain, without any supporting primary source, that the ruler had become ill “da er sich auf der Jagd erhitzt und zu viel gebratene Hirschleber gegessen hatte” (“because he had become hot while hunting and had eaten too much fried deer liver”). – About the presence of the Pope in Bodfeld cf. REGESTA IMPERII III, 5, n. 1263–1267.

12 D H. II. 205, URKUNDEN HEINRICHS II., 240–241, from 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 1009. Cf. GOETTING 1973, 265–266; not mentioned in DASLER 2001.

13 Cf. the list in ERDMANN 1940, 81, of the 17 sojourns, there are “zwölf in der Zeit von Ende August bis Anfang Oktober, die wir als die Hauptjagdzeit anzusprechen haben” (“twelve in the period from the end of August to the beginning of October, which we have to describe as the main hunting season”).

era autumn was traditionally the season for deer hunting<sup>14</sup>. Since Bodfeld was merely a royal hunting seat and no important assemblies or important ecclesiastical celebrations were held, one cannot presume the presence of stone buildings or a church. In the written sources, there are no references to the buildings or the royal seat as such. The number of persons of the royal court who were at the location temporarily is difficult to tell, due to the absence of written sources. The gathering of “innumerable worldly and ecclesiastical dignitaries” (*innumerabiles tam laici quam aecclesiastici ordinis dignitates*) when King Henry III felt that death was near is hardly representative, and no number of persons is given (LAMPERT VON HERSFELD, ad a. 1056, p. 69).

#### KAIERSLAUTERN

The information about the royal castle in Lautern (today Kaiserslautern, Rheinland-Pfalz) is far more detailed but is lesser in quantity, owing to the description of King Frederick Barbarossa (d. 1190) recorded by his biographer Rahewin of Freising in 1160 at the latest: “At Kaiserslautern he [sc. Barbarossa] built a royal palace of red stone on a lavish scale. For on the one side he surrounded it with a strong wall. The other side was washed by a fish pond, similar to a lake, supporting all kinds of fish and game birds, to feast the eye as well as the taste. It also has adjacent to it a park (*ortus = hortus*) that affords pasture to a large herd of deer and roe deer. The royal splendour of all these things and their abundance (which precludes enumeration) are well worth the spectators’ effort.”<sup>15</sup> According to this revealing description, which owes much to the literary topos of *locus amoenus* (i.e. lovely idyllic scenery), the neatly constructed royal seat consisted of at least one stone building, and there was a fish pond and a park with deer surrounded by walls. The animals were a food source and they also seemed to have served for entertainment purposes, but, notably, there is no reference to hunting. The representational importance of the entire site, which was not least meant to impress visitors, is emphasized and considered the visible mirror image of the emperor’s dignity. The aim of the biographer’s writing was to praise Barbarossa and the quoted passage was written for the same purpose. In medieval times, royal seats often served to represent the majesty of the king through a display of material wealth (architecture, deer parks, the keeping of exotic animals etc.) and by ritual acts (hunting) (cf. HAUCK 1963, *passim*; for examples EHLERS 2009).

The three examples presented date from different periods. They emphasize how variable and altogether narrow the basis of our knowledge is when it comes to statements in written sources. A feature common to all three seats is that they document the great importance of hunting for the East Frankish-German kings of the Early and High Middle Ages: Bodfeld was situated in a hunting area and was chosen as a hunting seat because of this merit. In Aachen and Kaiserslautern, game parks were deliberately placed right next to the royal seats. Grounds comparable to those constructed by

14 The strict (legal) differentiation between hunting season and close season in the modern sense was foreign to the Early and High Middle Ages. Contemporary sources only very rarely take the seasonality of the practice of hunting as a theme. Cf. the first references about this in LINDNER 1940, esp. 420–424; unproductive for the Middle Ages: STAHL 1967, 9–25.  
– Thegan, the contemporary biographer of Emperor Louis the Pious (d. 840), is more precise about the period of hunting activity: in the month of August, when the deer are at their fittest, he (sc. the king) goes hunting, to be precise until the wild boar hunting season arrives. THEGANUS, c. 19, p. 204 l. 8–10 *In mense autem augusto, quando cervi pinguisissimi sunt, venatione vacabat, usquedum aprorum tempus advenerat.* – A 10<sup>th</sup>-cent. forgery of a document, allegedly issued by Arnulf of Carinthia (D Arn. 184, allegedly from 20<sup>th</sup> November 885) defines the season for hunting wild boar and bears as the period from three weeks before the autumnal equinox to the Feast of St Martin (11 November). URKUNDEN DER DEUTSCHEN KAROLINGER 3, 281–286, here p. 285 l. 21–23.

15 OTTONIS ET RAHEWINI, I. IV, c. 86, p. 345 l. 1–11. Transl. is taken from OTTO OF FREISING, I. IV, c. 86, p. 333. Cf. HAUCK 1963, 59–60; RÖSENER 1997, 136–137; KRIEG 2003, 173; GIESE 2008, 133, n. 53 and p. 146; GÖRICH 2011, 154–155. – On the rulers’ sojourns in Kaiserslautern in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> cent. cf. THON 2002.

Barbarossa in Kaiserslautern are laid out, for example, in Vincennes near Paris, and near Palermo in Sicily<sup>16</sup>. The prestigious equipping of royal seats with deer parks was, in this respect, no geographically isolated phenomenon, rather a transnational feature (brought out by HAUCK 1963; cf. Å. AHRLAND in this vol.). In a European perspective, these royal seats refer to how hunting was exploited to serve the prestige and practice of rule and thereby proved what immense status hunting must have had for medieval rulers beyond its relevance for securing subsistence. This result tallies with the discovery gained all in all with the help of historical as well as literary sources that hunting was an integral facet of the ideal ruler and of the monarchial self-image as well during medieval times<sup>17</sup>. In an age in which physical integrity was an essential condition for political leadership, which at the same time always meant military leadership, hunting was the best training for war and served the best preparation for the duties of the king (cf. S. OEHRL on bear hunting in this vol.). Therefore hunting was a pastime of highly symbolic meaning and was regarded as a cipher for the ability to rule the realm with all the necessary power. Another important point concerns royal hunting as a social collective activity with a strong hierarchy, able to form elite groups, increase social integration and balance social rivalry, while at the same time excluding other groups of the society like peasants, clerics etc. (cf. nowadays GIESE 2011). So hunting together was at national level participation in domination and on international stage an element of diplomacy.

While no contemporary illustrations of the architecture of Aachen, Bodfeld und Kaiserslautern are preserved, in the so-called CODEX FALKENSTEINENSIS<sup>18</sup> we find an illustration of a castle in Bavaria with a fish pond similar to the one described by Rahewin of Freising. This manuscript was written in the reign of Frederick Barbarossa. It records the properties, incomes and manorial rights of the counts of Falkenstein (near Flintsbach at the Inn, Bavaria) and is the oldest extant survey of a secular German lordship. In addition, this document hints that a connection between places of power and hunting also became established below monarch level<sup>19</sup>.

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16 Cf. for Vincennes: HAUCK 1963, 60; SCHRÖDER 2004, esp. 143–173. – For Sicily: cf. HAUCK 1963, 62; independent of Hauck BOCCASSINI 2003, 122–146.

17 Cf. nowadays HACK 2009, esp. 147–152; detailed in future: GIESE in prep.

18 The manuscript (München, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, KL Weyarn 1, fol. 11r [Herrenchiemsee, 1166]) and this edition are retrievable as digital copies from <http://www.bayerische-landesbibliothek-online.de/codexfalkensteinensis> [viewed 2.11.2011]. Cf. SPIESS 2007; BERTELSMEIER-KIERST 2008, 25–31 and 182.

19 The castle inventory in the Codex Falkensteinensis also lists spears for bear hunting. Cf. RÖSENER 1997, 135; WOLTER-VON DEM KNSEBECK 1997, 516–517.

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Priv.-Doz. Dr. Martina Giese  
 Gastprofessorin an der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen  
 Philosophische Fakultät, Fachbereich Geschichtswissenschaft  
 Institut für Geschichtliche Landeskunde und Historische Hilfswissenschaften  
 Wilhelmstr. 36  
 D 72074 Tübingen  
 martina.giese@uni-tuebingen.de