

The Saxon War by Bruno of Merseburg

This partisan, and indeed polemical, history of the conflict between Henry IV of Germany and the Saxon rebels is a strictly contemporary work, believed to have been written in or about the year 1082. It was, therefore, produced not long after the last event mentioned therein, the coronation of Hermann of Salm as (anti)-king, which took place at Goslar, in Saxony, on 26th December 1081. Bruno sought to justify the rebellion of the Saxons and the election of the first anti-king, Rudolf, and to show how by his oppressive government King Henry had forfeited any right to rule, both for himself and his dynasty. Bruno also devoted considerable attention to Henry's dispute with Gregory VII, ten of whose letters he reproduced in his history. But while supporting the pope against the king, he made clear, both in his own words and through letters which he copied, that the German rebels were deeply disappointed by Gregory's absolution of Henry at Canossa in December 1076, and his attempt to remain neutral after the more intransigent rebels had elected a rival king at Forcheim in March 1077. Bruno was at pains to stress that this election was conducted with the full knowledge and involvement of a papal legate, and indeed followed the standards of probity laid down by canon law. Hence there could be no doubt about its validity.¹

The author seems to have been a cleric of Archbishop Werner of Magdeburg, and after the latter's death at the battle of Melrichstadt in August 1078 he entered the household of Bishop Werner of Merseburg. He was probably the Bruno who appears as chancellor (that is as the head of the writing office) in the two surviving charters of the anti-king Hermann. Later on, in 1100, we find two different individuals called Bruno in the cathedral chapter at Magdeburg, one as provost and the other as the scholasticus (head of the cathedral school); one or other of these could well have been our author.

The three extracts below have been translated from Brunos Buch vom Sachsenkrieg, ed. H-E. Lohmann (Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Leipzig 1937), pp. 82-6, 96-9, 114-118; chapters 88-91, 107-8, and 121-5.

Translation (c) G.A. Loud (2011).

¹ For Bruno's polemical intentions, and for the political thought expressed in these passages, see I.S. Robinson, 'Pope Gregory VII, the princes and the pactum 1077-1080', *English Historical Review* xciv (1979), 721-56, especially pp. 723-37.

(a) [*The meetings at Oppenheim and Canossa and the election of the anti-king Rudolf*]

The Saxons, therefore, collected no small army, and marched to the Rhine, [arriving] near the village of Oppenheim, where the patriarch, along with the Bishop of Passau, the legate of the Roman pontiff, was staying.² There too was no small host of Swabians, who were all awaiting the arrival of the Saxon army. Although they had already given pledges to each other through envoys, as the Saxons approached the patriarch and the other leaders went to meet them, and advised those present now to confirm the friendship which they had renewed at a distance, since the swords of all of them were still dripping with blood from the recent battle, and to prevent trouble stirred up by common persons destroy the treaty that had been concluded, something which easily happens among armed men. On one side was Duke Otto, whose position had been violently taken from him, and on the other there was Duke Welf, who had been unjustly raised to that same honour.³ They gave each other kisses of peace on condition that once a new king was elected, for it was to this end that they had gathered from each side, and whichever of them should rightfully hold this honour, the other would freely and without envy concede it to him. Similarly the knights on each side, men of the second or third rank, gave kisses of peace to whoever had done them injury, not without shedding many a tear. Then, once everybody had made friends and allies from their [former] enemies, they pitched camp so near to each other that the people on each side had no difficulty hearing what was said by the other. They had already begun to hold discussions as to the appointment of a king, the Saxons wishing to elect someone from among the Swabians, and the Swabians from among the Saxons, and so Henry, who was staying in the city of Mainz on the other bank of the Rhine, abandoned all hope of keeping the crown. However, he sent envoys who did their best to persuade them to be merciful, and to deign to accept suitable restitution for his wrongdoing. But our people refused to pay any heed to his envoys unless he was first absolved from anathema by the papal legate. At last, to cut a long story short, they promised that they would accept his humble penitence, provided that he agreed to fulfil all the conditions that our people imposed upon him.

² Sigehard, Patriarch of Aquileia (d. 1077), Altmann, Bishop of Passau 1065-91.

³ Henry IV had deposed Otto of Northeim as Duke of Bavaria in 1070, and appointed the Swabian nobleman Welf (IV) in his place.

Once he had promised this, their first demand to him was that he restore to power the bishop of Worms, who had been driven from his city a long time earlier.⁴ Then, he was to have a letter written in which he should declare that he had unjustly attacked the Saxons, to the foot of which he should have his seal applied in the presence of our men, and which after it was sealed he should give to us that copies be sent by our envoys throughout Italy and the land of Germany to our people, while he himself should go to Rome where he would have the bond of anathema lifted through making appropriate satisfaction. As a result the bishop was brought back into the city with great honour. The letters were sealed in the presence of our men with the royal *bull*, and were sent by our messengers to the cities of Italy and of the German kingdom. The king himself prepared with the utmost haste to have the bond of anathema lifted through the forgiveness of the Roman pontiff. Every one of our men swore on oath that if Henry IV, son of the Emperor Henry, had not been absolved from the ban by the pope by the beginning of the month of February, he would no longer be their king, nor be referred to as king whatever the circumstances. The patriarch was the first to take this oath, which he had recorded in writing and put in his purse; however he observed it better in writing than in deed, and because of this he suffered a cruel punishment, as has been said a little earlier.⁵ Then the bishop of Passau, the legate of the Roman see, did the same, and after him all those who were present, bishops, dukes, counts and all the others greater and lesser, but the bishops took the lead in this since they also recorded the oath in writing. They then sent an envoy to request the pope to come to Augsburg at the beginning of February, so that the case might diligently be examined in front of all, and either he would absolve the king, or he would be bound more tightly than before and they would find another who, with the pope's agreement, would be able to rule. After all this had been done here, the two armies bid farewell to each other with great goodwill, and each of them returned home, rejoicing and singing praises to God.

⁴ Bishop Adalbert of Worms (1070-1107) had been driven out by the citizens in 1074.

⁵ Bruno had previously, in a passage placed out of chronological sequence, suggested that his sudden death (in 1077) was a punishment for continuing to associate with the excommunicated king, *Saxonicum Bellum*, c. 75, p. 77.

As he had been requested, the pope set off for Augsburg, intending to arrive there at the beginning of February, in the year of the Lord 1077, as the princes wanted, and our people were anxious to arrive there to welcome the lord pope with proper veneration. But behold, it was announced to the pope that Henry was marching on Italy with a great army, and that his intention was, once he had crossed the Alps as he desired, to install another pope in his place. So the pope sent a legate to hasten to meet our people, while he himself, sad and indeed very fearful, turned back, so that he might protect Italy from the ravages of sword and fire.

Henry wandered through Italy from place to place, but his problem was more that he was unsure of what to do, since he was afraid that whatever he did he would lose his kingship. For he knew that unless he came in submission to the pope and was freed by him from excommunication he would undoubtedly not be welcome in his kingdom; but, if he did come humbly to make satisfaction, he was afraid that the pope would take the kingship from him because of the extent of his crimes, or that the punishment for his own disobedience would be increased by the pope. Hence he was pushed in different directions by his many problems. However, although he had no doubt that he was, or would be, in some way the loser, he finally chose the policy in which he thought there was some hope, and came to the pope clad in woollens⁶ and with bare feet, claiming that he preferred the kingdom of Heaven to an earthly one, and that he would thus humbly receive whatever penance the pope wished to impose upon him. The Apostolic pontiff rejoiced over the great humility shown by such a great man. He ordered him not to wear the royal regalia until he himself gave his permission, because the contrition of his heart would be more acceptable to Almighty God if he gave public proof of this through the meanness of his apparel. He also instructed him to avoid the company of and speech with those men who had been excommunicated, so that after being cleansed through the grace of God by his conversion, he did not through infection from others become even more impure than he had been before. For although when he had promised to do this he had been sent forth legally absolved, he was warned over and over again not to lie to God, for if he did not fulfil his promises, he would not only be bound by the former sentence, but

⁶ i.e. as opposed to silk or other more valuable and less coarse textiles.

another even stricter punishment would be laid upon him. Thus he returned to his own people.

But when he began to exclude these men from his company, they started to make a great fuss, telling him that if he now drove away those by whose wisdom and courage he had up to now held his kingdom, the pope would be able neither to restore it to him nor to obtain another for him. These words and others like them led him to change his mind, and he wickedly returned through their evil counsel to his customary ways. He placed upon his head the diadem of gold and kept in his heart the anathema, stronger than iron. He mixed in communion with the excommunicate, and this wretched man was thrust out from communion with the saints. He now made it clear to all that what he said, that he preferred the kingdom of Heaven to earthly things, was untrue. Had he remained obedient for [even] a little while, he would have held his earthly kingdom in peace, and at some future time would have come into possession of the heavenly and eternal one. But now, for his disobedience, he would not have the one that he loved without great toil, and would never receive the other without a complete change in his way of life.

Meanwhile the Saxons and Swabians gathered at Forcheim, and envoys were [also] present from the other provinces, who made known that they were in favour of whatever should be decided there in a proper manner about the commonweal. A legate of the Apostolic See was also present, who confirmed through the high authority of the pope everything that our people should rightfully decide with regard to the kingdom.⁷ From the many who were suggested as being worthy through their honesty for election, finally the Saxons and Swabians both agreed to elect as their king Duke Rudolf of the Swabians. But while some argued that he be confirmed as king, others wished to place some conditions on this, namely that they promote him as king only through a law by which he promise to remedy their own particular injuries. Indeed Duke Otto did not at first wish to make Rudolf king unless he promise to restore to him [Otto] the position that had been unjustly taken away from him.⁸ Many other people similarly raised their own cases, which they wanted him to promise

⁷ Other sources reveal that there were actually two legates present, a Cardinal Deacon, Bernard, and Abbot Bernard of St. Victor, Marseilles.

⁸ This was the Duchy of Bavaria, which Henry IV had confiscated when he had had Otto of Nordheim arrested in 1071, although the bulk of Otto's lands were actually in Saxony.

would receive correction. On hearing this, the papal legate forbade such action, explaining that he was not to be a king for particular individuals, but for all the people, and thus he suggested that it would be sufficient if he promised to render justice to everyone. He also said that should he be elected in the way in which they had started out, through making pledges to particular individuals, this election would not be lawful (*sincera*), but would appear to have been polluted by the poison of the simoniac heresy. However, an exception should be made for certain special issues, for he ought to correct certain abuses which were rampant, namely that bishoprics ought not to be given out in return for either money or favour – rather he should allow to every church free election, as was laid down in canon law. It was also agreed here by common consent, and confirmed by the authority of the Roman pontiff, that nobody should be granted royal power by hereditary right, and the son of a king, even if he was most worthy, should become king by a free election and not by line of succession. If indeed the son of a king was unworthy, and the people were unwilling to accept him, then the people had the power to make king whomever they wished. Once all these provisions had been legally enacted, they brought Rudolf, the king-elect, with great ceremony to Mainz. There they solemnly and manfully supported him until he received his royal coronation, which was speedily accomplished, for he was crowned by Siegfried, Archbishop of the city of Mainz, in the presence and with the acclamation of many others, on 26th March in the year of our Lord 1077.

[b] *[The German rebels reproach Gregory VII for not supporting the anti-king Rudolf. The letters to which they refer, which Bruno reproduced in full, were those sent by Gregory in the summer of 1077 to his legates, and to the clergy and people of Germany, setting out the terms by which a judgement might be made between the respective claims of Henry and Rudolf to be the rightful king.]*⁹

Cardinal Bernard received this letter, and obeyed what had been enjoined upon him. But when our men received these letters, they cast away the great hope they had placed in the pope, their rock, for they had [previously] believed that Heaven was more likely to stand still, or the earth to move around Heaven, than that the see of Peter would abandon the constancy of Peter. They sent this letter to the pope, seeking

⁹ Gregory, *Reg.* IV.23-4; H.E.J. Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII 1073-1085. An English Translation* (Oxford 2002), pp. 236-8.

by it to recall him, who had been struck by fear of that slave, namely of this present life, as though by a cockcrow, to the strength of his former constancy and to encourage him through the example of Christ.¹⁰

‘Those faithful to St. Peter to the apostolic and venerable pope, the lord Gregory, who the more they are in his service are the more greatly oppressed. We have already placed many complaints before the Holy See about our various troubles. That we have not yet received any justice or consolation, we ascribe not however to your holiness, but rather to our own sins. If we had entered into this matter, as a result of which we have suffered such evil consequences, through our own wish and decision, or if your majesty had been slow to support us, then we should suffer these evils with better grace. Now, however, it is necessary that this burden, which we undertook only when ordered by your authority, should be made lighter by that same hand supporting us. Your excellency is a witness, and we have as evidence your own letters, that it was not by our counsel nor indeed for our cause, but for injuries inflicted on the Apostolic See that you deprived our king of the royal dignity and that you forbade us all, under dire threat, to serve him as king. You absolved all Christians from the obligation of the oaths that they had made, or would make, to him, and then you bound him with the chain of anathema. In all these matters we have obeyed your paternity, at great risk to ourselves, as is now clear. For since we were unwilling to agree with the others to your deposition by one who had been deposed, he behaved with great cruelty against us. As a result many of our people who entered heart and soul into this struggle have lost all their property, their sons have been disinherited, and having been rich men they have been left poor. Those that are left are every day in fear of their lives, for they have lost almost all means of subsistence. But while no persecution can overcome us, the man who is overcome is he who, albeit unwillingly, put himself forth for you,¹¹ and the one who is granted the honour is he who dishonoured it with his crimes.

¹⁰ This is clearly a reference to *Matthew*, 26: 74-5, where St. Peter denied knowing Christ when challenged by the high priests’ servants, and (as Christ had earlier prophesied) was reminded of his fault by the crowing of a cock, ‘and he went out and wept bitterly’. The letter that follows has been dated to April 1078, and its authorship attributed to Archbishop Gebhard of Salzburg.

¹¹ This is not meant to suggest that Rudolf was an unwilling supporter of the pope; rather that he did not seek the kingship and was properly reluctant to accept it through lack of worldly ambition.

For this work we have received this reward: that the man who was forced, at peril to our souls, to humble himself at your feet, is absolved without penalty and receives liberty to harm us, while we are not consulted. While you have notified us in your letter of his absolution from anathema, we are of the opinion that nothing is changed with regard to the [judicial] sentence about the kingdom that was imposed upon him. For we are really cannot understand how he can be freed from his oaths by that absolution. Indeed, without the keeping of oaths, the institution of royal dignity can never be maintained. Since we have thus already been without a ruler for more than a year, another has been chosen through election as our prince, in the place of that guilty man. Through our election of this king, and not through having more than one king, a great hope has grown up of the reformation of the realm. But then your letter arrived unexpectedly, talking about two kings in one kingdom, and mentioning a legation to the two of them! A division of the people and an encouragement of schism have followed this multiplication of the royal name and in some way a division of the kingdom; for they perceive how that double-dealing person is always given priority in your letters, and by throwing this case open to discussion you are permitting him to exercise authority in this country, as though he were [still] in power. The manner of this discussion, if we may speak without prejudice to your grace, is remarkable to our eyes, in that a man who has already been unconditionally deposed by synodical judgement, with another person confirmed in that same dignity by apostolic authority, is now to be heard [again],¹² and a matter which was finished has been started once again, and a question raised about what was not in doubt. This makes us extremely unhappy, because, so it seems to us, as we remain firm in the undertaking that was begun, so now hope is given, both in word and deed, to the other side. For the courtiers of the aforesaid Henry, who were considered infamous by the whole kingdom and who as royal servants were manifestly disobedient to synodical instructions, and who together with their leader were separated from the holy Church by the Apostolic legate, were kindly received when they came to this See, and not only returned unpunished but were in addition crowned with glory and honour, and proudly returning to their former disobedience, mock our wretchedness. We are considered quite ridiculous and foolish in that we abstain from the company of men who have so charitably been received back into communion by our leader. Added to

¹² Literally, 'is to be placed to reason'.

this, and the greatest of our misfortunes, is that as well as those matters in which we are at fault, we are also blamed for the sin of our enemies, for the fact that we do not send frequent and suitable envoys is attributed to our negligence. However, a clearer view shows that they have prevented this from happening, although they swore on oath to you that they would not hinder [such embassies]. But now nothing is said about the violent interdiction of a holy journey, or about their manifest perjury, and it is deemed to be our fault that we do not send envoys. We know, most dear lord, and we hope out of consideration of your piety, that you are doing all this with good intention and for some hidden reason, but we are ignorant men and unable to fathom this secret plan. We shall tell you what we have clearly seen and heard to have arisen, and every day [continues] to arise, as a consequence of this encouragement of both sides and the uncertain delay of matters that are certain: these are wars which are intestinal rather than civil,¹³ uncountable killings, devastation, arson which makes no differentiation between houses and churches, unheard of oppression of the poor, the plunder of ecclesiastical property (the like of which we have never heard about or seen), the collapse of law – both divine and secular – without hope of repair. Finally, in this conflict between the two kings, both of whom you are encouraging in their hopes of obtaining the throne, there has been such a squandering of the *regalia* that in future the kings of our land will have to sustain themselves rather from theft than from their royal property. These unfortunate results would now be as nothing, or no more than a minor inconvenience, if at the beginning of the way your decision had ‘turned not aside to the right hand or to the left’.¹⁴ You are on a hard road, because ‘the zeal of thine house hath eaten [me] up’;¹⁵ and where travelling is difficult it is shameful to turn back. Do not, most holy father, wander from the path, lest by delaying further and giving way to both sides you allow these great evils to grow and be multiplied. If it is hard for you to pronounce in favour of those who have placed their lives in great peril for your sake, hasten however to help the Church which has in your time been so wretchedly damaged and reduced to slavery by unparalleled oppression. If it does not seem wise openly to resist those who openly attack it, because of the dangers of the present time, you should at least beware not by your actions allow matters to be made worse.

¹³ Here quoting the beginning of Lucan’s account of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.

¹⁴ *Deuteronomy*, 17: 20.

¹⁵ *John*, 2: 17.

If what was decreed in a Roman synod and afterwards confirmed by a legate of the Apostolic See must [now] be passed over in silence and held of no account, we are completely at a loss as to what thereafter we can trust or consider permanent. We say this to your holiness not in a spirit of arrogance but through the bitterness of our soul, since nobody can be as sad as we are. For when through obedience to the shepherd we are laid open to the jaws of wolves, if indeed we must fear the shepherd, we are the most wretched of men. May Almighty God rouse in you such zeal against the enemies of Christ that the hope that we have placed in you be not disappointed!’

They received no response to this letter and to their wishes, and so they sent another letter to him, so that since like Peter (according to Mark) he had not been roused by the first cockcrow, the people of the Church might at least give voice for a second time, like the cock, and rouse him, like Peter, from the torpor of doubt to the constancy of Peter.¹⁶

[c] [*The Battle on the Elster and the death of King Rudolf in October 1080*]

In October of this same year Henry, never ceasing his military efforts, raised another army to invade the kingdom of Saxony. The Saxons meanwhile marched out with a great number of men and made camp at a place called Künkul, so that they could with the help of God protect their frontiers from invasion by the enemy. Henry sent out scouts and realised how powerful our force was. He did not dare to challenge it in open battle, and so he turned to evil deception, and through lamentable cunning split our army into two parts. Doubting his own strength, he would not dare to take it on while it was united, but if it should prove necessary he would not hesitate to attack it when it was split up into different units. Hence, avoiding a pitched battle, he marched with his entire army towards Erfurt, while sending his fastest cavalry back towards Goslar, to burn some of the villages and [then] hasten back to him. Although the Saxons learned through their scouts of his march towards Erfurt, and could easily have pursued him or even forestalled him, once they saw the smoke behind them, they all hurried in that direction to keep him out of Goslar and the neighbouring part of

¹⁶ *Mark*, 14: 68-72, another account of how St. Peter denied being a follower of Christ [cf. note 6 above].

Saxony. He however continued on his way to Erfurt, and that town was plundered and set on fire. When our army realised that it had been deceived, it set out in pursuit, leaving behind a large number of infantry, and also cavalry. As our men came nearer to him, they saw that he intended to ravage to bishopric of Naumberg. They moved to stop him by hastening through the hills, and bravely saved the city from the blaze. Once he was informed of this, he marched to the River Elster, burning and destroying everything in his path, but once he saw how deep the river was, he was reluctant to make camp there. Here I have been told different stories by different people, but it has not been granted to me to know which of these is the truth. For some people say that since he had twice [already] suffered defeat in battle, he was reluctant to tempt fate by trying battle once more, instead he intended to hoodwink our men and burn a large part of that region, and thus return home as though victorious without fighting a battle, but he came up against the unexpected depth of the river, which he was unable easily to cross, and so was forced to fight a battle. However, others think that he chose this place for the battle out of deliberate and evil intent, for there his men, of whom he had no very high opinion, had either to fight bravely or, should they flee disgracefully, risk being submerged in the river. Still others believe that he took this route because he was expecting help from the Bohemians or the men of Meissen, to whom he had sent envoys; if the latter came to join him, as he hoped, then he would march in force via Merseburg and Magdeburg and across right across Saxony; he would be able to ravage the whole region and make it perpetually subject to his power.

Thus Henry pitched camp on the bank of the Elster, and at first light next morning drew up his battle lines. He did not wish to delay the encounter, since our men were exhausted by the speed of their journey and the difficulties of their route, and had abandoned many men along the way through fatigue, for hearing that the enemy were at hand they had marched without delay to defend their homeland. They realised that there were very few infantry there, for most of these had been unable to keep up, and so they ordered all those who were poorly mounted to fight as infantrymen rather than cavalry, and once they had arranged themselves, they set out to engage the enemy. The bishops instructed all the clergy who were present to sing

the eighty-second psalm with the utmost devotion.¹⁷ The armies met at the Grune marsh, and since there was no ford through it and both armies were unsure [of what to do], they stayed where they were, urging the other side to advance and shouting insults at each other, while they each remained motionless on their own bank. At last our men realised that the head of the marsh was not far away, and they marched towards it, while the other side saw this and similarly set off for the same place where the marsh ended. They arrived there safely, and both sides raised their hands and attacked each other. But as soon as Henry saw them engage each other, he realised that he was isolated, and turned in flight, although his army fought with such courage that some of our men gave way, and a false rumour spread to the enemy's camp that the Saxons had been defeated and was mendaciously proclaimed there. As the bishops who supported Henry were chanting the *Te Deum laudamus* in rejoicing, Radbod, one of the [Saxon] leaders, who had been killed, was brought back to the camp. The men carrying his body called from afar to those still in the camp: 'run away, run away'. However Duke Otto took command of a large force of infantrymen and gave those who had put our men to flight a dose of their own medicine. He put them to flight and did not cease his pursuit until he saw them rushing through their own camp and braving the danger of the river crossing. Indeed, just as many of the enemy died in the river as perished in the battle. Assuming that their victory was complete, the foot soldiers wanted to plunder the camp. But Duke Otto was a sensible soldier, and he feared that there were still some of the enemy in their rear, so he told them to stay their hand from plunder for a little while, until they were sure that no enemies had been left behind, and then they could plunder the camp in safety. Hence he marched back with the infantry, and on the site of the battle he found Henry of Laach¹⁸ and a considerable part of the [enemy] army, who were rejoicing as though they were victorious and happily and noisily singing the *Kyrie Eleyson*. When Duke Otto saw their numbers, at first he wanted to avoid them, for he believed that he did not have enough men with him to fight such a great force; but then he thought again how it is not difficult for God to conquer many with only a few, and he attacked them bravely. God filled them with fear, and he soon put them to flight. They all either drowned in the river or fled across it. 'Now', said Duke Otto, 'you can seek out their camp

¹⁷ *Psalm* 83: 1-2 (Authorised Version): 'Keep not thou silence O God ... for lo, thine enemies make a tumult, and they that hate thee have lifted up their head'.

¹⁸ Count Palatine of Lotharingia.

without danger; and you may safely take whatever you find [there]. Whatever was the enemy's today you may through your courage now call your own!' They charged into the camp while he was still speaking and rushed to seize everything that was found there. Many valuable tents were seized, many caskets belong to the bishops [filled] with sacred vestments, many gold and silver vessels suitable for every day use and many others covered with gold and silver decoration. There was also a great deal of hard cash, many top-quality horses, all sorts of arms, and changes of clothes without number which had been brought with them by the archbishops of Cologne and Trier and some thirteen other bishops, along with what Duke Frederick,¹⁹ Count Henry and the other very rich men had brought with them, as well as what they had seized as plunder in Erfurt. Our men seized all this and returned to their camp in triumph.

Those who had fled from the sword underwent so many tribulations in the river, woods and marches that nobody would believe them [to be possible] unless it happened that they were present in all these places to see them in person. For the river had such steep banks on each side that on one it was impossible to enter without jumping in, and on the other nobody could get out by chance without pulling themselves up with the help of shrubs or plants. Many of the fugitives dived into the river on the near side, and then climbed up the other bank standing on the backs of their horses and hacking into the bank with their sword, intending to drag their horses up after them, but they were so exhausted by this cutting that they abandoned their horses, threw away their armour and rushed off in panic-stricken flight. Thus while the Unstrut, where we had been defeated, worked against us, the Elster paid us back in double measure. For while there we lost a great deal of our property in our flight, here we took from the dead and those who fled both the goods of the enemy and our own things which the fleeing enemy had [earlier] plundered from us.²⁰ And indeed in this rout many strong men were killed by the peasants with axes and cudgels, and many noble and distinguished men were captured by persons of low birth,²¹ many were so racked by the most cruel pangs of hunger that they did not hesitate to exchange their horses or swords in return for pieces of bread, and if they found even the poorest of

¹⁹ Frederick of Buren, appointed Duke of Swabia by Henry IV in 1079, the ancestor of the later Staufens emperors.

²⁰ Here Bruno referred to the defeat of the Saxons five years earlier at the River Unstrut, in June 1075, which had enabled King Henry to recover control of the duchy for a time; for that battle, see Bruno, *Saxonicum Bellum*, c. 46, pp. 44-5.

²¹ *a personis vilibus*, literally 'by wretched persons'.

bread they still did not spare their property. Those captives who were brought to the honourable men in our ranks were cured if they were wounded, supplied with clothing and arms as was fitting, and [then] sent back home without ransom. It is said that Henry wanted to undertake a new invasion of Saxony with the forces he had left, with the men whom he had sent after the Bohemians and with those who came back with them. But they responded that they would prefer, if it was possible, to travel all over the world rather than cross into the land of the Saxons one more time.

Meanwhile the Saxons returned to their camp, but they found that their rejoicing was greatly diminished, since King Rudolf had received two wounds, one which mutilated him and another that was mortal. [However], he lamented the people's fate more than his own, for when he realised that his people had secured the victory he said: "Now I can rejoice while I am alive, and I die in the way God wants!" Although his right hand had been cut off and he had a serious stomach wound, extending down to his groin, he still consoled those who were lamenting his death. He promised that if he should survive for a little while, he would put off receiving medical attention so that he could display his wounds, even though he ought to have the doctors care for them. Our princes were much moved by his bravery and piety, and they all unanimously promised him that if Almighty God wished to keep him alive, and even if he lost both hands, then they would choose no other ruler for Saxony while he was alive. He was greatly cheered by their loyalty, and passed away serenely. This battle took place in the year from the Incarnation of the Lord 1080, on Thursday 15th October.

Then, in the month of December, while our princes were gathered together to confer about the condition of the kingdom, lo a messenger arrived who said that Henry had told his men to ignore their setback from this battle because, with the King of the Saxons killed, he would make the whole of Saxony subject to his authority, and he was now approaching with an army, intending to celebrate Christmas at Goslar. But our men spent three days mustering a large army and marched out to meet him, ready courageously to defend their native land. When Henry realised this, his high hopes fell away, for he had expected to be able easily to vanquish the Saxons while they lacked a leader. In consequence he changed his plan, disbanded his army and sent envoys to the Saxons, to say that since they would not wish to be without a king,

they should take his son as their ruler, and he would swear to them that he himself would never enter the land of Saxony. Duke Otto replied to this embassy with amusement, for it was his habit to conceal some serious matter with an appearance of levity: he said, 'I have often seen a bad calf sired by a bad ox; hence I have no wish for either the father or the son!'