



# POPEVS VS KINGS

Which one had more power during the Middle Ages?

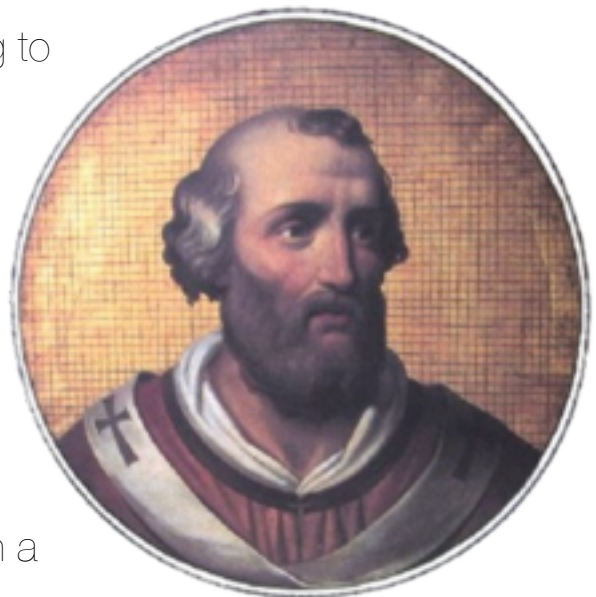


## Pope John XII and King Otto the Great

Some popes and kings have been fierce enemies; others have found ways to work productively together for their mutual benefit. But sometimes, like in the case of Pope John XII and King Otto the Great, the relationship is more complicated.

Pope John XII was the son of Alberic II, the ruler of the Roman nobles. Alberic was also the half-brother of Pope John XI and so Alberic used his influence to convince the Roman nobles to install his son as the next pope. As a result, when he was only about 17 years old, John became both pope and Princeps of the Romans so he wielded both political and religious power in Rome.

The problem was that according to historical records, John was a disgraceful Pope. He was said to be a murderer, a gambler, to have had many mistresses, and to have blinded his confessor, Benedict. He was also accused of violating many religious rules like celebrating Mass without taking communion, failing to make the sign of the cross, and he allegedly ordained a deacon in a horse stable.



Not surprisingly, Pope John XII made many enemies. Facing an invasion, John appealed to King Otto for help. Otto was a powerful king of the Germans. Much like Charlemagne, Otto saw himself as a protector of the Christian Church. Otto answered the call and invaded Italy in 961 C.E. Pope John's enemies, fearing attack, retreated to their strongholds and Otto's armies advanced to Rome.

There, Pope John and King Otto formed an alliance. Pope John crowned Otto as Emperor of the Roman Empire in 962 C.E., about 150 years after Pope Leo had crowned Charlemagne with the same title. In return Otto promised to support only John as Pope and to guarantee the protection of the Papal States.



Pope John, however, became fearful of Otto's power. In an effort to limit this threat, John decided to try to form an alliance with some of Otto's enemies. Pope John sent messengers to the Magyars and Byzantines and tried to organize an alliance against Otto.

However, Otto's forces intercepted the messages. Not surprisingly, Otto was outraged by this betrayal. He returned to Rome and overthrew Pope John, making Pope Leo VIII the new pope. John took the papal treasury and fled to Tibur.

Otto demanded that John return to Rome and explain his actions. John, in return, threatened to excommunicate anyone who opposed him. He later returned to Rome with an army, forcing Pope Leo VIII to flee for his life. John reinstated himself both as pope and ruler of Rome. However, he died soon after and was eventually replaced by Leo VIII.

Despite the betrayal that occurred, an important connection had been made between the Christian Church and what became known as the Holy Roman Empire. Otto kept the title Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire would continue to rule in central Europe until the Napoleonic Wars in 1806.