

Praise for Frederick the Wise

To his family, friends, peers, and subjects, Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony was much more than simply Martin Luther's noble protector. Dr. Wellman's thoroughly researched and engaging biography paints a vivid image of the Saxon elector. It is sure to become a valuable resource for students of German history and the Reformation period. Interested readers will be introduced to a Christian prince whose humanity and integrity were rare for someone of his elite status within the German empire. They will also encounter political intrigue and scandalous behavior. Praiseworthy, yet not without his flaws, Frederick the Wise steps out from the pages as an exceptional and noteworthy man of his time.

—Paul M. Bacon, PhD
Adjunct Professor of Art History
Dominican University
River Forest, IL

Sam Wellman's telling of the story of the public and personal life of Luther's celebrated protector, Frederick the Wise, is a welcome addition to Reformation scholarship as we approach 2017. His careful research and well-crafted prose provide readers with insights into the risky yet resolute Christian prince who defended Luther even as he received the consolation of evangelical pastoral care from the Reformer. Aspects of the relationship between these two men often only alluded to in standard Luther biographies are developed with precision by Wellman. In this book we learn much about Frederick but a lot about Luther as well.

—John T. Pless, MDiv
Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, IN

In a biography with the character development, twists and turns, and absorbing storyline of a novel, Sam Wellman recreates the life and times of the powerful and resourceful ruler who made the Reformation

possible. Duke Frederick emerges as the adult in the room of squabbling princes and an inept emperor. A man of peace, a vigorous patron of the arts and education, and a skillful player in the byzantine mazes of late medieval politics, Frederick was also a man of moral and theological contradictions. But Frederick was a shrewd and stalwart defender of Martin Luther, who was not above criticizing his protector. This book brings the historical context of the Reformation to life.

—Gene Edward Veith, PhD
Professor of Literature
Patrick Henry College

Frederick the Wise typically plays a supporting role in histories of the Lutheran Reformation—important, but in the wings. Here he rightfully occupies center stage. Wellman’s quick-moving treatment of Frederick’s life is a delight to read and fills an important gap in English-language Reformation resources.

—Lawrence R. Rast Jr., PhD
President, Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, IN

Sam Wellman has written a thorough biography of one of the most significant princes in late medieval Germany. While many recognize Frederick’s important role in the early part of the Lutheran Reformation, Wellman’s biography reveals Frederick’s significance as an elector in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation. This work also demonstrates Frederick’s political sophistication as someone connected to the most powerful leaders of his own time. Simply put, if Luther’s Reformation had never occurred, scholars would still find Frederick’s life to be a compelling object of scholarship. However, the Lutheran Reformation did take place and Wellman’s biography explains the political and social context of that pivotal event. Frederick’s defense and support of Martin Luther in the early 1520s ensured that the Reformation did succeed as a social and political movement.

—Matthew Phillips, PhD
Associate Professor of History
Concordia University Nebraska

FREDERICK THE WISE

SEEN AND UNSEEN LIVES OF MARTIN LUTHER'S PROTECTOR

Sam Wellman



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CONTEMPORARIES RELEVANT TO FREDERICK THE WISE

WETTIN FAMILY

Frederick the Meek (*der Sanftmütige*) [1412–64], Frederick’s grandfather and Elector of Saxony (1428–64).

Ernst of Saxony [1441–86], Frederick’s father and Elector of Saxony (1464–86).

Albrecht the Courageous (*der Beherzte*) [1443–1500], Frederick’s uncle and ruling duke of Albertine Saxony; one of the imperial military leaders.

Ernst of Saxony [1464–1513], Frederick’s irritating brother and archbishop of Magdeburg.

Albrecht of Saxony [1467–84], Frederick’s brother and administrator of Mainz archbishopric.

Johann the Constant (*der Beständige*) [1468–1532], Frederick’s brother and Elector of Saxony (1525–32).

Christine of Saxony [1461–1521], Frederick’s sister and wife of King Johann I of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden; mother of King Christian II.

Margarete of Saxony [1469–1528], Frederick’s sister and wife of Prince Heinrich of Braunschweig-Lüneburg.

Johann Friedrich the Magnanimous (*der Großmütige*) [1503–54], Frederick’s nephew and ill-fated Elector of Saxony (1532–47).

George the Bearded [1471–1539], Frederick’s troublesome cousin and ruling duke of Albertine Saxony.

Wilhelm III the Brave (*der Tapfere*) of Saxony [1425–82], Frederick’s great uncle and Landgrave of Thuringia; fought Elector Frederick the Meek in the infamous “Brother War.”

Elisabeth [1443–84], Frederick’s mother; sister of Albrecht IV of Bavaria.

Margaretha [1416–86], Frederick’s paternal grandmother; sister of Emperor Frederick.

Claus Narr [c. 1435–1515], Frederick’s legendary jester.

“SECRET FAMILY”

Anna [?1480–1525+], Frederick’s “God-given wife.”

Sebastien [c. 1500–35], “Bastien”; Frederick’s first son by Anna.

Friedrich [?1502–25+], “Fritz”; Frederick’s second son by Anna.

CLERGY

Martin Luther [1483–1546], Augustinian professor of Bible in Wittenberg and religious reformer.

Johann von Staupitz [1460–1524], Augustinian general vicar and organizer of university in Wittenberg; longtime acquaintance of Frederick as well as Luther’s mentor.

Andreas Karlstadt [1486–1541], professor and volatile religious reformer.

Thomas Müntzer [c. 1488–1525], religious reformer, violently radical; local leader in *Bauernkrieg*.

Jakob Vogt [?–1522], Frederick’s longtime Franciscan father confessor.

Gabriel von Eyb [1455–1535], prince bishop of Eichstätt; one of Frederick’s “favorites.”

Friedrich IV, Margrave of Baden [1458–1517], bishop of Eutrecht; one of Frederick’s “favorites.”

Lorenz von Bibra [1459–1519], prince bishop of Würzburg; one of Frederick’s “favorites.”

IMPERIAL TERRITORIAL PRINCES

Philipp the Magnanimous (*der Großmütige*) [1504–67], Landgrave of Hesse (1518–67). His long regency was trouble for Frederick.

Ulrich, Duke of Württemberg [1487–1550]; ruthless, unpopular. In 1519 the Swabian League caused loss of his duchy for fifteen years.

Albrecht IV, Duke of Bavaria [1447–1508], Frederick’s maternal uncle. Married Kunigunde, daughter of Emperor Frederick. Shining linguist.

ELECTORAL PRINCES

Richard von Greiffenklau [1467–1531], Trier archbishop (1511–31); one of Frederick’s close and trusted acquaintances.

Berthold von Henneberg [1442–1504], Mainz archbishop (1484–1504); one of Frederick’s “favorite colleagues.” Firebrand imperial reformer.

Albrecht of Brandenburg [1490–1545], Mainz archbishop (1514–45); one of Frederick’s milder foes.

Hermann IV of Hesse [1450–1508], Cologne archbishop (1480–1508); one of Frederick’s “favorite colleagues.”

Joachim I [1484–1535], Brandenburg elector (1499–1535); a mild foe of Frederick.

Johann Cicero [1455–99], Brandenburg elector (1486–99); one of Frederick’s “favorite colleagues.”

Philipp [1448–1508], Palatine elector (1476–1508); one of Frederick’s “favorite colleagues.” Lost heavily in the Bavarian Succession War.

Johann II, Margrave of Baden [1434–1503], Trier elector (1456–1503); one of Frederick’s “favorite colleagues.”

FOREIGN SOVEREIGNS

Ferdinand of Aragon [1452–1516]. As regent for daughter Joanna, he was virtual king of united Spain (1506–16); grandfather of emperors Karl V and Ferdinand I.

Christian II [1481–1559], king of Denmark (1513–23); Frederick’s nephew.

Henry VIII [1491–1547], king of England (1509–47); in Frederick’s lifetime not yet infamous.

Matthias Corvinus [1443–90], king of Hungary (1458–90) and part of Bohemia. Dangerous foe of the empire; occupied eastern Austria (1485–90).

Vladislaus II [1456–1516], son of the Polish king Casimir IV. King of Bohemia (1471–1516); king of Hungary (1490–1516). Weak but enduring sovereign.

Charles VIII [1470–98], king of France (1483–98); reviled (and underestimated) by Maximilian.

Louis XII [1462–1515], king of France (1498–1515); aggressive, effective sovereign.

Francois I [1494–1547], king of France (1515–47); Duke of Valois.

Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy [1433–77], father of Maria, wife of Maximilian and mother of Philipp the Fair and Margarethe of Austria.

Anne, Duchess of Brittany [1477–1514], queen of France for Charles VIII (1491–98), for Louis XII (1499–1514). Proxy marriage in 1490 to Maximilian I not consummated.

René II, Duke of Lorraine [1451–1508], Frederick’s friend and fellow negotiator between Maximilian and the French court. In 1477 René defeated Charles the Bold at Nancy.

SAXON ELECTORAL OFFICIALS

George Spalatin [1484–1545], Frederick’s secretary, pastor, and confidant; Luther’s confidant as well.

Fabian von Feilitzsch [c. 1457–1520], highly regarded adviser in Frederick’s court.

Hans von der Planitz [c. 1473–1535], very competent diplomat for Frederick’s court.

Heinrich von Büнау [?1465–1507], trusted adviser, confidant, and “Renaissance man.”

Dr. Martin Mellerstadt [c. 1450–1513], Frederick’s physician and organizer of university in Wittenberg. Fair scholar and as volatile as Luther.

Degenhart von Pfeffinger [1471–1519], financial administrator, key adviser, and serious relic collector.

Gregory Brück [c. 1485–1557], chancellor beginning 1520. Jurist and key adviser in “Luther affair.”

Hans Hundt von Wenkheim [?–1509], early keeper of the privy purse and “accountant.”

Hans von Leimbach [1445–1513], main financial administrator prior to Degenhart Pfeffinger.

Dr. Alvensleve Pasca [?–1525+], Frederick’s physician and caretaker of his daughter in Magdeburg.

Heinrich von Ende [?1455–1515], dominant administrator in Frederick’s early court.

Johann Mogenhofer [?1460–1510], powerful chancellor in Frederick’s court in the middle years.

Dr. Hieronymus Schurff [1481–1554], outstanding university jurist who often advised Luther.

POPES

Julius II [1443–1513], pope (1503–13). Warring and building pope, amassed huge debts.

Leo X [1475–1521], pope (1513–21). Princely lifestyle and papal debt left by Julius II led to widespread corruption to raise money.

HABSBURGS

Friedrich III [1415–93], king/emperor (1452–93) of the Holy Roman Empire.

Maximilian I [1459–1519], son of Frederick III. King/emperor (1493–1519) of the Holy Roman Empire. Charismatic, reckless adventurer.

Philip the Fair [1478–1506], son of Maximilian I; sovereign of Burgundy. By marriage to mentally ill Joanna of Castile, de facto ruler of Castile.

Margarethe of Austria [1480–1533], daughter of Maximilian I. Guardian of Philip’s children and governor of Burgundy for Karl.

Karl V [1500–58], son of Philip the Fair. King of Spain (1506–56). King/emperor (1519–56) of the Holy Roman Empire.

Ferdinand I [1503–64], son of Philip the Fair. De facto ruler of much of the Germanic empire (1519–56). King/emperor (1556–64) of the Holy Roman Empire.

IMPERIAL OFFICIALS

Matthäus Lang [1469–1540], so-called “Swabian” and malicious chamber secretary in Maximilian’s inner circle. Bishop of Gurk.

Count Heinrich VII von Fürstenberg [1464–99], so-called “Swabian” and Hofmarshall in Maximilian’s inner circle.

Dr. Konrad Stürtzel [c. 1435–1509], so-called “Swabian” in Maximilian’s inner circle. Chancellor and behind-the-scenes intriguer.

Jean Glapion [c. 1460–1522], chaplain and duplicitous negotiator in Karl V’s inner circle.

SCHOLARS AND ARTISTS

Albrecht Dürer [1471–1528], Nuremberger. One of Frederick's favorite artists.

Jacopo de Barbari [c. 1440–c. 1516], Venetian artist in Frederick's court for a short time.

Lucas Cranach [1472–1553], artist in Frederick's court since 1505. Prolific and entrepreneurial.

Konrad Pflüger [?–c. 1505], Frederick's master builder since at least 1488.

Conrad Celtis [1459–1508], Humanist poet laureate of the empire, promoted by Frederick.

Desiderius Erasmus [1466–1536], Humanist scholar of renown.

WITTENBERGERS

Philip Melancthon [1497–1560], Greek scholar and close colleague of Luther (and Spalatin). First systematic theologian of Evangelicals.

NUREMBERGERS

Anton Tucher [1458–1524], Patrician and longtime acquaintance of Frederick.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

RELEVANT TO FREDERICK THE WISE

1346

Wittenberg: Pope Clemens VI decreed the Castle Church a relic center subordinate only to the pope (thus, no local bishops).

1356

Golden Bull declared Saxon sovereign an elector and, in the emperor's absence, the imperial vicar of the eastern empire.

1398

Wittenberg: Pope Boniface IX granted the All Saints' Foundation of the Castle Church its own indulgence (Portiuncula-Ablaß) for All Saints' Day.

1423

Electoral rank gained for the Wettiners by Frederick's great grandfather, Frederick I the Warlike (*der Streitbare*) of Meissen.

1451

Frederick's grandfather Frederick II the Meek and his brother Wilhelm III the Brave ended the bloody six-year "Brother War."

1463

January 17 in Torgau: Frederick born to Elector Ernst and Elisabeth, sister of Bavaria's Duke Albrecht IV (the Wise).

1464

Frederick's father, Ernst, became Elector of Saxony.

1471

First great silver lode discovered in the Saxon Erzgebirge; many follow.

1473

Frederick began a rigorous, Latin-based education in Grimma.

1476

Uncle Albrecht the Courageous traveled to the Holy Land.

1480

Ernst traveled to Rome, gaining ecclesiastical plums for two sons and the Golden Rose for himself (but alienating his brother Albrecht).

1484

Frederick's brother Albrecht and mother Elisabeth died (probably both from the plague).

1485

Infamous division of Saxony in Leipzig (*Leipziger Teilung*).

1486

Reichstag in Frankfurt: possibly Frederick's first; Maximilian elected "king."

Father Ernst died from hunting accident; Frederick succeeded him as Elector Frederick III of Saxony.

Frederick worried about dangerous King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary who had conquered Vienna in 1485.

1487

Reichstag in Nuremberg: Frederick presented himself as a grand prince.

1488

Master builder Pflüger was already living in Wittenberg.

Frederick helped free Maximilian from captivity in Brussels.

Emperor Friedrich III rejuvenated military might of the Swabian League.

1489

Wittenberg: workers began not to renovate the old castle but to raze it.

1490

King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary died, ending threat from the East.

1493

Frederick expelled Jews from his electorate.

Frederick traveled to the Holy Land.

Emperor Friedrich III died, succeeded by son Maximilian.

1494

Frederick was retained as imperial councillor in Maximilian's court.

1495

Reichstag in Worms: "eternal peace" (*Ewiger Landfriede*) ended feud as way to resolve disputes.

1496

Frederick was first important patron of Albrecht Dürer, who painted his portrait as well as future altarpieces for Wittenberg Castle Church.

1497

Frederick resided in Austria to serve Maximilian.

1498

Frederick named imperial governor (*Reichsstatthalter*), next in authority to Maximilian.

Frederick abruptly cooled toward Maximilian and returned to Saxony.

1499

Approximate time when Frederick and "companion" Anna began their enduring relationship.

1500

Brother Johann married Sophie of Mecklenburg in a colossal wedding in Torgau.

Uncle Albrecht died. His son George, who succeeded him, was to prove unrelentingly antagonistic.

Maximilian appointed Frederick *Statthalter* of the newly created imperial governing council (*Reichsregiment*).

1502

The disingenuous imperial governing council (*Reichsregiment*) ended.

Wittenberg University founded; studies began October 18.

Near complete Wittenberg Castle Church consecrated by Cardinal Peraudi.

1503

Johann Friedrich, born to Johann and wife Sophie, became a legitimate heir to the electorate.

1504

Berthold, archbishop of Mainz, died.

Bavarian-Palatine succession war crushed the Palatine elector Philipp.

Wittenberg: Augustinian Hermits began building their cloister.

Lucas Cranach became Saxon electoral court painter (until he died in 1553).

1506

Frederick permanently broke with brother Ernst for sowing dissention among the Wettins and slurring his companion Anna.

Saxon electorate introduced inheritance books in the *Amts*.

1507

Reichstag in Constance: Pope Julius II appealed to the imperial estates to bequeath their relics to Frederick (who readied grand reliquaries).

1508

Martin Luther called to Wittenberg temporarily to teach Aristotle's ethics.

Spalatin joined the electoral court to tutor Johann's son.

Maximilian mandated an end to escalating disputes between Frederick and Cousin George.

1509

Taxing nine-year guardianship of Philipp, future Landgrave of Hesse, began.

Wittenberg: castle complex virtually completed.

Erfurt, semi-dependent on Saxony, began its bloody "Year of Madness."

The exceptional "Relic book" (*Heiltumbuch*) with woodcuts of Lucas Cranach printed.

1510

Gout and stones irreversibly ruined health of Frederick, who could rarely ride or hunt.

Frederick asked Spalatin to write the Saxon history and stock a relevant library.

1511

Luther called to Wittenberg to become professor of the Bible.

Albertine Saxon Frederick died, succeeded as *Hochmeister* of the Teutonic order by a Brandenburger. Saxons continued to decline as the Brandenburgers rose.

Pope prohibited concubines, much to chagrin of Frederick and “wife” Anna.

1512

Spalatin became university librarian with means to acquire books.

1513

Frederick suffered depression and poor eyesight as well as constant poor health.

Frederick’s artists finally mastered a medallion for representation.

Brother Ernst, archbishop of Magdeburg, died of syphilis. Again a Brandenburger (Albrecht) succeeded a Saxon.

Frederick’s relic collecting exploded; collection tripled in size in three years.

Frederick began a “Power Sharing” (*Mutschierung*) with Johann.

Frederick wrote letters to support the persecuted Hebrew scholar Reuchlin.

1514

Intensive building in Torgau at Hartenfels castle, Frederick’s favorite residence.

Brandenburger (Albrecht) gained the highly desirable Mainz electorate.

Spalatin and Luther became friends, suggesting Frederick was also aware of Luther.

1516

Spalatin served only at the electoral court.

First known time Frederick took personal interest in Luther.

1517

October 31: Luther posted ninety-five theses against indulgences at Wittenberg Castle Church.

Albrecht of Mainz reported the “Luther affair” to Pope Leo X.

1518

Wittenberg: Melancthon (Reuchlin’s nephew) came as a Greek scholar.

Frederick allowed interrogation of Luther by Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg.

1519

Maximilian died; Frederick was key to selecting the new emperor, abruptly changing the politics of Europe (including the pope).

Marriage contract between Johann Friedrich and Karl’s sister Katharina was possible bribe for Frederick’s vote.

Frederick rejected the crown himself and swung the election to Karl V.

Frederick conditioned Karl V’s election on revival of the imperial governing council.

Luther’s booklet “*Tessaradecas consolatoria pro laborantibus & onerantibus*” consoled Frederick during his worsening health.

1520

Wittenberg: university student unrest.

Frederick discussed Luther with Erasmus in Cologne.

Wittenberg: Luther burned the bull from the pope.

1521

Wittenberg: Castle Church displayed relics but offered no indulgences.

Karl V exempted the Wettin territory from extra-territorial courts.

Wittenberg: the university was reorganized.

Luther appeared before the emperor at the Worms *Reichstag*.

Frederick had Luther “kidnapped” and hidden at Wartburg castle.

Wittenberg: unrest triggered by Karlstadt and zealous reformers.

1522

Frederick appointed Spalatin court chaplain and preacher.

Luther returned to Wittenberg to restore order.

Frederick attended the revived imperial governing council in Nuremberg.

Frederick ended his acquisition of relics.

1523

Karl reneged on the marriage contract between Johann Friedrich and his sister.

King Christian II of Denmark sought refuge with his uncle Frederick.

Luther urged Frederick (unsuccessfully) to dissolve the century-old All Saints' Foundation.

1524

Wittenberg: Luther managed to stop the celebration of the Mass.

In Weimar, Johann and Johann Friedrich heard in alarm Thomas Müntzer's radical sermon; he disappeared, then resurfaced outside the territory.

1525

Spalatin urged Frederick (unsuccessfully) to reform all chapters, monasteries, and clergy.

Frederick's final will acknowledged "companion" Anna, two sons, and one daughter.

On his deathbed, Frederick took communion with both bread and wine.

May 5: Frederick died as countryfolk rebelled over much of the empire.

May 11: Frederick was buried in the Wittenberg Castle Church.

PREFACE

This work about Frederick the Wise drew from published sources, predominantly those in German and to a much lesser extent those in English. What it offers the curious who read only English is access to the German sources, which overwhelmingly dominate research on Frederick the Wise. The state archives in Weimar for Frederick the Wise and other Ernestine electors are famously “inexhaustible.” Above all others, this work is indebted to Ingetraut Ludolphy and her biography *Friedrich der Weise* (1984). Her struggle to complete her *magnum opus* would be a book in itself. Dr. Ludolphy labored in the old German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*; DDR) and was herself labeled a political “reactionary.” Unable to publish her work in the DDR, she emigrated (perhaps illegally) as a “pensioner” to West Germany. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen published her *Friedrich der Weise*. After reunification (*der Wende*), Dr. Ludolphy was able to return to Saxony. She turned ninety-three in 2014. She was kind enough in 2011 to read portions of this book and to offer numerous improvements. The mistakes that remain are solely my own.

This work owes much to librarians and library staffs in both Germany and the United States. Very helpful were those in Berlin (Staatbibliothek and Humboldt-Universitätbibliothek), Leipzig (Bibliothek Theologie at Universität Leipzig), and Lutherstadt Wittenberg (Bibliothek des Evangelischen Predigerseminars and the Stadtbibliothek). Equally supportive were libraries in Kansas (Newton Public Library and the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College).

Numerous individuals helped. This work had a lightning start thanks to Dr. Martin Treu in Wittenberg summarizing (as of 2006) the research on the Ernestine Wettins, especially Frederick.

Special thanks are due to the support and advice of Rev. Paul T. McCain, editor Laura Lane, and others at Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis.

Particular thanks to my wife, Ruth, supportive throughout.



Figure 1: Frederick III of Saxony c. 1486 by Nuremberg Master (courtesy Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, and Artothek)

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING

(1463–87)

“If one wants to judge, then one should know
the reason for matters from the beginning.”

—Proverb favored by Frederick the Wise¹

WHEN A PRINCE DIES . . .

In late summer of 1486, couriers burst from Colditz, one of many castles serving the House of Wettin princes in Saxony. Over the next days messengers prompted more messengers in ever farther reaches. They urged their steeds through forests, past harvesting fields, on trails, along wagon furrows—all arteries into and out of cities and noble strongholds. Each courier surrendered his message at the destination to an official who, after judging its importance, rushed it to a superior. No one in the entire Holy Roman Empire dawdled over this message, for the news from Colditz was of imperial magnitude.

Ernst, the electoral prince of Saxony, was dead.

The great prince had died on the heels of hounds that chased that most noble prey, the red stag, in the most prime month of the hunt, August.² The prince collected spirited stallions like children collect baubles, and perhaps his mount that day was a new prize that stumbled and rolled its steely croup over his chest, breaking ribs and driving them into his lungs. No simple fall would kill a hard-muscled noble of forty-five who had ridden horses from his earliest memory and jostled ahorse before the first stiff hair on his chin appeared.³

Wife and parents buried, Ernst's death most affected his oldest son, Frederick. This twenty-three-year-old, as decreed by the Golden Bull of

the Holy Roman Empire, would assume the seat of Saxon elector vacated by Ernst.⁴ As a Nuremberg master had portrayed Frederick in those very days (fig. 1, page xxiv),⁵ the Saxon exuded youth and sensitivity. To some observers he even revealed softness despite a beard, for it just fuzzed meekly along his jawline. His saucer-eyed, pink face was convex, open, and as defenseless as an egg, saved from appearing totally feckless by a firm jaw and the raptorish royal nose.⁶ God help him if others saw in his great brown eyes the eyes of a rabbit.⁷

Was it the perception of frailty in this wide-eyed son Frederick that had led his father Ernst just the year before to insist on officially dividing mighty Saxony with Ernst's own brother Albrecht? After all, could the portrait's slope-shouldered Frederick with the delicate hands of a lutist defend his throne against battle-fisted Uncle Albrecht, a warrior so domineering, so fierce that he was one of the emperor's favorite field marshals?⁸ For that matter, could Frederick someday defend himself against Albrecht's oldest son, George, already showing his teeth at fifteen? Whatever Ernst's motive before his demise, if he and his leading official Hugold von Schleinitz⁹ had schemed shrewdly enough, Frederick could at least try to rule his half of Saxony and hope Uncle Albrecht was satisfied with his better half. For Albrecht had definitely already received the cream of Saxony.¹⁰

How had the rift between the brothers Ernst and Albrecht happened? They had exhibited an exceptionally healthy bond, even sharing for nearly twenty years a common household, though like most sovereigns of the day never in one permanent location.¹¹ Albrecht himself recalled the brothers' days of harmony when they "lived in the most friendly way in one castle, needed one table and one key, even received and disbursed all annuities, money, and income at the same time, and always were so brotherly and friendly that whichever one demanded from the other whatever goods that were to come to him or his children, the other was happy and ready to grant and bestow."¹²

Harmony became an illusion, exposed in full discord when Ernst traveled to Rome in 1480 to secure powerful ecclesiastical positions for two of his sons.¹³ Pointedly, Elector Ernst did not leave Albrecht in sole charge of Saxony during his absence. Albrecht had but one voice in a coalition with Ernst's most trusted councillors.¹⁴ At the head of the councillors was High Marshal von Schleinitz, who in particular annoyed and perhaps even slandered Albrecht. That offense together with the

affront that Ernst openly showed he no longer trusted Albrecht was like poking a lion in both eyes. Albrecht remained with his family in the common household after Ernst's return from Rome and even in some ways helped reform Saxony, but finally in 1482 the smoldering lion departed. He set up his own residence in Torgau at the Hartenfels, a favorite castle perched on a rock prominent over the River Elbe.¹⁵

When their uncle Wilhelm (the Brave) died that same year of 1482, Albrecht asked to assume Wilhelm's rule of Thuringia.¹⁶ Thuringia was expansive and prosperous, but no equal to what remained for Ernst. He refused. This refusal to placate Albrecht was only one of a succession of decisions by Ernst that seemed to defy understanding. Why would he further anger Albrecht? Had he forgotten the infamous Brother War (*Bruderkrieg*)¹⁷ that erupted in 1445 between their father Frederick and their uncle Wilhelm? The sad truth was that the Brother War had erupted *after* their father Frederick had given Thuringia to younger brother Wilhelm. Influential councillor Apel Vitzthum kept Wilhelm unhappy enough with his share of property and power to fight his brother to the death.¹⁸ The brothers had gathered their allies and fought each other year after year. Emperor Friedrich III himself relished the Saxons weakening their territory (his house of Habsburg's greatest rival). That the emperor's sister Margaretha was married to Elector Frederick no doubt forced the emperor finally to threaten to intercede¹⁹ after six senseless years of lost lives and property.

Both Ernst and Albrecht had reason to remember the conflict well. At the ages of fourteen and twelve, the two boys had been kidnapped for a short time by a knight²⁰ who had ardently supported their father in the Brother War but felt uncompensated. The rescue of Ernst and Albrecht was celebrated in song at every Saxon festival, though the real heroes of the story—brave forest people, including one stalwart charcoaler—crumbled to dust. The young princes, especially Albrecht, evolved into the heroes. But now they, too, were at odds with each other.

In 1484, Albrecht negotiated an annual salary with Ernst and officially withdrew from any rule of Saxony for ten years. This action by Albrecht jolted Ernst.²¹ The year 1484 had already been wrenching for Ernst. His wife, Elisabeth, died in March at only forty-one. Next his son Albrecht, placed so well by Ernst to become an elector, suddenly died in May at only seventeen. Although Ernst promoted another son for the open position, the pope awarded it almost immediately to Berthold von

Henneberg-Römhild. These tragic setbacks plus the estrangement from Albrecht seemed to change Ernst from a hard-driving optimist to a fearful pessimist.

The tactic of withdrawal by Albrecht in some eyes released him from any obligation to Ernst or to Ernst's wishes. Was this a prelude to another brutal "Brother War"? The threat was now genuine to Ernst and he was well aware he was no match for Albrecht in a fight. Ernst could further reflect that he was himself forty-three years old and his father had died at fifty-two. If Ernst died during the ten-year withdrawal, Albrecht could claim the electorate. Who could stop him? Ernst must have reasoned, therefore, that he needed to resolve the danger for his own heirs while he was still alive.

Ernst announced he intended to rip Saxony in two!

THE MUTILATION OF SAXONY

A division of this kind to resolve a family dispute was not rare for the time. In the division involving Ernst and Albrecht, however, the consequences were rare. Not only had their father forbidden any division in his last will in 1459,²² not only did the Golden Bull forbid dividing an electorate, but consider also, as Saxons have done in all the centuries since, the enormity of that division by Ernst. Saxons from the first moment lamented the division officially acted upon in 1485 in Leipzig, thus known as the Leipzig Division (*Leipziger Teilung*). In the early 1470s, Saxony, one of the largest princely territories of the empire with many more than one million subjects, was beginning to discover lode after lode of silver, treasure that was making it even richer than its great size merited. Then in 1482 Thuringia once again was within the electoral territory. Saxony, controlled by the House of Wettin, was becoming the only territory that could challenge in wealth and power the House of Habsburg. The Habsburgs had controlled the empire since 1440. The difference between the two royal houses in the eyes of most imperial subjects was that the Habsburgs were suspiciously Austrian and now Burgundian, too, whereas the Saxons were German to the core.²³ Albrecht, clearly more oriented than Ernst to an imperial scale of thinking, protested the division for all the obvious reasons, denouncing High Marshal von Schleinitz in particular. Young Frederick may have protested the division as well.²⁴ This enormous potential for Saxony, this

powerful nucleus for nation-building, Ernst was about to throw away. And this he did.²⁵

Both brothers conceded that Ernst as the elector (*Kurfürst*) had to retain the original electoral land (*Kurlande*) to the north around Wittenberg. This one-eighth of their total territory was beloved by neither. For the rest, according to Saxon custom, Ernst as the elder brother would divide the territory and then Albrecht would pick the half he wanted.²⁶ Ernst assigned his advisers, led of course by the ubiquitous von Schleinitz, to divide the territory. The high marshal and his group purposely left the halves splintered, yet interconnected, on the premise that two such ugly halves would have to cooperate yet as a whole. The silver mines, because they were just developing, defied even this poor strategy, so they remained in common ownership along with coinage, the bishopric of Meissen²⁷ (considered the religious center of Saxony by all Wettiners²⁸), and four large properties to the east outside Saxony proper. In truth, no one could have fairly appraised the territory because data on wealth and population were so lacking. In addition, elements such as feudal rights defied evaluation.

Nevertheless, how true rang the proverb “Whoever smells it, cringes from it.”²⁹ The resulting division by Ernst and von Schleinitz smelled foul to the dullest nose (fig. 2, next page). The better half included the major part of the political entity Mark Meissen, as well as northern Thuringia. This half even included most of the precious silver works, though commonly owned, within its borders. It also had a major trade route from the southwest that passed through Leipzig to the eastern countries. Leipzig also boasted special trade fair privileges as well as the only university in Saxony. The poorer half created by Ernst and von Schleinitz embraced some of western Meissen, the Vogtland, the Ortland of Franconia, and the greater part of Thuringia (though that part was riddled by extensive tracts of non-Wettin land, such as the city-state of Erfurt).

Indeed, the division seemed contrived to lure Albrecht, who had already shown a preference for Thuringia and Torgau to take the poorer half.³⁰ To further bait that trap, Ernst and von Schleinitz added an enormous requirement of 100,000 gulden to take the better half. They had misjudged Albrecht. No fool, he selected the better half anyway. Once settled, who could make the lion pay?³¹ His half had most of Mark

Meissen, the esteemed southeast portion that also embedded those royal cities so special to the heart of every Wettiner: Dresden and Meissen.

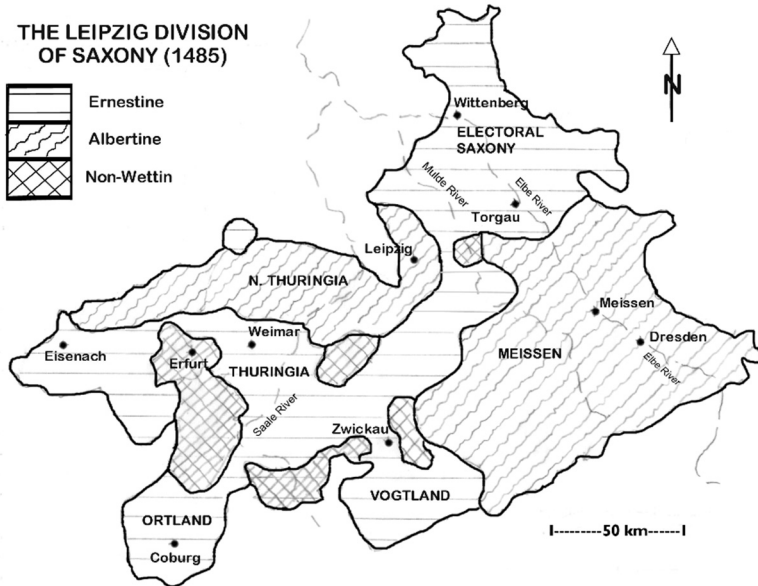


Figure 2: Simplified from Blaschke (1985) and Schwiebert (1950)

Nevertheless, Ernst's ugly half, splintered and inferior though it was, did have the original electorate added to the north. In its entirety it was definitely a territory most sovereigns would envy. After all, a man needed three days to ride a good horse from the southern boundary in Franconia through sprawling river-fed forests and fields to the northern boundary by Brandenburg. In the same way, a man needed three days to ride from the western boundary near Hesse to the eastern boundary abutting Albrecht's half.³² Great stone fortresses, belonging to the sovereign, loomed from heights. Trees, never out of sight, yielded hardwoods for every use: the dominant beech for tool handles, but also the hornbeam for iron-tough gears and the oak for enduring furniture. Forests offered inexhaustible nuts and woods for fuel. The fretworked canopy sheltered game, especially wild hogs and the prized red deer. Lowlands cleared for farming rippled with wheat, barley, rye, flax, and oats. Cattle, horses, sheep, and goats milled over the rougher pasturelands. Vegetable gardens, pigs, and sundry fowl surrounded robust farmhouses. Orchards

hung heavy with pears, apples, plums, and cherries. Rivers teemed with waterfowl and silvery fish. Tending this horn of plenty were hundreds of thousands of the freest, least discontent countryfolk in the empire.³³

These bountiful feudal lands graced the territorial sovereign with hard cash. In the 1480s, the rent from nobles and countryfolk still rivaled the income from silver.³⁴ In addition, the ruling prince controlled the roads, including the “Low Road,” the major southwest-northeast trade route that crossed what later came to be called “Ernestine Saxony.” Tolls, tariffs, and safe conduct charges from the sovereign’s roads poured into the coffers. In addition, no small amount of money came from protection contracts with imperial cities Mühlhausen and Nordhausen and with the city-state of Erfurt. Another source of income, less significant, was the disjointed judicial system that extracted fines and penalties. Taxes, erratically collected, brought in money to an even lesser degree. Nevertheless, in an era when annually a laborer might receive twenty gulden or a lawyer two hundred gulden,³⁵ total income every year to the elector ran into many tens of thousands of gulden.

This was the Ernestine Saxony that young Frederick assumed upon Ernst’s death, not yet one year after Ernst and Albrecht sealed the Leipzig Division. The document of that legal separation named seventy towns and cities in Ernestine Saxony. The most populated of these were Zwickau, Torgau, Weimar, and Wittenberg. Still, these four had less than five thousand inhabitants each and probably little more than two thousand—mere villages compared to the great cities of the empire such as Augsburg, Nuremberg, Magdeburg, and Cologne.³⁶ Demeaning for any territorial prince of the first rank was the lack of a university. As events would prove, troubling in particular to young Frederick was also the lack of any religious focus such as the Chapel of Three Kings in the city of Meissen where the Wettiners buried their electoral princes. Overall, Ernestine Saxony virtually shrieked to worldly outsiders that it was little more than a rough frontier with scarcely one thread of finery.

Coupled with the need of refinement was the urgency to reform the government, if for no other reason than governance had been in a shambles since the Leipzig Division. Subjects and officials were bewildered as to whom and how they served. Complicating the outlook for Frederick even more were his duties as an electoral prince, for he was now no ordinary prince, not even an ordinary imperial prince. The responsibilities of an electoral prince were much greater than the

responsibilities of other princes of the empire. These seven electoral princes or “electors” had been enfeoffed since 1356 by the Golden Bull with the right to elect the “king of the Romans.” This king expected soon thereafter to be crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by the pope. At the right moment, then, an electoral prince such as Frederick was indeed a kingmaker. According to the Golden Bull, which codified electors who had in truth been serving since 1257, one elector had to be the king of Bohemia; three electors had to be the archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne; and the remaining three had to be the secular princes from the Palatine, Brandenburg, and Saxony.³⁷ The Golden Bull also designated the Saxon elector to be the high marshal of the empire. Moreover, during an interregnum of the highest imperial office, the Saxon elector was the administrator of the eastern portion of the empire.

FREDERICK’S SEASONING

“The uninformed can be the master of no one”³⁸ was a proverb of the time, perhaps even muttered against Frederick. He knew that in 1486 he was the same age that his father, Ernst, had been when he began his rule in 1464. Just how well had this young prince Frederick been prepared for the responsibilities of a secular elector?³⁹ His father had been ashamed in 1480 in Rome when he was unable to talk to Pope Sixtus IV in Latin.⁴⁰ For Ernst, this lack of knowledge that an ambitious imperial prince needed, this dearth of Latin, the language of all educated people of the Christian world, seems to have arisen from the parochial attitude of his own father, Frederick the Meek. Frederick the Meek was so Saxon that in 1458, when Pope Calixtus III tried to offer indulgences in Saxony, the elector demanded half the proceeds; he had “inspectors” at every sale making sure he received every pfennig.⁴¹ Despite his father’s insular attitude, Ernst and his mother, Margaretha, knew very well that Latin was a cornerstone. She was the sister of the Habsburg emperor, the aunt of the Habsburg king Maximilian. Just as certainly, Ernst’s wife, Elisabeth, knew Latin was a cornerstone. Elisabeth was a princess of the ruling Wittelsbachs of Bavaria and her brother Duke Albrecht IV was known as the shining linguist of the time, rivaled perhaps only by Maximilian.

But none of the maternal influences meant anything if Ernst resisted the world outside Saxony as his own father had. From Frederick’s birth in Torgau on January 10, 1463, Ernst must have vowed his son would never

blush before anyone. Ernst would prove again and again how perceptive he was. Who could better instill his children with the niceties as well as the necessities of a court life than his mother and his wife? In about 1470, he instituted the Women's Quarter (*Frauen Hof* or *Frauenzimmer*), a virtually independent court from his own.⁴² All the younger royal boys and girls immersed themselves in this separate Women's Quarter. Soon after, in 1471, Ernst by letter approved his mother to supervise Frederick; the boy was to learn Latin and French as well as the other necessities of a sovereign.⁴³ Thus Frederick was being sculpted into one of the better educated princes such as those of Bavaria, Burgundy, and Austria.

Although Frederick had an older sister, Christine, and a younger sister, Margarete, he probably had faint contact with them as a boy other than seeing them during their two daily meals (mid-morning and late afternoon) in the women's dining room.⁴⁴ Excepting mothers and grandmothers,⁴⁵ in day to day activity the female side of any noble court existed prudishly separate from the male side. Frederick was much closer to his brothers and male cousins; until the breakup of the common household in 1482, he lived alongside his brothers and Uncle Albrecht's sons. For example, in 1476, before Frederick's brother Ernst left for his ecclesiastical career in Magdeburg, seven royal boys lived in the common household: Frederick (13); his brothers Ernst (12), Albrecht (9), and Johann (8); and the cousins George (5), Heinrich (3), and Frederick (1). Older Frederick had to seem the "older brother" even to his cousins. Although Ernst and Albrecht soon left this group, the others remained together another six years.⁴⁶

Margaretha surely wrote her brother, the Habsburg emperor Friedrich III, about this sober child. Did she convey to the emperor that the child was conscientious and trustworthy? Did she conceal that the boy, much like the emperor himself, was deliberate almost to a fault? Soon enough, however, the royal ladies yielded Frederick to a formal education. At age 10, Frederick had come within the sphere of the scholarly priest Ulrich Kemmerlin, probably at whatever Wettin residence the priest was needed. By 1474, Frederick at age 11 had his own "young lords" court at Torgau for thirty-two weeks with at least one of his brothers and fourteen servants.⁴⁷ Kemmerlin taught reading, writing, mathematics, and yet more Latin. Kemmerlin no doubt rigorously taught Latin as much more than a language but also as "art" in that the selections in Latin imparted mental discipline and cultural knowledge.⁴⁸

It is implausible Frederick also studied under the humanist Fridianus Pighinucius, obscure except for his acquaintance with renowned humanist Conrad Celtis. Although documents prove Pighinucius tutored Frederick's brother Ernst, who was only one year younger, this occurred years after Ernst left for Magdeburg.⁴⁹ In any case, Frederick did learn Latin, and he even had favorites in Latin such as Terence and Cato, both of whom spun elegant aphorisms so similar to proverbs. It seems likely, because of their pervasive popularity for children, that he learned as well the animal stories of Aesop, each with an attached moral.

Throughout his life, Frederick was fond of German proverbs. He considered proverbs virtually equal in wisdom to the Bible.⁵⁰ It was common, moreover, among all people in this time of illiteracy to quote proverbs. Even the literate nobility quoted proverbs, including some that targeted themselves. Some jibes were merely sour: "Where noblemen are, there are fancy sheets." Many were acid: "When Adam hoed and Eve spun, where then was the nobleman?" Some ran bitter: "Where there is a carcass, then don't worry where the noblemen and ravens are."⁵¹

The time of Frederick's youth did not stand out as a creative time in the empire for literary fare; Gutenberg's invention of the 1450s was ready and waiting for the printing explosion that was yet to happen. Frederick must have listened often to the old songs of chivalry and love from the minstrels who came and went. No doubt he read or listened to the wit of Wolfram von Eschenbach's thirteenth century Arthurian epic *Parzival*.⁵² Frederick possibly read the *Sachsenspiegel*, an essential compilation of Saxon laws from that same century.⁵³ He probably heard accounts of the *Heliand*, the Old Saxon saga from the ninth century. Its mixture of New Testament and ancient pagan elements was provocative.⁵⁴ Could the Christian God conquer the inexorable forces of time and fate? Although the wealthy Wettiners might have possessed a copy, it is unlikely Frederick would have labored through the Low German alliterative poetry so tortuous to read.⁵⁵ Besides that, its pagan doubts were firmly answered by a much advanced Roman liturgy.

Frederick's later life confirmed that in his youth, probably reinforced by Father Kemmerlin, he deeply believed the tenets of the Roman Church. There is nonetheless solid evidence that astrology intrigued him lifelong as it did many other contemporaries,⁵⁶ even the humanists (although his early confidant Dr. Mellerstadt in Leipzig carried on a highly audible harangue against astrology).⁵⁷ Most people of the time

believed not only that the stars and planets forecasted events but also that two-headed calves and other sports of nature revealed the future. The safest course for a Christian prince was strict observance of traditional church discipline. As a tot, Frederick probably already knew “The pious regret nothing.”⁵⁸ Reading the Bible was not a normal part of church discipline, though Frederick could have read the Latin of the sanctioned Vulgate Bible. Fundamental to piety was learning the vast accumulation of church rituals and requirements on the church calendar.

The 1480 catechism in German by Dietrich Kolde detailed the duties of a Christian.⁵⁹ The essence of duties to the Church was threefold obedience: to the seven Holy Sacraments, to the Church’s interpretation of the Ten Commandments, and to the five “commandments of the church.” These latter five were weekly attendance at Mass, annual confession, annual communion, designated fasting, and obedience to clerical jurisdiction. By church law, clerics could punish the disobedient by excommunication, refusal of burial in church grounds, and other means. Sins were legion, the worst being idolatry, the next murder. The church formulated at least sixteen categories of sexual sins.⁶⁰ Least offensive was an “unchaste kiss”; not much worse was fornication. The worst were five categories of sins “against nature.” Self-gratification was a graver sin in the eyes of the church than raping a woman. Frederick no doubt realized early on that most nobles and many clerics themselves winked at most of these sexual sins. Noblemen had few reservations in gratifying themselves with women below their class and not much more for those within the nobility.

The sin that was truly perilous was one that was also a civil crime, a transgression that would fall under the elector’s own jurisdiction. Frederick had to witness the administration of justice⁶¹ in various entities under his father. Imprisonment other than short internment was seldom an option in those days. Throughout the empire, torture was a standard step in the legal processing of a defendant once accused by witnesses (more than one witness as in the Bible) and indicted. Few accused, guilty or innocent, held out under torture pursued in well-established stages of increasing degradation and pain. Punishment was public and watched excitedly “amid the noise of the crowd and the smell of frying pork sausages from butchers’ stalls put up for the occasion.”⁶² The penalty of death was usually only for murder, treason, or theft. The executioner “mercifully” beheaded the highborn but pitilessly hanged most others.

Burning and the horrific breaking on the wheel for heinous crimes were less frequent. Murder of an infant could require burial alive or drowning. Local officials were leery of executions on holy days and festivals, though the anticipation and gore were highly popular, simply because a visiting sovereign so often pardoned criminals as a grand gesture. Theft and fraud were the most common crimes, punished occasionally by death but routinely by loss of fingers or ears. Some received public humiliation or banishment. Rape and adultery were definitely serious civil crimes, even capital crimes, though hard to prove.⁶³ Convictions for heresy and witchcraft, the foodstuff of gossips for centuries, were actually rare.

On a more pleasant subject, music was an everyday presence in the Wettin court, usually very brassy. Saxons were known throughout the empire for their trumpeters. These musicians were the most admired and the best paid. Ernst would loan them to other courts for special occasions, but if the best were not returned, he sent them a hard reminder. Documents from 1484 suggest that for his own playing, Frederick preferred the lute, a popular stringed instrument of the time.⁶⁴ Animals were also favorite diversions of the court, besides the usual many dozens of falcons, dogs, and horses.⁶⁵ Menageries were maintained at many locations. Several kinds of deer were ubiquitous. Bears had been common at Torgau and Meissen for decades. Other creatures included wolves, lynxes, eagles, waterfowl, songbirds, monkeys, and peacocks. Exotic beasts amused the royals, though sometimes the imports did not survive long. Among these in Ernst's time were a camel and a lion.

Frederick had many male influences. Within the Wettin court, Frederick's uncle Albrecht without doubt influenced him.⁶⁶ Did Albrecht's ominous restlessness make Frederick wary later of the possible discontent of his own brother Johann? Uncle Albrecht moved out of the electoral shadow of his brother Ernst to make a name for himself as a military leader. In 1471, in part because of his marriage to the daughter of the recently deceased King George Podjebrad of Bohemia and in part because it was in the interest of Saxony, Albrecht, with thousands of knights and foot soldiers, fought futilely for the contested throne in Bohemia. In 1475, at Neuss on the lower River Rhine, Albrecht was the "emperor's great marshal and flagmaster"⁶⁷ at the side of the imperial field general Albrecht "Achilles."⁶⁸ Both fought Charles the Bold of Burgundy⁶⁹ (ironically, a territory gained by Maximilian only a few years later through marriage to Charles's daughter Maria). Although a fierce

and cruel warrior, Albrecht was widely admired by Saxons. In 1476, he even put aside his bloody sword to travel with a great entourage to the Holy Land. On his return, he resumed his imperial military career and rose ever higher in command.

That Frederick himself was versed in the ways of the knight is undeniable. As a youth, in Dresden while riding up to the barrier for his turn to joust, he overheard a woman in the crowd blurt, "Oh, what can that young child show!?" This disturbed him so much at the time that he could still recall it years later for Spalatin, his secretary and biographer.⁷⁰ How rarely he must have heard harsh words in his exalted station. Even as a child he undoubtedly wore the finest armor available and fought hard. A contemporary told Spalatin that the elector fought as hard as anyone in jousts.⁷¹ Early on, Frederick developed a love for the great hunting lodge at Lochau, where red deer and wild boar⁷² abounded as well as wolves and bears.⁷³ Hunting and jousting were not only for pleasure. Standing firm in the face of danger was no small element of the joust and the hunt. To shirk these knightly aspects was unthinkable for a prince of the time⁷⁴ unless he had already been slated for a religious life as had Frederick's brothers Ernst and Albrecht.

Frederick prepared himself well for the risk arising from combat, the joust, or the hunt. Nevertheless he lived in a time of abrupt death in many forms. One danger above all seemed to later observers to have caused in Frederick a fear of death that ballooned into a phobia: the threat of plague.⁷⁵ Plagues were real enough; in half of the twenty-five years prior to 1487, somewhere in the empire, plague raged.⁷⁶ Nuremberg alone during those twenty-five years had five severe outbreaks; similarly, Erfurt had four.⁷⁷ Two forms of plague seemed ever ready to strike, and both were deadly. Deaths in towns mounted into the hundreds and in cities into thousands. Ernst had to move his court temporarily to Coburg in 1484 from fear of the plague.⁷⁸ That was too late to save Frederick's mother, Elisabeth, who died of plague that March at age 41.⁷⁹ It is plausible the death in May that same year of Frederick's seventeen-year-old brother Albrecht, who had begun a life in the church, was also from the plague. In 1487, the first altarpiece Frederick commissioned featured St. Mary, "most often invoked as a protector in times of war or against the plague."⁸⁰

Outside the Wettin court, Frederick spent time in the court of Mainz when his brother Albrecht had taken an ecclesiastical position there. In

addition, Frederick undoubtedly visited the courts of powerful relatives, including Uncle Albrecht IV of Bavaria and even the Austrian court of his grandmother Margaretha's brother, the emperor.⁸¹ He had probably also visited the court in Burgundy of his Great-uncle Maximilian, for somewhere Frederick polished the skill to speak, read, and write French. All highborn princes also began attending "diets" at an early age. Not only would Frederick have gone with his father the elector to *Landstags* (territorial diets) within Saxony but he also would have gone to *Reichstags* (imperial diets) "out in the empire." Some claim that in 1481, Frederick, at age 18, went with Uncle Albrecht to the *Reichstag* in Nuremberg.⁸² More certain is that, in 1486, Frederick at twenty-three and Johann at eighteen attended the *Reichstag* in Frankfurt with their father.

Many other possibilities arise for Frederick's preparation. His father and Uncle Albrecht had traveled in rarified air. The atmosphere was colorful and festive. Perhaps in 1474, Frederick at eleven had been with father Ernst and Uncle Albrecht when they traveled to Amberg east of Nuremberg for their niece's marriage to Prince Philipp of the Palatine.⁸³ Was Frederick in the procession from Saxony that entered Amberg with three hundred subject knights, all dressed in flaming red? Did he note at the dance the amazement of nobles from the Palatine and Bavaria when Saxon musicians with their convoluted trumpets covered a range of notes never heard before? Did he see his father and Albrecht dance with each other? Did he watch the jousting tournament won by Uncle Albrecht, a tournament so hotly contested that a knight from Bavaria died of injuries?

Without doubt there were many festive occasions. In 1476, Frederick certainly numbered among twelve hundred resplendent Saxons and Thuringians at his brother Ernst's installation in the city of Magdeburg.⁸⁴ It seems likely that in 1478, Frederick at fifteen attended the extravagant wedding of his sister Christine to Hans, Crown Prince of Denmark. Frederick, however, did not accompany his father and his "two hundred mounted retainers dressed in black livery, their horses in jeweled halters" to Rome in 1480.⁸⁵ That grand opportunity lost for Frederick to meet the pope seems reasonable only in light of Ernst's growing distrust of Albrecht. Did Ernst leave seventeen-year-old Frederick behind to observe and report the activities of Albrecht and even Ernst's own advisers?⁸⁶

Frederick's greatest mentor was surely his father, Ernst. Father Ernst was pious enough for a prince, taking Frederick and Johann in 1482 to a

Franciscan monastery in Jüterbog for an overnight stay and confession.⁸⁷ There is nevertheless evidence Ernst enjoyed himself outside the marriage bed.⁸⁸ But what more can be gleaned of Ernst himself? What can outsiders believe of this influential prince whom history ignores except for venting contempt on him over his decision to divide the most powerful territory in the core of Germany? Ernst never even earned a sobriquet. Yet he was able to gain from Rome two splendid ecclesiastical positions—Mainz and Magdeburg—for his sons, as well as gain the coveted Golden Rose for himself. He managed powerful marriages of his daughters to the future king of Denmark and to the House of Braunschweig-Lüneburg. He also encouraged and achieved major institutional reforms in Saxony.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Frederick's confidant Spalatin was said to have described Ernst as competent and prone to moderation—except a tendency to abrupt rages.⁹⁰ Was this Frederick's own assessment? If true, did this volcanic temper erupt, and then simmer for weeks and months? Did it result in the Leipzig Division? Did Frederick resolve never to fall prey himself to this destructive loss of control?

Records prove that before his father's death, Frederick made demands on subjects in the name of the elector.⁹¹ Ernst's concern for his sons' survival may have prompted him to bring Frederick as well as Johann into governance early. If so, Frederick learned from high-powered officials such as Chancellor Johann von Mergenthal and the notorious schemer Hugold von Schleinitz. Did Frederick question from this experience the custom of the time to use as councillors powerful nobles with their own personal ambitions? On the other hand, did he surmise those who were not powerful tended to become sycophants? Young Frederick had to have met the main councillors residing at the electoral court and everyone down to the grooms. If nowhere else, he encountered them while dining. Judging from later evidence,⁹² at meals the constant retinue of the elector numbered more than one hundred, with places assigned at tables of ten. In reality, Frederick undoubtedly saw everyone of influence except some of Ernst's officials (usually called *Amt* men) scattered in towns about the territory.

In summary, in 1486, Frederick was a trilingual, well-traveled young prince who was acquainted not only with all the powers in the electorate but also with the mightiest figures of the empire. He was in truth related to almost all the most powerful families of the empire. It was a time when

those who ruled called each other “cousins,” assuming with good reason a real blood connection or at least a marital bond of some kind. Although these “cousins” quarreled among themselves, it was a rash and unwise act for one to turn violently against another. The violence occasionally came from within the immediate family. Witness the Brother War. Nor did the nobility of countries outside the empire feel the same restrictions as those within. Beyond the eastern border in 1486 two dangerous factions were seething with impatience to test Frederick’s mettle . . .

PERILOUS FIRST MONTHS OF RULE

All of young Frederick’s weighty preparations meant nothing if he was too much the rabbit to retain his position as the electoral prince of Saxony. External dangers did exist. And they were immediate. In 1486, at the *Reichstag* in Frankfurt, the six “German” electors, bullied by Emperor Friedrich III, had elected his son Maximilian king of the Romans in the absence of the seventh elector, the king of Bohemia. The Bohemian king Vladislaus objected to this election of Maximilian.⁹³ In truth, the election in Frankfurt had violated the terms of the Golden Bull. Vladislaus and his Hungarian allies were particularly upset with the electors of Brandenburg and Saxony, whose territories abutted their own. Shouldn’t their sympathies be with their neighbors and not with the Austrians?⁹⁴ Moreover, because the two electorates of Brandenburg and Saxony shared a defense pact, it meant little in the long run which electorate the Bohemians and Hungarians attacked first; the other electorate had to fight too. It was also of no importance that Ernst, weeks before he died, had been the one to cast the vote for Maximilian at the *Reichstag*. Frederick and his Saxons would bear the consequences.

Vladislaus had in his complaint an ally, the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus. Corvinus was not simply a rapacious lout. Like war-loving Maximilian, Corvinus embodied many of the admired traits of the time. He was multilingual, accumulated a notable library, and as a patron of the arts flaunted artists, poets, and humanists in his court. Moreover, he buffered the empire from the Ottoman Turks. Corvinus also claimed part of the rule of Bohemia himself. Therefore, in his eyes, he was also the Bohemian king; hence he, too, was the elector who had been wronged. Most likely he was the driving force behind the complaint. In contrast to Vladislaus, he was truly menacing. He had already proven he was as

formidable as the imperial power. He had captured the Habsburg stronghold Vienna in 1485 and no doubt had designs on the empire itself.⁹⁵ Was Saxony his next stepping-stone? Matthius Corvinus and Vladislaus were to meet in the Bohemian city of Iglau within days after Ernst's death. Could anyone doubt that untested Frederick was one topic of their discussion?

Even as Frederick mourned father Ernst at his burial ceremony in Three Kings' Chapel in Meissen, he must have worried. Threats lurked on all sides of the new elector's territory, perhaps even inside. Younger brother Johann had been accompanying Frederick and his father often to functions inside and outside Saxony. Johann was only eighteen years old, but as the younger brother decreed to rule in some capacity yet knowing in reality his role would be nominal, he, just like his uncle Albrecht many years earlier, had thrown himself fully into the ways of a knight. A princely family expected a younger brother to follow a military career if he could not or would not contend for a powerful ecclesiastical position. Johann had firmly embraced this martial course; none was keener on the joust. Horses, leather, steel, and sweat were sweeter to Johann's nose than any flower. Frederick must have known he had to mollify this younger brother.

Johann was not the only Wettiner who might have been interested in the electorate. Who knew if Uncle Albrecht, a pet of both the emperor and his son King Maximilian, might not decide to reunite Saxony by overthrowing untested Frederick? Many throughout the empire would cheer such a move because it would set up again a powerful entity to keep the ruling Habsburgs from running roughshod over the imperial estates. Just weeks before Ernst's death, the emperor had been only too happy to sanction officially the division of Saxony; divided Saxony was less a rival to the House of Habsburg. Even so, if a crisis arose, who would fault a warrior like Albrecht for seizing power to save the honor of all Saxony?

In the meantime, Frederick had to take the reins of Ernestine Saxony. Swayed by his father throughout the years, Frederick had learned to prefer Dresden as his residence and, to a lesser degree, another residence on the moody River Elbe: his birthplace, Torgau. Because Uncle Albrecht now reigned in Dresden, Frederick gravitated in general to the Hartenfels castle in Torgau during the first half of the year and to the residence castle in Weimar the rest of the year.⁹⁶ Furthermore, because the Wettiners intentionally spurned permanent residences, the sovereign's

court had to be mobile.⁹⁷ Frederick also made the effort to “live” in a number of towns; occasionally he even visited the old rundown Ascanian castle at Wittenberg. Of course, he relished stays in the opulent hunting lodges at Lochau and Colditz.

Emperor Friedrich III was to confirm Frederick at a future *Reichstag*. In the meantime, the fledgling had to evade some of the greatest predators in and out of the empire. He awaited the outcome of the meeting in Iglau between the Hungarian Corvinus and the Bohemian Vladislaus. No Saxon had reason to trust the Bohemians. It had been little more than fifty years since thousands of “Hussite” soldiers invaded Saxony with hundreds of their dreaded war wagons.⁹⁸ Only the Swiss rivaled the Bohemians in ferocity and ingenuity. Although Vladislaus was a weak leader, his partner Corvinus was not. The Saxons, fueled by their knightly skills, were fierce enough, but similar to citizens of other imperial territories, they won by superior numbers and courage, almost never by military genius.

Frederick and Johann Cicero,⁹⁹ his counterpart in Brandenburg, soon heard the outcome from Iglau. Corvinus and Vladislaus demanded extravagant remuneration from the two electoral princes.¹⁰⁰ Demands from Corvinus had teeth. He had taken much of Austria, including prized Vienna, from the emperor because the emperor had not paid 400,000 gulden that Corvinus demanded. In January 1487, Frederick and Johann Cicero, in the face of an attack by the Bohemians and Hungarians, appealed to the empire for military aid. Was this also the moment for Albrecht to seize the reins of power from Frederick? Albrecht as yet showed Frederick nothing but cooperation, but what if threat of war and the safety of Saxons demanded his total command of the situation?

What were the dispositions of Frederick’s other neighbors?¹⁰¹ In addition to previously discussed Bohemia to the east, Brandenburg to the north, and intermeshed Albertine Saxony, Frederick’s most powerful adjacent neighbor was Hesse to the west. This territory under Landgrave Wilhelm was well-disposed toward Saxony. Many of Frederick’s other adjacent neighbors were territories of counts and lords, chief among them Schönburgs, Hartensteins, Wildenfelsses, Tautenburgs, Schwarzburgs, Stolbergs, and Mansfelds. In general, they cooperated but were defiantly independent. Only slightly less independent were the bishoprics of Meissen, Merseburg, and Naumburg,¹⁰² imperial fiefs ruled by bishops

who were essentially territorial lords. Once nearly embedded in one Saxony, the Leipzig Division had made all of them more difficult to dominate. Toward Frederick, Naumburg was most cooperative, Merseburg least. Other neighbors were the powerful archdiocesan territories of Magdeburg and Mainz and the equally powerful dioceses of Würzburg and Bamberg—all of them, for the moment, friendly. Additional neighbors were abbeys, imperial cities, and city-states, as well as entities that defied definition. Frederick's neighbors typified the murkiness of the empire: numerous and diverse to the very limit of comprehension.

And who advised Frederick in this time of difficulty?¹⁰³ It was not the schemer von Schleinitz. The Saxon high marshal had outwitted himself. All his hereditary properties were in Albrecht's half. He quietly slipped away from the Ernestine court.¹⁰⁴ Frederick significantly abolished the office of high marshal. His chief advisers in the first months were other incumbents who had served his father: *Hofmeister* Hans von Doringberg, Chancellor Johann Seyfried, and *Rentmeister* Hans Guntherode.¹⁰⁵ None of these appeared in the chamber registry book of 1487 and 1488 that listed Frederick's fifteen closest advisers.¹⁰⁶ Of these fifteen, four were of the titled nobility: counts from the families von Gleichen and von Stolberg. The other eleven were with less certainty all untitled nobility (collectively called knights): Heinrich and Götz von Ende, Otto and Dietrich Spiegel, Doctors Mellerstadt and Schrenk, Heinrich Löser, Ernst von Schonberg, Hans von Obernitz, Dietrich von Stenz, and Cristoffel von Lipsk. Notable in these earliest days because they were university graduates were Mellerstadt and Schrenk.¹⁰⁷ Assuming from their worth to Frederick over the next years, other advisers probably included Michael von Denstedt, Hans Hundt von Wenkheim, Conrad von König, Hans von Leimbach, Siegmund von Maltitz, Hans von Minkwitz, Heinrich von Starschedel, and Anselm von Tettau.

The engagement of Frederick's sister Margarete with Duke Heinrich II of Braunschweig-Lüneburg had occurred in Leipzig in better days. For once, the two power-marriage partners had at least probably seen each other because, years before, Heinrich had been a guest of the Saxon court at Rochlitz. In February 1487, Margarete, at sixteen, married eighteen-year-old Heinrich at the duke's royal residence in Celle. The young prince had just assumed his reign of this considerable territory northwest of Ernestine Saxony. Yet the Braunschweig territory had once been much

larger, one more example of a large dynasty shredded by poorly defined or poorly enforced inheritance rights. However splintered it was, the Braunschweig extended family was threaded throughout the empire. The marriage of Margarete and the previous marriage of Christine to the future king Hans of Denmark reflect a strategy of Ernst that to compete with the growing strength of the Hohenzollerns (that is, the Brandenburgs) to the north, the Wettiners needed stronger alliances with other northern neighbors.¹⁰⁸ Religious appointments of Ernst's sons Albrecht and Ernst also fit the northern strategy.

Frederick's eastern neighbors remained a worry, though the Saxons heard King Vladislaus was having trouble enlisting support for any attack on Saxony and Brandenburg. Would his much more dangerous ally Corvinus feel, in view of that poor alliance, it would be more prudent for him to tend to the defense of his recent conquest of Austria? The Austrian situation was also the reason Uncle Albrecht had no time for his Ernestine nephews. He had become the emperor's commander in chief, preparing a campaign to retake Austria. Albrecht's participation angered Corvinus even more against the Saxons.¹⁰⁹ Albrecht had been granted feudal rights to some properties east of Saxony under the control of Corvinus. Where would Corvinus try to take his revenge? In Austria or in Saxony? Was it significant that Iglau, the meeting place for Corvinus and Vladislaus, had been only a four- or five-day march directly southeast of Dresden, the heart of Albertine Saxony?

Frederick, during the early months of his rule, signaled his interest in influencing church matters and spiritual behavior. He initiated ecclesiastical changes, especially among the Franciscans so favored by the Wettins.¹¹⁰ Brother Johann was active in this effort too. They prodded for reform in the Franciscan monasteries in Torgau and Wittenberg. Pope Martin had suggested reform in this begging order of monks in 1430. Now Frederick wanted this "Martinian" form of stricter, more pious behavior implemented in the monasteries. This was not only to make them more self-sufficient; Frederick generously endowed and supported these cloisters. His territory enveloped about one hundred monasteries and foundations. They were located in any town of size, but they were especially concentrated in the dioceses of Mainz and Halberstadt in western Thuringia and the Ortland (Coburg area).¹¹¹ Less than thirty in his territory at the beginning of his reign were reformed or in the process of reforming.¹¹²

It is probable that Frederick's father, Ernst, had planned to push reform himself. He had achieved a remarkable concession in 1485 from Pope Innocent VIII.¹¹³ The pope expressly permitted the Saxon sovereign to reform both exempt and non-exempt monasteries of his territory if necessary. In all these matters, Frederick included Johann; his father had wished this. Moreover, Johann was more likely to remain a loyal partner. One unspoken reason undoubtedly was that Frederick was preparing to launch an aggressive effort on more than one front that would become obvious only during and after his confirmation as elector at the upcoming *Reichstag*. To do this Frederick needed a loyal Johann.

FIRST REICHSTAG AS SAXON ELECTOR

“What a bird is, one knows by his song and feathers.”¹¹⁴

Every prince knew the value of “representation”¹¹⁵ or “presentation,” that is, the public display befitting his office. It was not merely a display of power to intimidate. It was a deliberate, well-planned effort to show all the qualities of a prince most admired at the time: physical courage, power, generosity, thoughtfulness, intellect, curiosity, piety, nurturing, loyalty, and other virtues. Representation included among other methods jousting, symbols, rituals, stagings, music, coins, books, and funding. It was costly to carry out. To be totally effective, every representation had to be as public as possible. In the empire, no one surpassed King Maximilian at pomp; and he lagged behind the Italians. Frederick's first venture into this demanding, highly visible trial was in the first spring days of 1487 at the *Reichstag* in the imperial city of Nuremberg.¹¹⁶ The impression he gave “out in the empire” was of great importance.

On March 28, Frederick and his well-armed entourage emerged from dense forest north of Nuremberg. Across a half mile of cleared flats loomed one of the gems of the empire.¹¹⁷ Inside the great three-fold walls with more than one hundred towers lived twenty thousand citizens, among them the empire's finest artists and craftsmen. Frederick and Johann rode in through one of the west or north gates near the Kaiserburg fortress with several hundred horsemen in armor;¹¹⁸ no doubt all the knights in the same vivid color, a showy arrival only a powerful prince could do. Triumphant harmony by his paid musicians amplified his importance; his court employed nine permanent musicians, all trumpeters but for one drummer.¹¹⁹ Frederick's procession exhibited all

the splendor of the well-orchestrated processions that began jousting tournaments. He was unlikely to forget one iota of flags, banners, staffs, or indeed any symbol of Saxon rule. Peers had to be noticing he was already a master of protocol.

The money-starved emperor had called for the *Reichstag*.¹²⁰ At that time, *Reichstags* still occurred only as mandated by the emperor, an indication of how subordinate the estates were in the imperial view of governing. A *Reichstag*, always held in an imperial city, was nevertheless no trifling event; hundreds of masters and thousands of servants were involved for several weeks, often for several months. They burned time and money. For Frederick, this *Reichstag* was a succession of grand occasions.¹²¹ On April 18, the emperor crowned humanist Conrad Celtis poet laureate of the empire.¹²² Frederick had championed this honor for Celtis, as indirectly acknowledged in 1486 when Celtis dedicated to Frederick his most significant work, *Ars versificandi et carminum* (The Art of Writing Verses and Poems).¹²³ Here is clear evidence that Frederick was far from a newcomer on the imperial scene. Moreover, he recognized that the work of Celtis was important, one of the first impulses of the humanistic groundswell from the south spreading over the empire. That Celtis was the son of a peasant suggests Frederick was open to talent regardless of social position. By crowning Celtis, the emperor indirectly honored Frederick himself.

That was only the first triumph for Frederick at the *Reichstag*. On May 23, Frederick finished negotiations for a renewed “inheritance protectorate” of Ernestine Saxony with Albertine Saxony, Brandenburg, and Hesse. This kind of agreement among upper nobility dynasties was more and more popular. It served to define boundaries, protect inheritance, and determine succession if a family died out. Implied also was some degree of mutual assistance in military difficulties. Such protectorates were only as dependable as the integrity and willingness of the parties involved. Frederick’s father, Ernst, had signed a similar agreement with Bohemian king Vladislaus in 1482. That agreement seemed of little value in 1487. Still, the protectorate renewed among both Saxonies, Brandenburg, and Hesse afforded some comfort to Frederick.

An even greater event occurred on May 23. The emperor enfeoffed Frederick as elector. From then forward, without doubt, he was Elector Frederick III of Saxony. He was the sixth Saxon sovereign named Frederick in the line of Wettiners that went back to Frederick I of the

Bitten Cheek, who began his reign of Mark Meissen in 1292. Frederick I the Warlike had been the first Saxon elector, enfeoffed in 1423. It was convention at the time to begin numbering from one again after the third use. The only interruption in this almost two hundred-year-long chain of Saxon sovereigns named Frederick was Frederick's father, Ernst. That was only because Ernst's older brother, of course named Frederick, died before he could assume the reign.

On June 3, Frederick and Johann hosted a great feast. All the princes and noble women at the Nuremberg *Reichstag* attended, as did the most important patricians of the city.¹²⁴ Records show the chefs served twenty courses. Frederick and Johann must have offered a wide spectrum of the animal kingdom, from pork to peacocks and from turtles to eels. Highlighting courses were "subtleties," dishes designed to amaze and amuse, such as a "baked" pie spewing forth live birds. No doubt the best wines from Rhine vineyards flowed freely too. Throughout the day, the Saxon brass entertained, even at the dance that evening. The brothers surely followed custom (records prove Frederick did in later years) in hiring for the dance unattached ladies—the younger and more willing, the better.¹²⁵ Later yet, patricians and highborn nobles gambled at cards. Cautious Frederick on such occasions seems to have won or lost only hundreds of gulden, not thousands, as some patricians and nobles did.¹²⁶

As to the business of the *Reichstag* itself, young Frederick and the other territorial princes were cynics. Nothing was to happen this time but the usual sad sequence of imperial politics. The emperor needed resources. The technique of Friedrich III was well worn. The emperor was mute in the meetings, and then cornered each individual prince or prelate privately to muscle money or soldiers from that person, while attempting to give nothing significant in return.¹²⁷ If pressed, in true Habsburg fashion he promised marriages, fiefs, and other rewards that he might or might not deliver later. Although ancient for the time—he was seventy-one—and considered sluggish by his detractors, the emperor was in truth doggedly effective. At Frankfurt the previous year, the emperor had given the estates nothing but empty promises. In return he received a colossal triumph: the electoral princes elected his twenty-six-year-old son Maximilian king, assuring his succession to the imperial throne. The electors had foolishly surrendered all their future leverage.

Voting for the king was the privilege of the curia of seven electors. On any issue other than the election of the king, all three curiae of the

imperial estates voted. The electors remained the most influential curia, deliberating first and then meeting with the “curia of princes.” This “curia of princes” consisted of some two hundred fifty non-electoral princes, counts, other titled nobility, and prelates. Within this curia, about ten princes, especially those of Hesse, Württemberg, and now Albertine Saxony, dominated. Only after the curia of electors and the “curia of princes” had resolved their differences and agreed on an issue did they meet with the third curia.¹²⁸ It was inevitable that the vote of this third curia of sixty or so free imperial cities meant nothing; its influence was an illusion.¹²⁹ Within the empire, with no voice whatever, were about two thousand families of lower or untitled nobility (knights), hundreds of thousands of burghers from roughly three thousand non-imperial cities and towns, and more than fifteen million countryfolk (*Bauern*).

In 1484, a new force had arrived among the electors: forty-two-year-old archbishop of Mainz, Berthold von Henneberg-Römhild. This carried sad irony for Frederick, for Berthold had replaced Frederick’s younger brother Albrecht who had succeeded Diether von Isenburg in 1482.¹³⁰ At first, Berthold seemed a toady to the emperor and his son. How false that notion proved to be! Berthold had a vision of organizing the empire internally in a way that would benefit the estates, not simply help solve the problems of the House of Habsburg. The Habsburgs’ concerns were real enough. Because their holdings were on the most peripheral parts of the empire, they scuffled constantly with France, Switzerland, Italy, Bohemia, Hungary, and even the Turks. In any case, by 1487, Berthold was truly emboldening all the estates. Although the three curiae of electors, princes, and imperial cities that voted at the *Reichstag* were well established, the emperor had learned to circumvent matters easily by inviting only those he trusted. Now the estates, encouraged by Berthold, resisted. Those present would not approve funds for the empire until the missing estates voted, present or absent. Berthold and others won change on another matter of great importance: the curiae could now negotiate among themselves in secret. No longer were the eyes and ears of the imperial circle in attendance to intimidate. In 1487, as in no previous *Reichstags*, both the curia of electors and the curia of princes had become boldly independent. Under Berthold’s influence, the curiae were now talking of a constitution.

Procedurally, the curiae were so much stronger at the 1487 *Reichstag* that the emperor had to employ more subtle tactics. Friedrich III became

more the fox, less the wolf. A long-standing grievance of the electors and princes was lack of an imperial judicial court. The emperor's "concession" to the final compromise of the 1487 *Reichstag* was that he allowed the concept of an imperial judicial court to be drafted for study.¹³¹ In return, the estates approved money for the emperor, but in their new defiance they set rigid conditions on the funds. They would furnish money only for relief of the Austrian properties captured or threatened by Corvinus. To assure this outcome, they would give the money only to the Brandenburg elector Johann Cicero. He would in turn disburse it only to the imperial commander in chief of the military, Frederick's uncle Albrecht. The old emperor had won just in time the previous year the guarantee of his son Maximilian as his successor.

At Nuremberg in 1487, new elector Frederick probably listened far more than he talked in the now secret discussions of the curiae. Besides Frederick and the dynamic Berthold, four other electors completed this most powerful of the curiae. Johann Cicero of Brandenburg, at thirty-one, was also a newcomer. More senior members were Archbishop Hermann of Cologne, at thirty-six an elector for six years, and Philipp of the Palatine, at thirty-eight an elector for ten years. Grand old prince of the electors was Archbishop Johann II of Trier. Although only fifty-two, the archbishop nevertheless had been an elector for thirty years. First becoming an elector at only twenty-two himself, the archbishop may have warmed to twenty-four-year-old Frederick. Doubtless they all welcomed him, for whatever political skirmishes ensued, these five electors remained uppermost in Frederick's esteem the rest of his life.¹³²

Regardless of Frederick's real or perceived role in the political maneuvers during the 1487 *Reichstag*, after it was over he was in good standing both with the curia of electors and, perhaps more importantly at the time, with the imperial circle. Frederick was not so naïve to think that the Habsburgs were indifferent to his assets of silver. Still, he knew advantages flowed from imperial approval. This tentative harmony with the Habsburgs was some assurance for the safety of Ernestine Saxony against all potential enemies, with the exception of formidable Corvinus.

Autumn 1487 would indeed bring a chill from the east as icy as the usual piercing winds.