

Information for the press

The Aachen cathedral Germany's first UNESCO-World Heritage

With the construction of the representative imperial palace Charlemagne followed his dream of a "new Rome" in Aachen. Undisputed heart of the palatinate complex had always been St. Mary's church, Aachen cathedral. Its current appearance has, however, developed in the course of more than 1,200 years of history.

Around 800 the octagon, the core piece of the cathedral, was built based on the model of Byzantine palace churches. Since Roman times the internal height of more than 31 meters had been unique in the North and remained unsurpassed until the era of High Romanticism. Before further elements could be added to the central building, St. Mary's church (palace chapel) became the burial place of Charlemagne († 814). Until today the remains of the meanwhile canonised ruler have rested in the Charlemagne shrine of Aachen cathedral.

Further buildings were erected in the 14th and 15th century: the Gothic choir hall (by Aachen citizens also called "Aachen's glasshouse") and the chapels on the north and south side. While today's Hungarian chapel and the porch were added in the 18th century, the western tower was completed in the late 19th century. Aachen cathedral, which in 1978 was included in the list of the UNESCO-World Heritage as the first German monument, today belongs to one of the most important cultural monuments of European dimension and is one of the best preserved architectural monuments of the Carolingian period.

Besides its significance as burial place of Charlemagne, Aachen cathedral - between 936 und 1531 - also was the coronation place of Roman-German kings and became the last resting place for the emperor Otto III († 1002). In the course of the Middle Age it also became one of the most significant pilgrimage places of Christianity. Since 1349 the Aachen Pilgrimage has attracted pilgrims from all over the world every

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seven years, to come and visit the city of Charlemagne, which has been Episcopal residence since 1930. Shown are the Aachen cloth relics, which according to tradition have been worshiped as baby Jesus' diaper, John the Baptist's decapitation cloth and Christ's loin cloth.

Further unique historic testimonials of the history of the venerable St. Mary's Church of Charlemagne are held in the adjacent cathedral treasury, which is considered as the most significant ecclesiastical treasury north of the Alps and accommodates impressive exhibits e.g. the Cross of Lothair, the Bust of Charlemagne or the Persephone sarcophagus.

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