For over five centuries, the Carolingian, Ottonian, Salian, and Hohenstaufen dynasties shaped the fate of half of Europe. Amidst the tension between powerful archbishops and burgeoning princes, they laid the foundations for a new European order.

In the grand state exhibition “The emperors and the pillars of their power” at the Mainz State Museum, we take you along on a journey back to the Middle Ages. Experience the battle for power and privileges, ecclesiastical rituals and chivalry, all the way to the growing influence of cities and princes.
The grand state exhibition shows the golden age of the medieval emperors and the foundations of their power with outstanding loans from across Europe and impressive samples from the archives of the GDKE directorates. Unique testimonies paint a vivid picture of the power and charisma of imperial authority. Wonderful illustrations and precious robes will be on display, as well as imperial and episcopal insignias of power.

**EUROPE, THE CENTRE AT THE RHINE RIVER AND THE MAGNITUDE OF THE EMPIRE**

On Christmas Day in 800 A.D., Charlemagne was crowned the first emperor of the Middle Ages at Saint Peter’s Basilica in the Holy City of Rome. With that, he became patron of large parts of Europe and at the same time established a new European order, which determined the direction of both politics and society for many centuries to come.

Though Aachen is most often associated with Charlemagne, he had, in fact, concentrated the centre of his power in the region between Ingelheim and Worms for quite some time. Aachen, where he spent the rest of his days, only later played a major role in the life of Charlemagne, who by that time was already known as the Father of Europe. And while the unique imperial palace arose in Ingelheim, Mainz became the ecclesiastical centre in the eastern half of the empire. It was, as chronicler Otto von Freising stated as early as the 12th century, the area where the “empire’s greatest power” was concentrated.

In addition to the exhibition, travel recommendations to original locations are planned as well.

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KINGMAKERS, MAINZ CATHEDRALS AND THE RITUALS OF POWER

In the Middle Ages, the emperor was regarded as the protector of large parts of Europe and Christianity itself, made evident by the ritual act of the anointment. The archbishops of Mainz claimed the right to anoint kings and thus the future emperors for themselves – manifested by a ceremony held at the Old Cathedral in Mainz.

Here, the royal coronations were held in 1002 and 1024, followed by others (1077, 1198 and 1212) in the New Cathedral. In the era of Archbishop Willigis, Mainz became the “Golden City” (Aurea Moguntia). Willigis was granted supremacy over all the other bishops in ecclesiastical matters by Pope Benedict VII, which made him the second most powerful man after the Pope. The mighty bishops ascended to become important pillars for the emperors and formed the pillars of the empire and imperial power.

PRINCES, CITIES AND THE BIRTH OF THE SchUM-CITIES

During the times of the Carolingians, the Ottonians, the Saliens and Hohenstaufen, the ecclesiastical centres had become powerful urban communities. Craftsmen, traders and merchants developed new forms of social and political organisation. Many towns along the River Rhine were granted liberties and privileges by emperors, kings as well as their episcopal masters.

The Jewish communities played a prominent role in this process. In Speyer, Worms and Mainz, Talmud schools developed that were highly respected throughout Europe. Under the name “SchUM” (SChpira, Uormatia and Magenza) the three cities became the highest authority for religious, cultic and legal matters in Ashkenazi Judaism. With their Jewish centres, Speyer, Worms, and Mainz were considered the “cradle of scholarship” for centuries. The Jewish communities built synagogues and mikvot here, which pointed the way ahead for Central and Eastern Europe.

PRINCES, KNIGHTS AND THE EMPIRE’S REORGANISATION

When the emperors’ authority began to fade in the 12th century, Frederick Barbarossa attempted to revive the old splendour once again. At the famous “diet of Penta-cost” in Mainz in 1184, he took the lead in a new courtly movement: Colourfulness, joie de vivre, chivalry, and a sense of duty would now determine the attitude towards life.

But after Henry IV’s “Walk to Canossa” (1077) and Barba-rossa’s submission in 1177 – the emperors had been signifi-cantly weakened. A new world was about to emerge, the time of cities and principalities.

THE LAST OF THE HOHENSTAUFEN, HERETIC AND GREATEST AMONG THE PRINCES ON EARTH

Frederick II, the last of the Hohenstaufen emperors, had to make numerous concessions to the imperial princes. In August 1235, Frederick and his princes proclaimed the “Mainz peace treaty” at a magnificent diet in Mainz. This led to a restructuring of the imperial court of justice.

Papal propaganda later demonised Frederick as, among other things, a church persecutor and heretic. By his followers, however, Frederick was considered the “greatest among the princes on earth”. Frederick II goes down in history as the last representative of German imperial glory. Soon after a new era began with the supremacy of the prince-electors and princes in many smaller territories, which was at the same time the basis of federalism, with visible signs of the new urban order of life and society that marked the beginning of our democratic development.
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