

2-KORNELIMÜNSTER

Pilgrimages in the Rhineland

In the late Middle Ages, localities situated along the major pilgrimage routes, “peregrinationes maiores”, to Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela, and which themselves possessed holy relics of secondary value, began to develop as places of pilgrimage. One such locality was Aachen, on a par with the Maria Hermitage in Switzerland or Vézelay in Burgundy. By augmenting the degree of grace or indulgence they could offer, they drew more pilgrims. Already prior to the time of Charlemagne, the first pilgrims came to Aachen. In the Middle Ages, Aachen was considered the most important place of pilgrimage in the Germanic regions. Following a period of prohibition during the Enlightenment, pilgrimage picked up again in the 19th century. Noteworthy is the Aachener Pilgrimage of 1937 which, despite attempts by the Nazis to disrupt it, still managed to mobilise 800,000 pilgrims, under the leadership of future Cardinal Clemens August Graf von Galen, in a silent protest. In the Holy Year 2000, more than 90,000 pilgrims took part in the journey to Aachen. Other pilgrimage destinations in the Rhineland are Mönchengladbach and Kornelimünster. In addition, there is a pilgrimage every seven years to the tomb of Saint Servatius in neighbouring Maastricht. The next date for this is in 2018, which is also the year in which the oldest city in the Netherlands, together with other boroughs in the Euregio Maas-Rhein, is aiming to be chosen as European Capital of Culture.

Pilgrimage, motives with accents

To feel the nearness of God - this is the goal of many of those believers who travel to the world's great religious sites. There are annually about 40 million Christians who undertake a pilgrimage. To visit the places marked by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is sufficient motive for many to make a journey that is as difficult as it may be rewarding. But there are different kinds of pilgrimage, where the accent is placed on another kind of experience. The Germanic term “Wallfahrt” (Wandering) relates to those sacred undertakings whose purpose is to comprehend the historic spectrum of Christian experience through visiting the tombs of saints, holy icons, relics and associated objects, or places of miraculous apparition. Today, little difference is observed between the words “Wallfahrt” and Pilgrimage. In fact, the word “Pilgrim” comes from the Latin “per agere” meaning “to go abroad”, and suggests a longer journey than from Aachen to Kornelimünster. A pilgrimage is thus a longer, religiously motivated journey, in particular one undertaken for the sake of salvation. Three places of pilgrimage have drawn believers for centuries: Jerusalem since the 4th century when the Empress Helena visited the city of Jesus as its first named pilgrim. From the early centuries of Christendom, Rome has developed into an important place of pilgrimage, thanks to the presence of the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul. Since the 9th century, pilgrims have travelled to Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain to honour the remains of the Apostle James. According to legend, Charlemagne is said to have been one of the first pilgrims to make this journey.

Visiting the sacred relics in Kornelimünster

Three cloth relics form the sacred treasure of Kornelimünster, all associated with Christ: the Apron that Jesus wore to wash and dry the feet of his disciples, the Shroud in which His body was wrapped and the Face-cloth that, in accordance with Jewish funereal ritual, was wrapped around His head. The web site of the Catholic Church in Germany makes no claim for the authenticity of any of these relics. Their age and type of weave suggest origins in antiquity and the Mediterranean region. But for Heinrich Mussinghoff, Bishop of Aachen, authenticity is not as decisive a factor as belief: “For the one who gazes in a state of faith, the spiritual experience outweighs any other consideration.” All three cloth relics came originally from the treasures of Charlemagne, via his son and successor Ludwig the Pious, who granted them to Kornelimünster. The three sacred relics, like the four relics in Aachen, were formerly displayed to visitors once a year. Then a decree of 1349 set the biblical rhythm of every seven years. In 1790, they were shown for the last time as sacred possessions of the Benedictine Abbey in Kornelimünster, as four years later they were taken to Paderborn, to protect them from the advancing army of Napoleon. Thanks to the intercession of the first Bishop of the

newly created diocese of Aachen, Marc-Antoine Berdolet, they were brought back to Kornelimünster in the beginning of the 19th century. Since then, however, they are no longer under the aegis of the Cloister, but rather that of the Office of the Provost, which is responsible for the Pilgrimage. According to Provost Vinken, a regular pilgrimage to Kornelimünster was considered in the Middle Ages to be “an effective insurance against mad cow disease”, Cornelius, as his name suggests, being the patron saint of horned livestock, hence the presence of the horn in the town’s coat of arms. This association served, in turn, to increase the importance of the local cattle market.

A direct contact with Jesus

The relics are normally kept on display in their glass cases during the pilgrimage period, while the pilgrims file by. They are then moved individually centre-stage for some of the services and ceremonies. For Provost Ewald Vinken, this makes the public display of all three holy relics from the gallery, when the throng of visitors are gathered below, filling the entire Benediktusplatz and Korneliusmarkt, quite particularly exciting. He still remembers with a thrill the pilgrimage of 2007, which included a schools’ pilgrimage from all the diocesan schools in the region: early in the morning, the gathering, both spiritual and material, began to grow in St. Kornelius. Then the thousands of schoolchildren made their way on foot along the 10-kilometre path to the “Dom”, as the cathedral in Aachen is known. The 2014 pilgrimage takes place under the motto: “Go forth to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). The two week-long periods (21st to 29th June & 14th to 21st September 2014) will also be a Jubilee celebration of the 1200th Anniversary of the founding of the cloister on the river Inde. Already from 2012, the monastery will be offering diverse events in the run-up as it “prepares itself for its role of host in this traditional place of pilgrimage and as the place of worship that will minister to a host of pilgrims from far and near in a spirit of friendship and hospitality.”

The Cornelius Octave – insurance from the Middle Ages against sickness and hunger

Every year on the anniversary of the death of St Cornelius and Cyprian on 16th September, the Cornelius Octave begins in Kornelimünster. An “Octave” in catholic tradition is the period following a festival, up to and including its eighth or octave day. Several services are devoted to the sick in this period, as Cornelius has been understood since the 15th century to intercede for the ailing and in particular for those with mental illnesses. During the Octave, little loaves of unsalted Cornelius Bread are distributed. These are not really intended as food, but rather to assure the recipients, who keep them from one feast to the next, that they will never suffer from hunger. In earlier times, the pilgrims would be weighed and were then expected to donate their weight in grain, or its cash equivalent, for the preparation of Cornelius Bread. Thus, the fat and the wealthy were “taxed” somewhat more than their poor and meagre fellows.

Pilgrimage with the Vennbahn - good for restaurants, bad for hotels

For pilgrims, the arrival of the railway was a blessing, shortening and easing their journey. The “Royal Railway Directors” organised extra trains, such as the Pilgrim’s Specials, to give the rural population a chance to take part. These were announced in the local papers. The year 1888, three years after the opening of the Aachen – Monschau line, was once more a year of pilgrimage for Aachen and Kornelimünster and for the first time, pilgrims from the Monschau region would use the Vennbahn to get them there and back. On particular days, there were special trains from Bütgenbach to Kornelimünster or Aachen. The first trains left Monschau at 7:45, more pilgrims got on board in Lammersdorf. Just before 10:00, the Pilgrim Special pulled into the Aachener Hauptbahnhof. In the late afternoon, the journey homewards would begin, with trains arriving at 19:09 in Lammersdorf and 19:31 in Monschau. Restaurants and cafes were delighted with this situation. Kornelimünster station cafe, as well as a nearby brewery, flourished in the early years of the Vennbahn and even had to extend their premises. Signs hung in the back part of the garden to let the less wealthy visitors know that they could unpack their sandwiches there. A great hall had to be built at Kornelimünster station to manage the vast number of visitors during the pilgrimage periods. Even the toilets were proportionally dimensioned, as well as being tiled, which was a novelty in those parts at the time.

However, those offering overnight hostelry were less fortunate. Hotels were hard-hit by the new trend toward rail-passenger pilgrimage, now that pilgrims could travel back home on the same day.

Pilgrimage by bike?

Aachen was once an important staging-post on the great pilgrimage route from Trondheim in Norway to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Today, the European long-distance cycle track EuroVelo 3, the “Pilgrims Route” follows this historic path more or less for its entire length. The German section, the D-Route 7 of the national cycle-track network, comes from Bonn via Heimbach and Kornelimünster to Aachen then continues towards Liege. There are no records of the number of cyclists who also use this route to visit sacred sites in the region, although year-by-year, more pilgrims to Aachen are seen arriving by bike: “Often alone, in the ancient pilgrim tradition, but also in pairs or small private groups, the guests of the “Dom” increasingly roll up on their cycles. Many were previously in Kornelimünster – even outside the usual pilgrimage weeks – and then cycle on from Aachen to Maastricht, to visit the tomb of St Servatius,” says Jean-Claude Kall, who directs the “Aachener Domschweizer”, the “Swiss Guards” of Aachen’s cathedral treasury.

From former imperial abbey to today’s Benedictine Abbey of Kornelimünster

The cornerstone of Kornelimünster was laid in 814 by Ludwig the Pious, who was counsellor to Benedict of Aniane (750–821) at the time. Initially, it was known as the “Cloister of the Redeemer on the Inde” and honoured with three sacred relics of Christ from Aachen. Soon after, in 873, Charles the Bald, youngest son of Ludwig the Pious, exchanged half of the Sacred Shroud of Christ for the skull and arm bones of Pope Cornelius († 253). Thus, the patronage was changed and its name altered to “Kornelimünster”. Today, the official title is “Abtei der Heiligen Abt Benedikt von Aniane and Papst Kornelius” (Abbey of the Holy Abbot Benedict of Aniane and Pope Cornelius). The original Carolingian church, already extended to include a “Martyrium” for the relics, was replaced by Emperor Otto III in the 10th century with a triple-naved Romanic pillared Basilica. This was in turn destroyed in the 13th century, this time by citizens of Aachen, rebuilt in the gothic style and has not ceased to be added to and altered since. These almost 1200 years of stylistic diversity, including the addition of the octagonal Cornelius Chapel, built to a plan by the famous Aachen architect of the baroque period, Johann-Josef Couven, shows significant parallels to the Aachen Dom. Under Napoleon, the so-called “little Münster land” fell in 1802 to the French and the Abbey was dissolved by secularisation. It wasn’t until 1906 that the Benedictine order returned to Kornelimünster to reinvest their Abbey, but on a new site to the west of the town. The new brilliant white, abbey church was only erected after World War II. Yet, although it is a newly founded abbey, today’s community bears the same titles and honourable succession as the imperial abbey, as well as inheriting its coat of arms. As for the old abbey church, it is now the town’s parish church. The other late gothic and baroque buildings are the property of the Land of North-Rhine Westphalia, which has converted them into the renowned NRW Centre for Contemporary Art. To complete the family of churches, we should mention the old “Bergkirche” (mountain church) on the Osthang, with its Carolingian elements, as well as the “Hermit’s Chapel” (1658) in the Klauser forest to the north. Both edifices are set in the picturesque surroundings of the narrow Inde valley.

The Benedictines: Prayer and work, but also hospitality

The Benedictine order is understood to be the oldest Catholic order of monks. With the monasteries they founded in Stavelot-Malmedy and Prüm, the Benedictines contributed significantly to the evangelisation of the Eifel region. Their order was founded in the 6th century by Benedict of Nursia (480 - 547 today’s Norcia in Umbria), who originally drew up the Regula Benedicti - which rhythms to this day the life of the order named after him - for the abbey he founded in 529 near Montecassino. Since the Middle Ages, the Regula have been at the root of the “Ordo Sancti Benedicti”, whereas the motto “Ora et labora” (Pray and Work), erroneously attributed to Benedict of Nursia, only appeared towards the end of the 19th century. Benedict linked work with readings and thereby gave the day a clear structure. The Benedictine rule sees itself as a system of guidelines for those seeking to lead a life of cloistered devotion. Chapters 31 - 57 deal with the administration of the monastery, such as



service and care of the monks, the organisation of crafts and tasks performed by people from outside the order, but also with the treatment of guests and the role of the cloister as host. Hospitality is written large within the Benedictine order. Rule 53,1 obliges them to “receive all guests who come to the cloister as you would receive Christ himself, that He may one day say unto you: I came as a guest and you took me in.” The Abbey at Kornelimünster offers spiritual retreat days, or even weeks, to its guests. Beds are also readily available for those making a pilgrimage by bike.