

Welcome!



Crypt and Imperial Tombs at Speyer Cathedral

www.dom-zu-speyer.de



I. The **Crypt** of the Speyer Cathedral

Dear Visitors,

You have descended to the crypt of Speyer Cathedral, one of the largest and most beautiful crypts in Christendom. The German poet, Reinhold Schneider, described this crypt, with its neighbouring burial place of the kings and emperors of the Middle Ages, as 'the most sublime monument on German ground.' In its symmetrical and clear structure, the crypt is a symbol of the Divine Order. The architect wanted to create a space that tells of God, a place which is like Him, for God created the cosmos out of the chaos, order out of disorder.

We are glad you can experience the atmosphere of this extraordinary place, while you search, perhaps, for a moment of reflection or prayer.

The Chapter of Speyer Cathedral



In the history of architecture, the crypt of the Speyer Cathedral is considered the culmination of the Middle Ages. Its design and harmony are remarkable. It is **the largest Romanesque crypt in the world**, built in the form of a hall. The crypt has a width of 35 meter and a length of 46 meter. The vault has the enormous height of 7 meter.

The crypt consists of four rooms, situated beneath the choir, the crossing and the transepts. The centre, under the crossing, is a square room, divided into $3 \times 3 = 9$ bays. This construction is emphasised by the vaults of the ceiling, with their alternating bands of red and yellow sandstone. On the northern and southern side of this central room beneath the transepts, separated by mighty pillars, you will find rooms with the same measurements. On the eastern side, under the cathedral's choir, there is another room which ends with an apse. **This is the oldest part of the cathedral.** It was here that construction began.



II. The Interior of the Crypt



What is a Crypt?

The word 'crypt' is derived from the Greek 'kryptein' and means 'something hidden' (like the German word 'Gruft' - 'place of tombs'). Indeed, the early Christian subterranean cemeteries outside the walls of ancient Rome, are thought to be the predecessors of crypts. Churches were built over some of them; for example, St Peter's in Rome was built over the Apostle Peter's tomb. The wish to be near to the bones of the saints - their relics - and to venerate them was the origin of crypts - a floor beneath the choir of the church with the saint's tomb in the centre. We do not know if the imperial patrons of the Speyer Cathedral planned to obtain any particular relics for this crypt but there is no tomb of a saint in it today.

From the beginning the crypt was used as a chapel, **a place of worship**. In the Middle Ages, up to seventy clerics worked at the cathedral, many of them priests, who were obliged to celebrate mass daily. The crypt therefore contains seven altars, the main altar **1** in the east and three altars **2** - **7** in each transept. Even today, Holy Mass is celebrated at the main altar on special occasions.

The great baptismal font **8** in the choir of the crypt is particularly remarkable. Hewn from one stone, it has a square base and is semicircular on each side. It is said to be the oldest Romanesque baptismal font north of the Alps. In the apse of the crypt you can find two Wardens of the Holy Sepulchre **9** by Hans Seyfer, ca 1508.

The crypt also contains various graves and **works of art**. Two Romanesque lions from 1100 **10** were found during archeological excavations outside the cathedral. A floral relief **11** is probably a piece of the older church which had been standing at the same place before the imperial cathedral was erected. The bones that were found during the construction were buried in a collective grave **12** in the east of the apse.



III. Kings and Emperors



If you go westwards from the central crypt, through a great gate of wrought iron, and before you come to the burial place of the emperors and kings, you will find yourself in a room containing an epitaph of Rudolf von Habsburg, who died in 1291 ¹³. The representation of King Rudolf I is striking as it eschews presenting the sovereign as an idealised young man, depicting him as noticeably aged with individualised facial features. However, not all of its elements are in an original state. Investigations from 2020 revealed that the nose and chin, as well as the hands and part of the edges have been reworked. The question regarding the extent to which the epitaph can be said to be one of the earliest medieval portraits is impossible to answer; this stems from the lack of information regarding the actual appearance of the king portrayed. On the walls are two Gothic reliefs ¹⁴ with representations of the kings and emperors buried in the cathedral. They date from about 1480.

IV. The Tombs of the Emperors



For reasons of **reverence** please keep silent as you reach the tombs of the emperors and kings. The tombs had not been visible for centuries because the emperors had been buried at the east end of the nave, over which in later times the King's Choir had been built. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the burial place was excavated and today's access from the crypt was built.

In the Middle Ages, this burial place was at the end of the nave. Pillar bases ¹⁵ of two of the great pillars of the nave are visible on the right and left side of the wall. This means that the emperors were buried on the border between the "earthly" nave and the "heavenly" crossing and therefore at the border between life and death and eternal life.

Cathedral and Diocese Museum

Artifacts recovered from the graves of the sovereigns interred in Speyer Cathedral are on display at the Cathedral and Diocese Museum in the Historical Museum of the Palatinate. The burial crowns and accompanying grave objects are at the centre of an exhibition that addresses the history of both the cathedral and the diocese. Supplementing the precious sculptures, liturgical devices and vestments, are further objects drawn from twelve centuries of Christian art. The Historical Museum of the Palatinate is located only five minutes away from the cathedral.

www.museum.speyer.de



The Salian emperors wanted Speyer Cathedral to bear witness to the sacredness and continuity of the empire and the emperors' royal dignity. Loyal to this idea, all the Salian emperors and two empresses were buried here. For two hundred years after the Salian dynasty, members of the Hohenstaufen, Habsburg and Nassauer dynasties also chose the cathedral for their resting place. This makes it the most **important burial place** of kings and emperors in Germany, comparable to the burial places of kings in other European countries: Westminster Abbey in London, St Denis near Paris, or the Escorial near Madrid.



16 Emperor Conrad II † 1039, the first Salian emperor and founder of the cathedral is buried in the middle. When he was buried the cathedral was still a construction site. Therefore his coffin was secured with three iron bands to protect it against damage.

17 Empress Gisela † 1043, wife of Conrad, is said to have been a beautiful and intelligent counsellor to her husband.

18 Empress Bertha † 1087, first wife of Henry IV who stood faithfully by her husband during his feud with the pope.

19 Emperor Henry III † 1056, who supported the construction of the cathedral and made valuable endowments to its treasure.

20 Emperor Henry IV † 1106, who quarreled with the pope and was excommunicated. He was a child when the cathedral was consecrated in 1061. 20 years later he remodeled the cathedral almost completely to its present-day appearance.

21 Emperor Henry V † 1125, who forced his father to resign. He was the last of the Salian emperors, dying without an heir.

22 King Philip of Swabia † 1208 of the Staufer dynasty, son of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, was the first German king to be assassinated.

23 Empress Beatrix † 1184, wife of emperor Frederick Barbarossa, buried together with her little daughter Agnes.

24 Princess Agnes † 1184. The adjacent tomb to the left, the one in the middle, was probably constructed for Frederick Barbarossa but he drowned in 1190 in Asia Minor, during the Third Crusade, and was buried there.

25 King Rudolf of Habsburg † 1291, the first German king of the Habsburg dynasty. He played a vital role in raising the comital house to the rank of imperial princes.

26 King Albert of Austria † 1308, son of Rudolf of Habsburg, was murdered by his own nephew.

27 King Adolph of Nassau † 1298, who was elected as king instead of Albert, was killed at the Battle on Hasenbühl in 1298.

28 Bishops of the Diocese Speyer from the 11th, 12th and 13th century.

29 Bishop Konrad III of Scharfenberg † 1224, also chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire.

30 Various bones and grave findings which are too confused by the ravages of time to be identified with anyone in particular.

31 Bishop Reginald II of Dillingen † 1039, one of the architects of the cathedral and revered as a saint.



At the end of your visit to the Crypt and the Tombs of the Emperors,

*we invite you to remain in a moment of silence and to pray for
those today who have responsibilities in politics, society and
for the peace in the world.*

*Almighty and eternal God,
you know the longings of men's hearts
and you protect their rights.
In your goodness, watch over those in authority,
so that people everywhere may enjoy freedom,
security, and peace.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.*

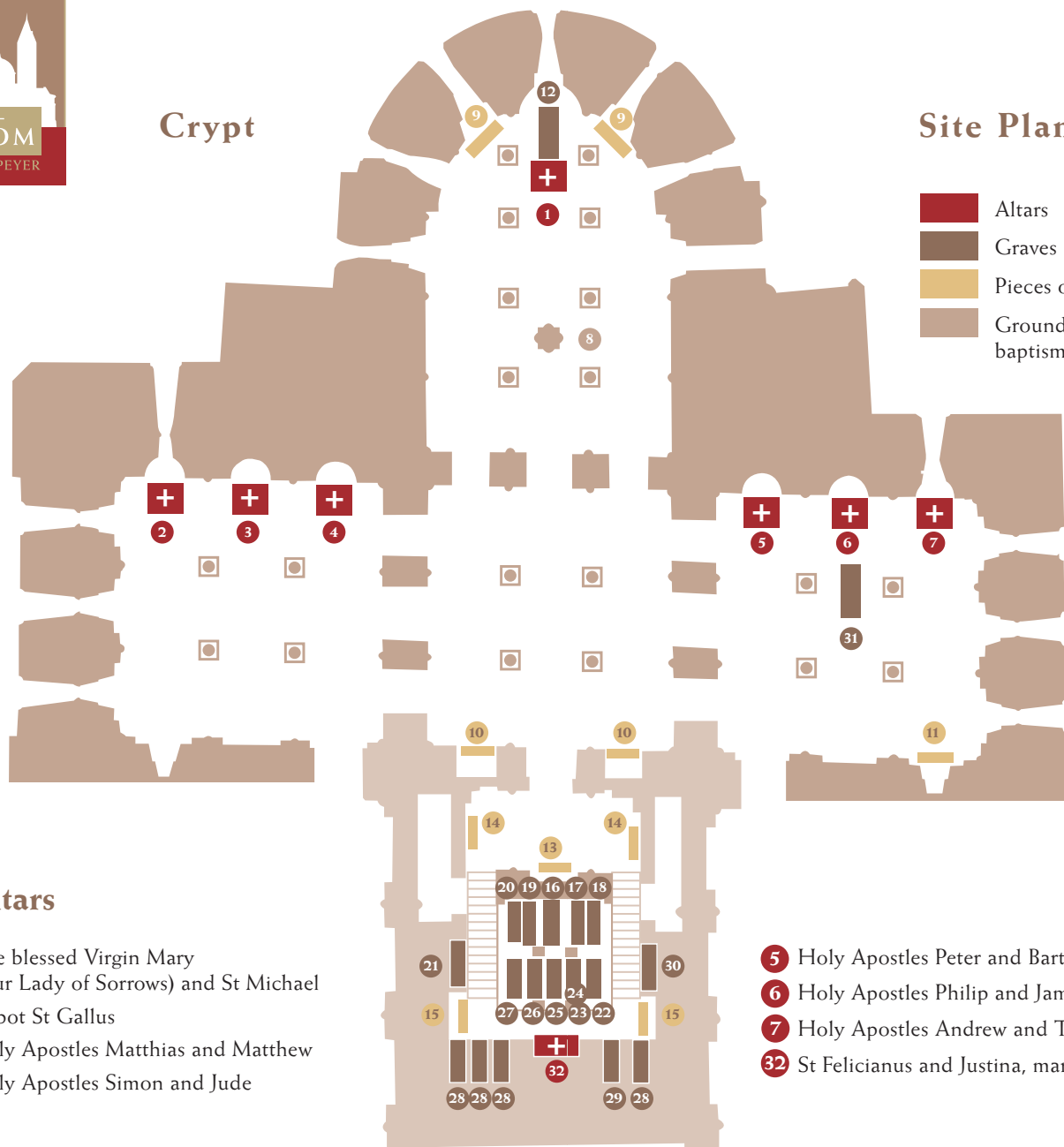
(from the Roman Missal)



Crypt

Site Plan

- Altars
- Graves
- Pieces of Art
- Ground plan, baptismal



Altars

- 1 The blessed Virgin Mary (Our Lady of Sorrows) and St Michael
- 2 Abbot St Gallus
- 3 Holy Apostles Matthias and Matthew
- 4 Holy Apostles Simon and Jude

- 5 Holy Apostles Peter and Bartholomew
- 6 Holy Apostles Philip and James
- 7 Holy Apostles Andrew and Thomas
- 32 St Felicianus and Justina, martyrs



1000 years and more

The Crypt of the Speyer cathedral was consecrated in 1041.

Your entrance fee helps us to preserve this building that is now almost a thousand years old. We want to thank you for your visit and your support. We hope to welcome you again, as well as your children, and grandchildren. To stay in touch, please visit our website

www.dom-zu-speyer.de



Editor

Chapter of Speyer Cathedral
Custos of the Cathedral

Photos

pages 1-5

pages 6+7

pages 8

pages 9

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