The Copy and Competition

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The Copy of an Empire? Charlemagne, the Carolingian Renaissance, and Early Medieval Perceptions of Late Antiquity

Abstract   The term "Carolingian Renaissance" was coined by the French historian Jean-Jacques Ampère in 1830, but its wide-spread use goes back to his Austrian colleague Erna Patzelt and her essay "Die karolingische Renaissance" written in 1924. Since that time, it has served as an icon for the cultural revival in early-medieval times and has been heavily utilized by historians, art historians, and archaeologists. Based on passages from Carolingian key authors like Alcuin and Einhard, who praised their emperor for his revival of antique laws, customs, and building traditions, it is believed that ninth-century Frankish society made large-scale investments in the creation of copies of antique art and architecture. A topic hitherto unresearched is the question of a Carolingian concept of copies. How were (late) antique art and architecture perceived in the ninth century? Were they understood as "heritage", as a reminder of a glorious past worth copying? The *Marienkirche* in Aachen is often interpreted as a Frankish attempt to establish equality between the "old" eastern and "new" (recreated) western emperor by architectural means, its main instrument being copying existing imperial architecture. But how much of sixth century Ravenna was needed as inspiration for ninth-century Aachen?

Keywords   Carolingian Renaissance, Charlemagne, late antiquity, palatial architecture, copies of ancient art

Within the systematic study of the Early Middle Ages, the Carolingian Renaissance is one of the topics that has received extensive and widespread attention and has been the focus of intensive debates by historians, art historians, and archaeologists for more than a century. The fascination this particular subject holds is not only illustrated by the large scope of monographs and articles related to it, but also by grand exhibitions attended by a broad audience. The 2014 exhibition on Charlemagne, which was staged in Aachen on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of the great Frankish ruler, was only one of many that took place within recent decades.[1] The tenor of both the scientific research and the public display of such exhibits is usually the same: Charlemagne is depicted as the most important of all early-medieval rulers, the one man who (with some help from the most prominent intellectuals of his time) brought back the somehow lost chief achievements of antique art and science, thus founding the culture of the European Middle Ages. In a cultural—but also political—way, he is deemed the *Pater Europae*. This alone should be sufficient to justify another re-examination of the Carolingian Renaissance, but in the context of the workshop "The Transformative Power of the Copy," upon which the present volume has been based, there is even more need, since "copies" seem to act as the basis of this particular Renaissance.

Did the Carolingians create their new Roman Empire by means of copying material objects? The use of the term "Renaissance" seems to indicate this—at least if that term is understood in the way Giorgio Vasari, the Italian painter, architect, and writer coined it in 1550. His definition is usually closely tied to the fields of art and art history, but since the term is also used in archaeology, the question arises whether we—that is, archaeologists—should use it in the same way, too (as we currently do). This question is to some degree connected with different concepts of copies. These play a fundamental role when examining the question of what relevance such Renaissances—and copies—have for historical archaeology.[2] Archaeology seldom focuses on the Renaissance other than in a chronological way, since archaeologists believe that Renaissance itself does not affect their field of research. Renaissance only happens to other people, most of them being art historians. When asked about the fundamental changes Italy experienced in the Quattrocento, for example, an archaeologist might reply that, since the material culture from that century does not differ much from that of the fourteenth century, the period could hardly be argued as comprising the dawning of a new age. On the contrary, he or she will use the term and terminology introduced by Vasari without hesitation when applying it to different ages and/or examples. Historical archaeology is in fact full of Renaissance—that is "rebirths": there is Ottonian Renaissance,

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1   *Karl der Große—Charlemagne. Macht Kunst Schätze.* Aachen June 20–September 21, 2014.

2   "Historical archaeology" in the context of this paper means the study of material culture of all periods of human history that have also generated written sources.

Byzantine Renaissance, and Carolingian Renaissance. All these examples have a certain concept in common—the "rebirth" of an age, a culture, or a political system, that somehow got lost—and they all belong to a period that, according to Vasari, certainly could not be connected to his understanding of Renaissance because they belong to the dark "Middle Ages" that lay between the glorious epoch of antiquity and the beginning of the Quattrocento. Also the idea that copying certain objects, like pieces of art, played an important role in all these different rebirths is widely accepted in Archaeology. The aim of this essay is to analyze one of these examples and the role copies might have played in this context.

Shortly after Vasari's term "Renaissance" was adopted by French and German art historians in the first half of the nineteenth century, its usage began to spread into neighbouring academic fields. Among the first to use the term in a modified way was French historian Jean-Jacques Ampère, who compared changes and developments in literature and fine art in the ninth century with those of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, thus forging the idea of a "Carolingian Renaissance."[3] Erna Patzelt's essay "Die karolingische Renaissance" (The Carolingian Renaissance) written a hundred years later marked the beginning of the wide-spread use of the term by historians and, eventually, by archaeologists despite the fact that Patzelt heavily criticized Ampère's views.[4]

Ever since, the so-called Carolingian Renaissance has served as an icon for cultural revival in early-medieval times and the term has been used by historians, art historians, and archaeologists alike. Its broad acceptance is based not only on observations made by Ampère and later colleagues, but also on authentic Carolingian texts written by the most famous and well-known authors of ninth-century Europe like Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, and especially Einhard, head of the so-called *Hofschule* and Charlemagne's biographer. These writers praised their imperial patron for reestablishing a Christian Roman Empire by reintroducing ancient laws and customs and by implementing a large-scale building program. The testimony of these written sources outlines a significant number of reforms Charlemagne imposed on his subsects and on his entire realm that culminated in a reenstatement of the Roman Empire with himself as the new (western) emperor.[5] By the end of the eighth century, despite all attempts by the Merovingian kings and their Carolingian successors to maintain a form of government that was ultimately based on Roman rule, the Roman Empire was considered to belong to an age that was long gone—hence the opportunity to reestablish this realm.[6]

However, ninth-century texts never speak of rebirth but of renovation: Einhard calls Charlemagne's rule *renovatio romani imperii*—the restoration

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3   Ampère 1839.
4   Patzelt 1924, 31.
5   Reudenbach 2009, 18–20.
6   Müller 2009, 192.

of the Roman Empire. By establishing this term, Einhard created a powerful vision and image of his era not only for his contemporaries but for all who subsequently studied the ninth century. Among others, Einhard specifies the physical means by which his imperial patron re-erected the Roman Empire: the building of churches, palaces, bridges, and even canals. The so-called *Paderborn epos*, composed around the year 800, goes even further and reports on Charlemagne reconstructing Rome itself— not actually in Rome, but in his new capital Aachen, which is referred to as *Roma Secunda*, the second Rome.

On the other hand, Einhard's chef-d'œuvre, the *Vita Karoli Magni*, is strangely full of coincidences: Charlemagne founds his beloved Aachen in the wilderness near a hot spring he accidently discovers. He never expected to become emperor and, while praying in Rome on Christmas day, was taken by surprise by the pope who wished to crown him. Naturally these anecdotes serve to underline Charlemagne's modesty—a key virtue in any medieval ruler. But still, Einhard leaves us with an ambivalent picture of his beloved patron: in all his life, Charlemagne prepares himself to become emperor, but the title becomes his by chance. However, other written sources and the remaining material of his age tell a different story: Charlemagne spent most of his life conquering much of the territories of the former Western Roman Empire and beyond. By uniting them under his rule, he created a powerbase equally strong to that of the eastern (Byzantine) emperors, who until then had successfully opposed all potential rivals to the title from the west. But commanding large armies and ruling vast territories alone was clearly not what made a "barbarian" king become a Roman emperor. Why indeed should he be attracted to such a position? At first glance, the benefits of the imperial crown may have been outweighed by the problems it created: the elevation above all other kings in western Europe stood against a confrontation with the other great empire on the continent. The Byzantine emperors would hardly welcome a new *augustus* in the West. Apart from this, there was further, surprising evidence to be considered: despite 300 years of disruption, the very idea of western imperial rule had survived.[7] Charlemagne did not want to become another "Byzantine" emperor—he instead based his legitimation as imperial ruler on the ancient city of Rome itself. This made him not "Roman emperor" but "emperor of the Romans"—a significant difference that was also stressed by all of his successors. This important detail should also be kept in mind when art and architecture of the Carolingian Renaissance are examined later in this paper: In terms of politcal ideology, Charlemagne's frame of reference should have been ancient Rome. Thus copying Roman art should provide the means of transporting his new status into Carolingian society.[8] Additionally, this new Roman Empire required an understanding with those who actually ruled the city of Rome, i.e. the popes. Support from

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7   Bullough 1999, 42.
8   Reudenbach 2009, 16.

the most important religious figure in the Latin West enabled the Frankish king to style himself as supreme Christian ruler.

In order to embody the idea of a western emperor, Charlemagne had to create objects that functioned as visible markers of his new position. The nature of these objects is thought to have already been predefined: In Roman times, the presence of imperial power was connected to certain places, monuments, and much circulating items that could serve as bearer of images and propaganda. Among these, coins were the most important. Coins issued by Charlemagne from 800 onwards are closely related to those of late antique emperors: both their images and inscriptions are very similar, though not identical.[9] Also, significant differences from contemporary Byzantine coins can be observed. Late antique or Byzantine coins were not copied, although this could have easily been done. Instead, Charlemagne's coinage appears as a mixture of features taken from various examples from the reign of Augustus to the end of the fourth century. Apart from coins, we know of no other non-artistic objects that were reintroduced during Charlemagne's reign as a display of the *renovato imperii*—ninth-century Frankish material culture differed strongly from Late Antiquity and no efforts were made to change this. Visualization of imperial power was limited to art and architecture and both seem to have been displayed only at his residences and partly at important monasteries.[10]

As a travelling king of the Early Middle Ages, Charlemagne had no capital to rule from. Power had to be exercised in person, by the ruler or by his appointed representative. Taxation, revolts, wars, and political crises—but also ecclesiastical matters—required the presence of the king/emperor in various parts of his vast realm. Also nearly all existing cities or rural estates lacked an infrastructure that could sustain the royal court permanently. The Merovingian kings had already adapted a system of geographical mobile rule based on royal palaces (*palatia*) and estates that could temporarily host their court. While, in the sixth century, most of these *palatia* were located in cities, the first half of the seventh century saw the rise of some rural places to full seats of power with architectural furnishings comparable to those of the city palaces.[11] This system was enhanced in Carolingian times and led to a diversity of *palatia*, some of which were used for a single purpose, like hunting.[12] Moreover, written sources show a clear increase in number of these sites from the middle of the eighth century onwards.[13] Knowledge about the Carolingian *palatia* and their Merovingian predecessors was, for a long time, almost entirely based on the testimony of written sources. Even today, nearly all of the sites in what is today Belgium and France have not been subject to archaeological research; for

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9   Reudenbach 2009, 20.
10   Reudenbach 2009, 24; Meckseper 2014, 160.
11   Renoux 2001, 29.
12   Zotz 1997, 100–101.
13   Zotz 2001, 17.

some even their exact location is still unknown.[14] This includes important places such as Attigny—according to written sources, one of the major power-centers from the seventh century onwards—and most of the *palatia* in the valleys of the Oise, Aisne, and Marne rivers. Only two exceptions are known: Qierzy and Samoussy were both briefly excavated by the German art historian Georg Weise, during the First World War. Weise worked under very difficult conditions (both sites were close to the front and partly used as army camps) and his brief publication of the results of his excavation is somewhat obscure and—concerning the overall layout of the *palatia*—inconclusive.[15] French archaeologists have rejected his work as being unscientific, but still refrain from carrying out their own fieldwork despite the fact that both sites (and probably many more, including Attigny) are easy accessible, since they were never built on after their destruction in the late ninth and tenth century. Only in St. Denis, a prominent monastery, have modern French excavations brought to light a building complex that might have served as a palace. In Germany, three important *palatia* have been excavated and studied in detail during recent decades: Aachen, Ingelheim, and Paderborn have all yielded many insights into Carolingian architecture.[16] In the Netherlands, the Valkhof palace in Nijmegen has been studied to some extent. Apart from written sources, all information about Frankish palaces comes from sites that were founded during the rule of Charlemagne. While our current understanding of these *palatia* is quite good, it remains impossible to compare their layout and architecture to older examples from Merovingian or early Carolingian times. As will be demonstrated later in this paper, the palaces of Charlemagne are often linked with other contemporary—and even older—residences outside the Frankish realm, but we know nothing about the already existing building traditions the ninth-century builders inherited from their predecessors of the sixth to eigth centuries. It is generally assumed that the Merovingian kings used late antique palaces that already existed in many cities in their kingdom, but here again, the archaeological sources are lacking. Despite large-scale excavations in the palaces of Cologne and Trier, very little is known about their early-medieval phases.[17] So the question whether the residences of Charlemagne represent a new type of architecture or follow older Frankish traditions remains unanswered. The same goes for comparisons with later Carolingian *palatia*. Under the rule of Charles the Bald, Quierzy, for example, is said to have been remodeled to serve as a substitute for Aachen (to which the western-Frankish kings no longer had access), and was even renamed "Caropolis," but unfortunately we know nothing about the physical appearance of this "city of Charlemagne."[18] This leaves

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14 Renoux 2001, 31.
15 Weise 1923.
16 Two more examples from Frankfurt and Zürich are known, but much less has been excavated from these sites.
17 Clemens 2001, 43.
18 Renoux 2001, 32.

for an analysis the three *palatia* founded under the rule of Charlemagne mentioned above; among them, Aachen is the most prominent and also the place which is said to have contained numerous copies, which shall be examined below.

The prominence of the Aachen *palatium* is based on three pieces of evidence:

1. Under the reign of Charlemagne, a new palace that subsequently served as his most favoured domicile was constructed. Towards the end of his reign in particular, he spent more time in Aachen than in any other *palatium*.
2. The resources committed to the erection of the *palatium* were immense; the new buildings had no parallels elsewhere in the Carolingian world.
3. The emperor died at Aachen and was buried in the palace church.

Einhard's descriptions of the palace and church have for a long time dominated our views about ninth-century Aachen. He and other authors write of a large *aula* and a palace church equipped with late antique *spoliae* columns that were brought from Ravenna together with a bronze statue showing Theoderic the Great on horseback. The presence of many distinguished objects of Roman art in Aachen even today seems to support Einhard's statement that the king (and later emperor) wanted to furnish his residence with everything that was expected to exist in an imperial capital. From this many scholars have drawn the conclusion that Charlemagne wanted Aachen, his *Roma Secunda*, his Rome north of the Alps to resemble—in a small way—Rome and Constantinople.[19] This view is based on statements from different texts that cannot necessarily be connected. First, the often expressed view that Charlemagne's residence was built according to some kind of predefined plan must be called into question. According to a letter from 787, Charlemagne asked Pope Hadrian I for permission to remove valuable *exempla* (marble floors, mosaics, and other marble furnishings) from palaces in Ravenna. It is thought that most of these materials came from the palace of Theoderic the Great, which can probably be identified with as a large building complex east of the church of Sant' Appollinare Nuove excavated by Corrado Ricci between 1907 and 1911.[20] It remains unclear whether these *spoliae* were brought to Aachen. Only much later did Einhard write that some columns (*columnas atque marmora*) used in the Aachen palace church had been obtained in Ravenna and Rome because they could not have been found elsewhere. The statue of Theoderic appears first in a description of Aachen written by Walahfried Strabo around 829. It was said to have been transferred from Ravenna, were there seem to have existed two such monuments, in 801.[21] Only the Paderborn epos calls Aachen Charlemagne's *Roma Secunda*. Other texts,

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19 Jacobsen 1994.
20 Porta 2003, 103.
21 Ranaldi and Novara 2014, 116.

and Einhard's *vita karoli magni* in particular, make no reference to the *renovatio* in connection with Aachen.[22]

Surprisingly (and despite some early excavations undertaken by Erich Schmidt in 1910–1911 in and around the palace church), all reconstructions of the buildings belonging to the Aachen *palatium* were until recently based on written sources and studies of the remaining architecture. Recent excavations, building surveys on the palace church (which today serves as cathedral), the remains of the *aula* (later incorporated into the medieval town hall), and a reexamination of the results of early fieldwork have produced an entirely new picture of this magnificent structure, thus challenging many old views. But some older positions have also been confirmed: According to written sources, the palace church was built between 796 and 804. This dating is also attested by dendrochronological data from the foundations (798±5° AD) and the ring armature beam of the dome (803±10° AD).[23] Roman *spolia* columns were used for the octagon of the interior; the capitals above are part Roman, part Carolingian copies, while the pilaster capitals from the façade are entirely works of the early ninth century.[24] Many pieces of architectural sculpture that have previously been regarded as original Roman objects can now be identified as works of the ninth century. They were worked from the same Lorraine limestone as the Roman specimens and their quality is surprisingly high: some pieces can be distinguished from works of the second or third centuries only by modern scientific analysis and the same is true for much of the bronze work. The five bronze doors of the palace church bear close resemblance to late antique works, like the door of the temple of Romulus on the *Forum Romanum*, but are also contemporary Carolingian works that were manufactured in Aachen, where a bronze heat was excavated close to the church[25] (fig. 1).

Many scholars have pointed out that the layout used for the Aachen palace church is very similar to well-known early Byzantine churches like San Vitale in Ravenna, the church of Sergios and Bacchus, and the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople or even the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or the early Islamic Dome of the Rock. All these buildings are centrally planned and domed chapels, but only San Vitale was actually visited by Charlemagne himself, while all other monuments were probably known only by accounts from embassies to foreign courts. Therefore Ravenna seems the most likely antetype to be copied by the Aachen palace church, but this view has recently been questioned. Although San Vitale and Aachen share many architectural features, the buildings themselves served different purposes.[26] While the Aachen church functioned as a palatine chapel, San Vitale was founded by bishops and never used by the Byzantine emperors,

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22 Meckseper 2014, 165.
23 Heckner 2012, 40; Müller et al. 2013, 151.
24 Schaab and Heckner 2012, 197–199.
25 Ristow 2012a.
26 Ranaldi and Novara 2014, 118.

Figure 1: Aachen. Carolingian Bronze Door of the Palatinate church.

despite the fact that emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora were pic-
tured on mosaics in the main apse. Even if Charlemagne himself admired
the building on the occasion of one of his visits to Ravenna, he certainly
would not have recognized the building as a palatine chapel. Also the
question remains as to why the emperor should have aimed to imitate a
church like San Vitale or even the Hagia Sophia that was closely connected
to his Byzantine rivals. Other examples for centrally-planned churches
were much closer at hand, like the late Merovingian church of St. Gereon
at Cologne.[27] This late antique building, which was probably converted
into a church by the sixth century, resembles the palace church in many

27 Müller et al. 2012, 233.

ways. The Aachen palatinate church clearly stands in the tradition of late antique domed buildings, but it was designed not as a copy of an existing church, but as an enhancement of a concept that had already existed for a long time.[28]

The second important structure within the Aachen *palatium* was an *aula* that very likelyprobably served as an audience and banquet hall. While we know nothing of its furnishings or internal construction, its overall layout has survived in the foundations and ground floor of the late medieval town hall. According to a recent building survey, the so-called *Granusturm*, a tower at the east end of the *aula*, served as a monumental staircase and likely connected three storeys. Large *aulae* are frequently known from late antique and early-medieval palaces. Indeed all other Carolingian *palatia* must have included such a building, as can be demonstrated by comparisons with Ingelheim and Paderborn. The palace *aula* of Trier, built in the beginning of the fourth century, has often been named as a prototype, but this building has much larger dimensions. Further, its condition during the ninth century is entirely unknown. By the eighth century, most late antique *aulae* within the Frankish realm were probably in ruins and therefore no longer in use.[29] Another source of inspiration might have come from contemporary residences outside of Charlemagne's kingdom: In Italy, the emperor himself visited the palaces of the newly-conquered Lombard kingdom shortly after 774 and—even more importantly—the residence of the popes in Rome. Here, he witnessed the large-scale remodeling of the Lateran Palace under the aegis of Leo III, including the erection of the famous *triclinium*, the appearance of which is unfortunately only conveyed in later descriptions.[30] Since both *aulae* were constructed at the same time, the Lateran *triclinium* could not have been a direct model for Aachen, but may have inspired Charlemagne to build something even lager for himself. In conclusion, the Aachen palace hall very likely imitated contemporary *aulae* instead of late Roman buildings. We know very little about other parts of the Aachen palace. The *aula* and church were connected by a covered walkway that was part of the original layout; a tower-like building in the middle of the walkway has, for a long time, been interpreted as a monumental entrance gate, but recent research has shown that it dates into the forth decade of the ninth century and never served as a gateway.[31] Its precise function—as well as the location of the imperial living quarters and other parts of the palace—remains unclear.Today, it is clear that, when the emperor died in 814, only the palace church and possibly the *aula* were finished, while much of the other buildings were erected later, or in some cases even earlier: One of the annex chapels flanking the palatine church

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28 Heckner 2014, 357.
29 Ley and Wietheger 2014, 241.
30 Luchterhandt 2014, 104.
31 Ristow 2012b, 2014.

Figure 2: Aachen. Bronze sculpture of a bear (?), now in atrium of the
cathedral, third century or eleventh century.

seems to have been erected in the middle of the eighth century, indicating
that Aachen was also of some importance to Charlemagne's predecessors.
Carolingian and later written sources refer to the existence of precious
works of ancient art that Charlemagne transferred to Aachen in order to
underline the status of his new capital—among them the abovementioned
statue of Theoderic which has not survived into later times. Two other
bronze sculptures—of a bear and a pine cone—that can still be found
in the entrance hall of the Aachen cathedral have often been attributed
to this group of artworks. The sculpture of the bear was for a long time
thought to depict a wolf and thus believed to have been transferred to
Aachen on behalf of Charlemagne in order to demonstrate his claim to a
second Rome (fig. 2). It was dated to Roman or even ancient Greek times,
but recent stylistic analyses claim that the work belongs to the eleventh
century.[32] Similar dates have been discussed concerning the bronze pine
cone, with its 129 perforated scales that would originally have served as a
waterspout on a fountain (fig. 3).

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32   Künzl 2002, 33; Maas 2013, 30.

Figure 3: Aachen. Bronze pine cone, probably dating to the eleventh century.

Since a similar bronze pine cone is know from an atrium of the Lateran in Rome, it might have been placed in the atrium of the Palatine chapel in Carolingian times. Still it bears an inscription that can be firmly dated to Ottonian times, indicating that it may have been transferred to Aachen much later than the reign of Charlemagne.

The long-favored concept of Aachen being Charlemagne's *Roma Secunda*, furnished with copies and originals of Roman art and copying ancient Roman palaces as a whole has already been questioned a decade ago.[33] In light of new research, this claim becomes even more unlikely. When Constantine the Great founded his new residence in Constantinople, he transferred numerous examples of ancient art to his capital, where they were then displayed. Whether Charlemagne had similar plans for Aachen, however, remains unknown. At least the statue of Theoderic shows that he considered the presence of large bronze sculpture a necessary component of a residence. This idea was probably not based on the assumption that this was a typical attribute of a Roman imperial palace, but was more likely influenced by contemporary examples: In the Lateran palace in Rome, there stood the statue of emperor Marcus Aurelius (then mistaken

33 Lobbedey 2003; Untermann 1999, 162; Untermann 2006, 123.

for Constantine the Great) before it was transferred to the Capitoline hill in the sixteenth century.[34] Again, this could have been an inspiration for Aachen, were the *palatium* was (in later Carolinigian written sources) also called "Lateran."

In conclusion, there is little remaining evidence to support the picture of Aachen as a second Rome modeled after Roman palaces. But then again, Aachen is not the only residence to discuss in this context. The Ingelheim *palatium* is claimed to be a much more accurate copy of late antique palaces, in contrast to Paderborn, which is seldom mentioned in the debate.[35] In recent times, Ingelheim has become the most widely-investigated Carolingian palace. Many new excavations have brought to light significant data that have improved the current state of research, although many results from older but also from most recent investigations remain unpublished. The basic layout of an *aula* in the west and a large *exedra* in the east seems to have been already established under the rule of Charlemagne, but many of the buildings were probably not finished until the time of Louis the Pius. The reason for this may be that, during the later years of his rule, Charlemagne concentrated on Aachen (he visited the place after long stays in 787–788 and only once more in 807), while his son stayed there on ten different occasions between 817 and 840.[36] The main difference between Aachen and Ingelheim is the absence of a distinguished palatine church. Despite the fact that Charlemagne and his successors attended many Easter and Christmas masses in Ingelheim, no large religious building is discernable from the interior of the palace complex. Only a small *trikonchos* in the middle of the compound can possibly be identified as a church, but its limited size would have made it unsuitable for offering mass to larger audiences. Given the fact that the Ingelheim *palatium* was a comparably large and magnificent building complex, the absence of a prominent church is quite surprising. In later times, under the rule of the Ottonian and Salian emperors, this shortcoming was adressed by the erection of a large church on the south wing of the compound. Recent excavations have shown that, in Carolingian times, the church of St. Remigius approximately one kilometer west of the palace may have been used as the palatinate chapel.[37]

The round towers in front of the palace façade were for a long time interpreted as elements of defense, but today it has become clear that the *palatium* was no fortress and the turrets might have only be used for decoration. Many other parts of the palace seem to bear close resemblance

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34 Ranaldi and Novara 2014, 116.
35 Despite our knowledge of this site, it is usually assumed that Paderborn was not built as a copy of Roman architecture, since in newly-conquered Saxony this reference could hardly be understood by Charlemagne's new subjects. The existence of monumental stone buildings in a landscape with an abundance of such constructions is thought to have been sufficient to impress the unruly Saxons (Gai 1999, 195).
36 Grewe 1999, 151.
37 Grewe 2014, 195.

to Roman palaces The *aula*, thought modest in its dimensions compared to Aachen or Trier, was furnished with an *opus-sectile* floor and decorated with wall paintings depicting biblical and Frankish kings, according to a description by Ermoldus Nigellus from the first half of the ninth century.[38] The *exedra*, with its *porticus* decorated with Roman *spoliae* columns and capitals and some pieces of Frankish architectural sculpture, appears to be a genuine copy of Roman architecture. But, then again, *exedrae* of this size in Roman palaces are unknown; the only direct comparisons can be found in Roman *forae*, notably the Traian Forum, in Rome.[39] In the context of early medieval architecture, it is a solitairy piece. Another very "Roman" feature was the construction of an aqueduct as a water supply for the palace. Its construction is unique for the seventh to tenth century and it clearly stands in a Roman tradition. Compared to Aachen, the reception of antiquity seems to have played a much larger part in the planning of the Ingelheim palace. But still, it was no copy of a Roman imperial palace. The recent excavator Holger Grewe called it a palace built from "ideas and material from antique buildings," that was combined with Carolingian innovative capacity.[40] This clearly marks Ingelheim as a genuine creation of the Carolingian period that is also demonstrated by the choice of its building plot: the site was "virgin" with no older representational architecture occupying that space prior and presumable only little Roman remains that could have used to compare the buildings of the "old" and the "new" Roman Empire.

In sum, it can be asserted that the *palatia* of Charlemagne—as we know them today—were not copies of Roman imperial palaces, nor were they meant to imitate them. As an increasing number of other scholars have recently detected, the builders of the Carolingian palace drew their inspiration from both late antique and contemporary architecture, thus creating something novel.[41] While the layout of single buildings may indeed have been inspired by older Roman architecture, the complex as a whole has no parallels elsewhere. Single parts of architectural sculptures are of a remarkably high quality that makes them nearly indistinguishable from older Roman works. The palaces at Ingelheim and Aachen cannot be compared to older imperial residences like Rome or Constantinople because of their different function and size. The Great Palace in the city of Constantine served as a permanent seat of government, while Carolingian *palatia*—like their Merovingian predecessors—were neither permanently in use nor did they predominantly function as government buildings. Charlemagne's main activities at these locations were bathing, hunting, and resting—in short: they were places of leisure. But since kings and emperors are never really absent from office, certain aspects of government were always

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38 Grewe 2001, 158.
39 Grewe 2014, 191.
40 Grewe 2014, 193–194.
41 Lobbedey 2003; Slot 2009.

included in their stays at these palaces. It also must have been clear to Charlemagne that he could have imitated Roman or Byzantine palaces, but that would never have been able to match their size.[42]

From the Upper Rhine Area comes another example of Carolingian architecture, which has for a long time served as a distinguished example of a ninth-century copy of classical Roman design: the so-called "Torhalle" (or entrance hall) of the Lorsch monastery, probalby erected under the reign of Charlemagne's son Louis the Pius, has often been compared to Roman triumphal arches, but this view was already been questioned some time ago.[43] The form of the basement with its three arches flanked by columns crowned by composite capitals is indeed reminiscent of classical Roman arches, but the upper floor with a room decorated with paintings that evoke associations of open, pavilion-like architecture clearly demonstrates that this building had a different meaning and served different functions[44] (figs. 4–5).

Again, the layout of the façade is unique and can only be compared with Merovingian and subsequent Carolingian architecture, but not with that of ancient Rome.[45] The primary function of this building remains unclear, but as its comparably low arches make it appear unsuitable for a ceremonial entrance monument; it may have served as a scene for judicature.[46] Still, Carolingian artists were familiar with the concept of triumphal arches, as can be illustrated by the so-called "Einhardsbogen," a now-lost silver miniature from the St. Servatius church treasury at Maastricht, its appearance conveyed in a seventeenth-century drawing. But even this small model arch is not a copy of a Roman monument, but rather an inventive combination of an antique example of architecture with contemporary religious iconography. Like that of the Lorsch "Torhalle," its original function remains unknown. Triumphal arches were hallmarks for the visualization of imperial power in antiquity, yet no Carolingian copy of them is known. The reason for this may lay in the fact that this type of monument lost its role in course of the sixth century. Beyond that time—with the exception of Byzantium—no triumphal processions including arches are known from written sources.

The examples of Carolingian architecture and art discussed in this paper are not very numerous, yet they represent ain large part of those buildings and objects on which the thesis of a *renovatio romani imperii* under the Rule of Charlemagne is usually based. Many of them have traditionally been understood as copies of Roman originals, but a closer look at these "copies" shows that neither Carolingian art nor architecture can be merely understood as replicas of antique examples. On the contrary,

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42 Ley and Wietheger 2014, 245.
43 Binding 1977, 289.
44 Untermann 2011, 201.
45 The earliest comparison of some details of its decoration can be found in the façade of the baptistery St. Jaen in Poitiers.
46 Untermann 2009, 137.

Figure 4: Lorsch. Limestone composite capital on the façade of the "Torhalle".

they appear to be genuine and innovative products of a period characterized by artistic traditions that were deeply rooted in Late Antiquity, but combined with an understanding of art and building traditions that were fundamentally different from those of their predecessors. In this context, copies played literally no role, because there was no Carolingian concept of copies. They are not mentioned anywhere in ninth-century texts. Instead, Einhard and his fellow authors often write about buildings erected under the reign of Charlemagne that are worthy of or appropriate for a Roman emperor but never comparable to already existing architecture. If a comparison to ancient buildings is made at all, it only serves to illustrate that the newly-erected monuments were superior in size, quality, and even beauty.[47] Likewise, we do not know if sculptures that appear to resemble

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47 Meckseper 2014, 166, 168.

Figure 5: Lorsch. Limestone capital on the façade of the "Torhalle".

older Roman art were perceived as copies in the sense that eighteenth or ninteenth-century art historians understood them. As stated above, most Carolingian objects of art and architecture were based on artistic traditions dating back to the Merovingian and Late Antique periods. Roman art from the second or fourth century was not perceived as "ancient" or even "more valuable" than contemporary art. It was simply part of the cultural framework of the ninth century and probably seen more as a quality standard that Carolingian artists tried to follow. In short, Charlemagne's *renevatio imperii* was an attempt to improve the current state of his realm by raising standards. It was not an attempt to revitalize the corpse of an empire fallen long ago by imitating its art and architecture. But such a futile undertaking is know from later times, when Eastern Frankish kings styled themselves as Roman emperors and, in turn, tried to revive the Carolingian Empire by copying its most prominent monument: Some eleventh century copies of the Aachen palace church have been identified, among them the church of *St. Pierre et St. Paul* at Ottmarsheim, which is a very accurate replica of Aachen, only on a slightly smaller scale.[48] But this is a different story of different copies.

In conclusion, it must be stated that the concept of a Carolingian Renaissance as it is currently used by many archaeologists, historians, and art historians is misleading, because it is based on the idea of objects and

48 Untermann 1999, 167.

architecture that are perceived as early medieval "copies" of Roman "originals". While the term certainly retains its usefulness when applied to Carolingian literature, archaeologists for example should refrain from using it, because such copies are entirely missing within the material culture of the ninth century. Also, this case demonstrates that "copying" terms and definitions coined by authors of neighbouring disciplines introduces a variety of dangers: many concepts are not transferable, since the nature of the studied sources simply differs too much. This seems especially true for the subjects of archaeology and history. In short, copying Renaissances can be seriously misleading!

Figures

Fig. 1:   Photo: Author.
Fig. 2:   Photo: Author.
Fig. 3:   Photo: Author.
Fig. 4:   Photo: Author.
Fig. 5:   Photo: Author.

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