

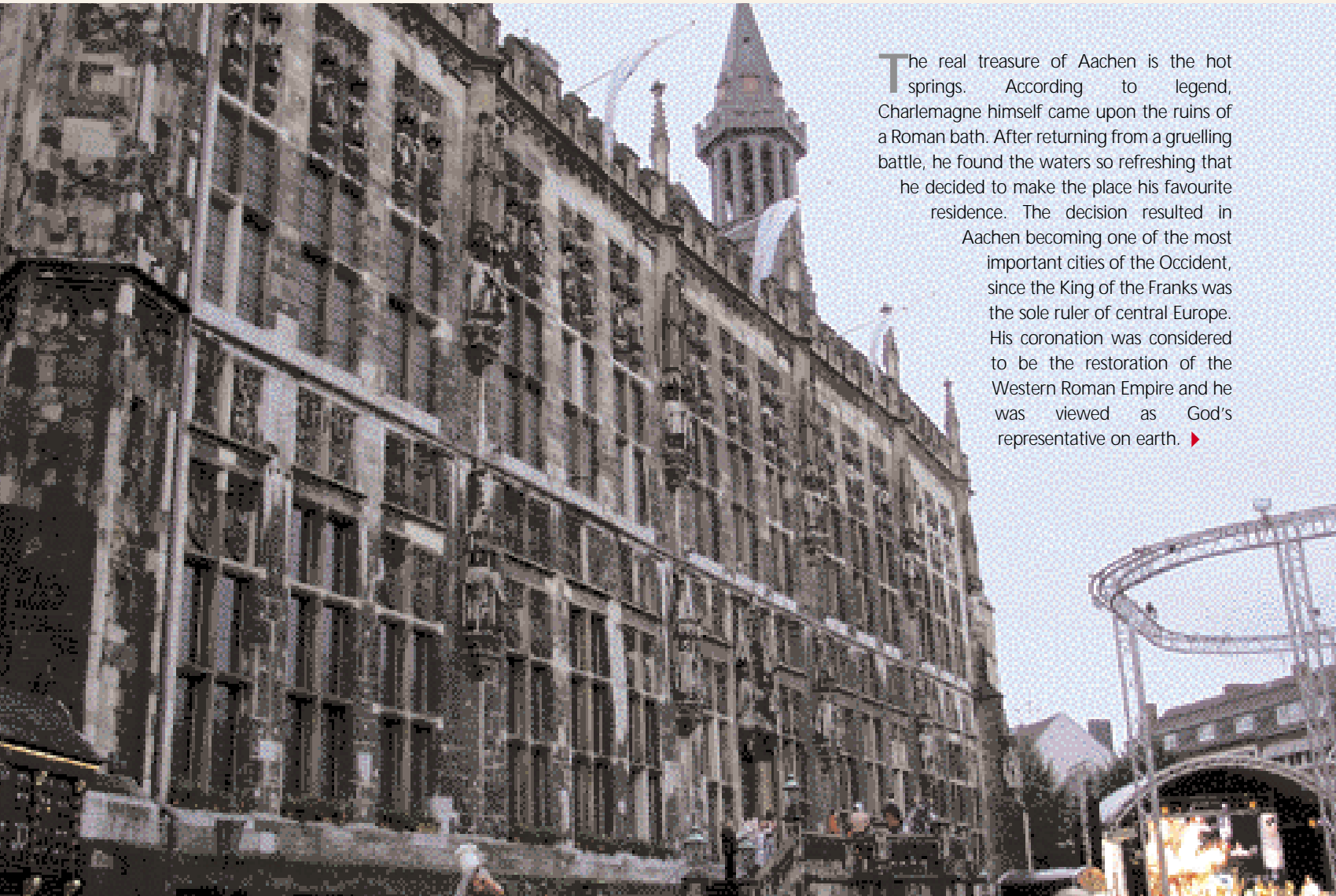
The Palace Chapel of Aachen

Taking the waters as did kings and emperors

> Text and Pictures
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Aquae Grannie was the name the Romans gave to the thermal baths. These very springs are the reason the Romans founded a military camp here. Prior to the Romans, the Celts had already appreciated the springs. Charlemagne was so delighted with the baths that he made Aachen the capital of his empire and with the Cathedral/Palace Chapel gave to the Occident one of its most important monuments.

The real treasure of Aachen is the hot springs. According to legend, Charlemagne himself came upon the ruins of a Roman bath. After returning from a gruelling battle, he found the waters so refreshing that he decided to make the place his favourite residence. The decision resulted in Aachen becoming one of the most important cities of the Occident, since the King of the Franks was the sole ruler of central Europe. His coronation was considered to be the restoration of the Western Roman Empire and he was viewed as God's representative on earth. ▶



The guild hall

مبنى نقابات الحرفيين

The Imperial Cathedral

Aachen Cathedral was one of the first buildings to be listed in the UNESCO Heritage Site Register in 1978, and the first German site. More or less successful attempts are made to find adjectives to express the beauty of the cathedral. These efforts are not necessary – it is quite enough just to imagine what the impression was at the time it was built, surrounded by houses barely taller than a human being. Charlemagne recruited architects from Italy, because at the time practically no one north of the Alps had ever seen such a magnificent building. The true beauty of the Cathedral is to be seen from the interior. Awaiting the visitor is a mystical atmosphere which will transport him to time long gone. You can almost sense the breath of the most powerful European of all times. The architecture of the cathedral gives evidence to Charlemagne's self-image as the legitimate successor to the Byzantine Emperor. The models for the Aachen Cathedral were obviously the sacral buildings in Rome, Ravenna and Istanbul.

Entering the building the visitor is overwhelmed by the thick columns. The massive pillars give the visitor the feeling that he is small and unimportant. It takes time to comprehend the number of columns and to realize that their positioning is of central importance. As in Rome and Ravenna, the columns of the dome are arranged in an octagon in order to replicate the ideal circle of the early Christians and Muslims. The effect is increased by an encircling aisle which doubles the angles and the columns to 16.

After the canonization of Charlemagne in 1165, the circular building was enlarged in the east/west axis. On the east side, a gothic choir and a new entrance were erected; on the west side opposite, the high choir. Here you will find the throne and a glass shrine with the venerable relics of Charlemagne. Whoever was in possession of Charlemagne's throne ruled the kingdom. It was thus no coincidence that for over 600 years 30 German kings took their places on this throne. Friedrich Barbarossa had Charlemagne canonized and thus the Cathedral of Aachen became a pilgrimage site for Christians.

The late canonization of Charlemagne was not entirely unselfish. It was intended to reinforce the rights of his successors to the

throne as emperors of the Roman Empire. Thus Barbarossa placed himself in the line of successors. A huge chandelier which fits like a glove into the symmetry of the dome symbolizes to this very day his claim to power. The form of chandelier reminds one of the towers and gates of a city wall – and for good reason, as it is meant to represent the Kingdom of God, a fortress under the dome-shaped heavens. The archangel Michael guards over the whole area from his position on one of the chains supporting the chandelier. In reality, as in the entire building, every detail is well thought out. All the numbers and measurements are part of the cosmic system of numbers.

Although Friedrich Barbarossa's claim to power – as with all other rulers crowned in Aachen – could not be extended to what had been the kingdom of Charlemagne, his aspirations are still visible in the engraving on the chandelier. There it says: "Friedrich, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire". All in all, this part of the cathedral is considered to be a perfect symmetrical construction. The later additions break the symmetry and would not have met Charlemagne's approval.

Further Sights Worth Visiting

Besides the Cathedral Treasure with its magnificent collection of ecclesiastical works of art you should see the 700-year-old City Hall, an impressive building from medieval times. In the Emperor's Court, many rulers were crowned and participated in festive dinners.

In the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral Treasure you find the two oldest preserved dwellings of Aachen. The houses called 'Eulenspiegel' and 'Postwagen' originate from 1657.

Modern Aachen is famous for its universities and research institutes. The best reputed showjumping in the world takes place in Aachen and it is visited by many well-off Arab guests.

The Elise Fountain and the Baths in Art Deco style are symbols of the fact that the healing springs never lost their attraction over the years. Aachen was the place to be at the time of Kaiser Wilhelm. Earlier, Casanova came here as did the kings of Prussia and the last Kaiser of Germany, Wilhelm. The period of "cures" was followed by the medicinal baths of the 21st century.



The choir from outside
جناح المنشدین من الخارج

The medicinal spas in Burtscheid, the spa area of Monheimsallee, the Carolus thermal baths and the Quellenhof spa complement the bath houses constructed in the style of classicism and attract more than 10,000 patients to the healing waters yearly, a place already esteemed by the Romans and Celts suffering from rheumatism and seeking to recover from endless marches. ■

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