## What to know when we go - Aachen

Charlemagne's official seal bore the phrase *Renovatio imperii Romani* (renewal of the Roman Empire).
As the Pope's designated Roman emperor, Charlemagne sought to revive the glory of Early Christian Rome.

Charlemagne accomplished this through:

- Uniting much of Western Europe
- Strengthening the Empire
- Promoting Christianity
- Encouraging education and learning




**On Christmas Day of the year 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charles the Great (Charlemagne) - Emperor of the Roman Empire. He had been king of the Franks since 768.**

**Aachen became its capital.**

## Carolingian Art

**Charlemagne's empire revived Roman art and architectural forms.**

***Charlemagne***, by Albrecht Dürer, the anachronistic coat-of-arms above him show the German eagle and the French Fleur-de-lis.
1512
Oil on wood
74.8 by 35 inches
Nuremberg, Germany
National Cultural Museum




**Charlemagne's reign (768–814 CE) had a lasting impact on medieval Europe. After his coronation, Charlemagne sought to revive the prestige and traditions of the Roman Empire in Western Europe.**

**Through military campaigns, he created one of the largest European empires – including much of modern-day France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, and northern Italy.**

**Charlemagne's *Renovatio* ("Renewal") or Carolingian Renaissance brought about a revival of learning, literature, art, and scholarship:**

- **Schools were established to educate clergy and government officials.**
- **The development of the script called *Carolingian minuscule* made books easier to read and copy.**
- **Monks copied many Greek and Roman works that might otherwise have been lost.**
- **One of his dearest projects was the recovery of the true text of the Bible, which through centuries of errors in copying, had become quite corrupted. Various scholars undertook the great project, but Alcuin of York's revision of the Bible, prepared at the new monastery at Tours, became the most widely used.**

- **Uniform Christian practices of the church were promoted.**

Charlemagne's Palace
Complex at Aachen with the Palatine Chapel (792-805)





**The Palatine Chapel, begun in c. 792 and consecrated in 805, has undergone significant changes over the centuries.**

- **The Gothic apse was added in 1355**
- **The dome rebuilt and raised in the 17th century**
- **Mosaics and revetment added in the 19th century.**
- **Columns looted by French troops in the 18th century were added back without knowledge as to their original locations in the 19th century.**
- **The structure was heavily damaged by allied bombing during WWII and significantly restored again in the second half of the twentieth century.**

**The original palace of Charlemagne did not survive.**




**Charlemagne made several strategic choices that linked his church to the legacies of ancient Rome and the 4th century emperor Constantine – the first Christian emperor of Rome.**

**Aachen was selected because it was an historic Roman site with hot springs used for bathing.**

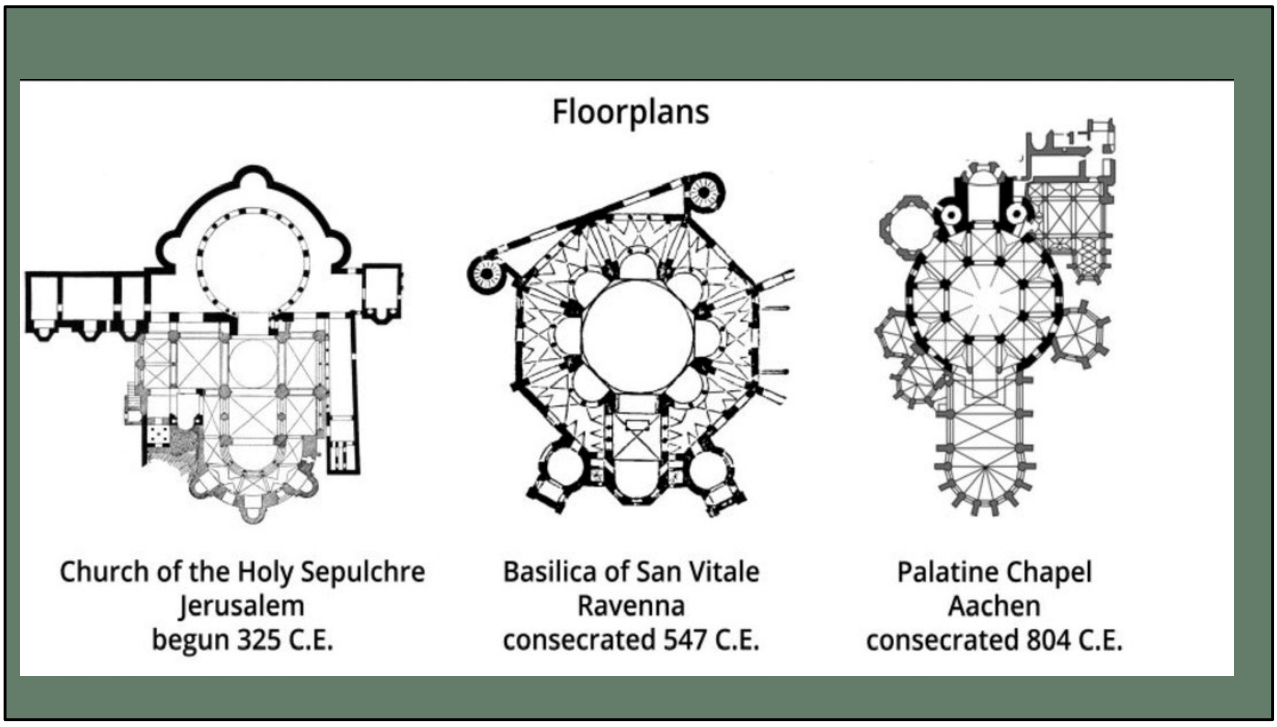
**A relic of the cloak of St. Martin was installed in the church at its consecration. St. Martin was the 4th century Roman soldier who had a vision of Jesus after sharing his cloak with a beggar.**




**In his eagerness to reestablish the imperial past, Charlemagne encouraged the use of Roman building techniques, and for his models, he looked to Rome and Ravenna. Rome was the former heart of the Roman Empire, which he wanted to renew. Ravenna was the long-term western outpost of Byzantine might and splendor reestablished by Justinian, which he wanted to emulate in his own capital at Aachen.**

**Charlemagne visited Ravenna three times. He then wrote to Pope Hadrian requesting "mosaic, marbles, and other materials from the floors and walls" in Rome and Ravenna for his palace and chapel in Aachen. And, he sent his builders to Ravenna to study and copy San Vitale.**

**Earlier Roman Christian sources became the standard for northern European architecture, sculpture and painting.**

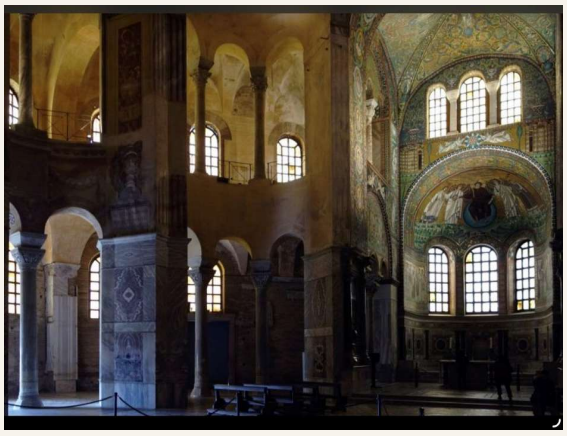



**These three floor plans show Charlemagne's intent to imitate two very significant Christian buildings – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and San Vitale in Ravenna.**

**The faithful believe that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre contains the site of the crucifixion of Christ and the tomb from which he rose.**

**And, as you can see, it is the San Vitale Chapel at Ravenna that provides a close comparison. You get a sense of what the Palatine Chapel would have looked like before Gothic renovations.**

Basilica of San Vitale,
Ravenna, 547 C.E



Palatine Chapel,
Aachen, 804 C.E.



**San Vitale is a small octagonal church with a centralized plan and two-story ambulatory. The eight sides were understood to be symbolic of regeneration – referencing Christ's resurrection eight days after Palm Sunday.**

**The original dome was also based on classical models and bore a mosaic that consisted of the Lamb of God – symbolically Jesus Christ in the center. This figure was surrounded by the four Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and then the 24 elders described in Revelation 4:4.**

**The octagonal centralized plan of the Palatine Chapel follows San Vitale creating that strong visual link.**

**The bronze exterior doors date from the time of Charlemagne and are the oldest historic monument of their kind in Germany.**





Interior of the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne, Aachen, Germany, 792–805.
Charlemagne's throne

**Charlemagne's Throne -**

**In 936, Otto I, the first Holy Roman Emperor of the Ottonian Dynasty, held his coronation as King of Germany in the Palatine Chapel utilizing Charlemagne's Throne.**

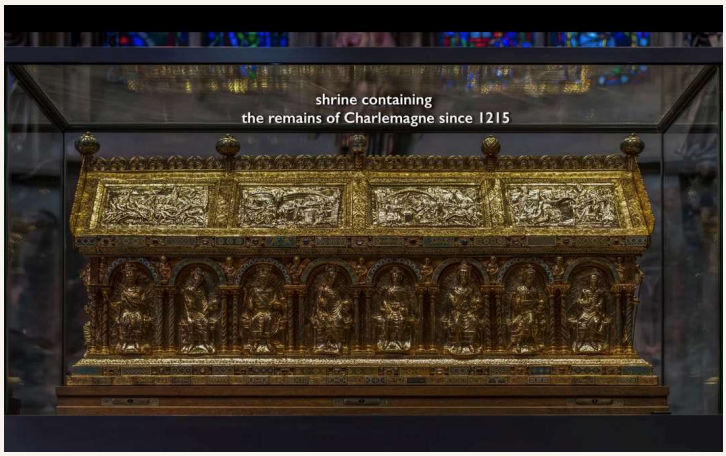
**This established a tradition. From that time until 1531, all the Holy Roman Emperors continued to hold their coronation in the Chapel.**

**Charlemagne's tomb was placed in the chapel in 1000.**



Bust of Charlemagne, 14th Century

Golden Reliquary (shrine) containing the remains of Charlemagne since 1215




**The magnificent and massive golden reliquary known as the *Marienschrein,* along with the Bust of Charlemagne are on view and not to be missed.**

**We are told the bust holds the remains of Charlemagne's skull.**