of the last Carolingian king in Germany, Louis the Child, they crowned one of themselves. Then, as attacks by the Hungarians increased, the dukes gave the royal title to their most powerful member, the duke of Saxony, Henry I (r.919–936), who proceeded to set up fortifications and reorganize his army, crowning his efforts with a major defeat of the Hungarians in 933.

Henry’s son Otto I (r.936–973) defeated rival family members, rebellious dukes, and Slavic and Hungarian armies soon after coming to the throne. Through astute marriage alliances and appointments he was eventually able to get his family members to head up all of the duchies. In 951, Otto marched into Italy and took the Lombard crown. That gave him control, at least theoretically, of much of northern Italy (see Map 4.6). Soon (in 962) he received the imperial crown that recognized his far-flung power. Both to himself and to contemporaries he recalled the greatness of Charlemagne. Meanwhile, Otto’s victory at Lechfeld in 955 (see p. 130) ended the Hungarian threat. In the same year, Otto defeated a Slavic group, the Obodrites, just east of the Elbe River and set up fortifications and bishoprics in the no-man’s-land between the Elbe and the Oder Rivers.

Victories such as these brought tribute, plum positions to disburse, and lands to give away, ensuring Otto a following among the great men of the realm. His successors, Otto II, Otto III—hence the dynastic name “Ottonians”—and Henry II, built on his achievements. (See Genealogy 4.2: The Ottonians.) Granted power by the magnates, they gave back in turn: they distributed land and appointed their aristocratic supporters to duchies, counties,