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Medieval History Through Artists' Eyes

Class 2: Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance
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"Throughout his whole reign, the wish that he had nearest to heart was to re-establish the ancient authority of the city of Rome under his care and by his influence"
– Einhard, Life of Charlemagne

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What's the historical significance, legacy of Charlemagne, 768-814?

- **"Father of Europe" – King of the Franks, King of the Lombards, "Holy" Roman Emperor**
- **"Second Rome" at Aachen**
- **"Holy" Roman Emperor** crowned by Pope Leo III in 800; "New Constantine"
    - "Renovatio Imperii Romani" or "renewal of the Roman Empire" in learning, ecclesiastical administration, art, and architecture
- **Carolingian Renaissance**: education, monastic reform under Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin

How did Carolingian artists respond to transformation of Frankish kingdom to Holy Roman Empire?

- Royal abbey at Lorsch, "triumphal arch" gateway, c. 780
- Gundohinus Gospels, Christ in Glory, 755
- Godescalc Gospels, Aachen, c. 781
    - Earliest manuscript commissioned by Charlemagne to commemorate his march to Rome, meeting with Pope Adrian I, and baptism of son Pepin
- Coronation Gospels, Aachen, 795
    - According to legend, discovered in Charlemagne's tomb, St. John the Evangelist
- Palace Chapel at Aachen, 792-805; consecrated in 805 by Pope Leo III
    - Inspired by Byzantine Emperor Justinian I's 6th c. San Vitale in Ravenna
        - Spolia from Rome and Ravenna
        - Site for consecration of subsequent Holy Roman Emperors (until 16th c)
        - Charlemagne's burial chapel
- West vs. East: Three separate cultures: Catholic Western Europe, Orthodox Byzantium, Islam
    - Charlemagne's Libri Carolini (790s) vs. Byzantine iconoclasm (breaking of images)

The "Carolingian Renaissance": Alcuin of York (782-796) "The most learned man anywhere to be found"

- Celtic Ireland & Northumbria; Anglo-Saxon England
    - Celtic Tara Brooch, 7-8th c.
    - Sutton Hoo treasure, 7th c.
- Book of Kells, Iona, c.800
- Lindisfarne Gospels, Northumbria, c.720
- Cf. Germanic motifs in Charlemagne's Godescalc Gospels and Coronation Gospels
- Leiden Aratea, c, 830, copy of 1st c. astronomical poem and illustrations
- Moutier Grandval Bible, from Alcuin's monastery of St. Martin's, Tours, 830
    - Alcuin's corrected Vulgate Bible
    - Caroline minuscule

Charlemagne's Legacy: Holy Roman Empire, Art and Architecture

- The German Holy Roman Empire: Ottonians (919-1023) – Otto I, Otto II, Otto III
    - Otto II married Byzantine princes Theophanu
- Gospel Book of Otto III (Emperor 996-1002), Benedictine monastery of Reichenau, c. 1000
    - "Liuthar Group" of manuscript: Liuthar artist? scribe?

        - Gospel cover with Byzantine ivory
    - St. Michael's, Hildesheim, c. 1022, Bishop Bernward; cf. early Christian Roman basilica
        - Column of Bernward, c. 1015; cf. Column of Trajan, Rome, c. 113
        - Bronze doors, 1015
    - Gero Crucifix, Cologne, 970

Suggested reading:

- https://smarthistory.org/palatine-chapel-aachen/ + other topics
- https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2020/09/24/roman-empire-no-barbarians-necessary/
  Peter Brown review: NYReview of Books, September 24, 2020:
    - **Judith Herrin, The Formation of Christendom, 1989**
        - **Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe, 2020**
    - **The Tragedy of Empire: From Constantine to the Destruction of Roman Italy** by Michael Kulikowski – "the Western Empire was trashed by its own top brass. Civil war alone caused its fall." (not barbarian invasions)
    - **Escape from Rome: The Failure of Empire and the Road to Prosperity** by Walter Scheidel -- "The best thing that Rome ever did for Europe was to die and not return."
    - **King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne** by Janet L. Nelson – "profound change in the centuries between the years 500 and 800;" "strangeness;" "It was a world of high rituals in which the sacred struck sparks on contact with the profane." "Heaven and earth were brought together through rituals that covered everything from the anointing of rulers to the blessing of spoons at the table."