While the first volume of this series was dominated by Aachen’s natural history and the archaeological remains of human habitation from the Celts, Romans, and Merovingian Franks, this second volume takes on a markedly different tone. Its overwhelming focus is the imperial palace complex (Pfalz/Aula Regia and Marienkirche) founded by Charlemagne and its longlasting impact on the shaping of Aachen’s urban history. Ranging from the first Carolingian wintering in Aachen in 765 to the death of Lothar II in 1137, the person and myth of Charlemagne serve as the organizing principles of the volume. Indeed, a full 80% of this massive 583-page volume is dedicated to the Carolingian era, with only 112 pages allotted to Franz-Reiner Erkens (professor of medieval history, University of Passau) for his compact and well-written history of Aachen during both the Ottonian and Salian eras.

The primary reason for such an emphasis on the Carolingian era comes from the volume’s mode of production. The Arbeitskreis Karolingisches Aachen under the chairmanship of Bernhard Steinauer (Chair of Highway Engineering, Earthworks and Tunnel Construction and Director of the Institute of Road and Traffic Engineering, Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen) wrote the majority of this volume to serve as a Gesamtdarstellung of archaeological, architectural, literary, and historical sources in honor of the 1200th anniversary of Charlemagne’s death on 28 January 2014. Faculty from the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (Harald Müller, professor of medieval history; Judith Ley, professor of architectural history; Frank Pohle, junior professor of Rhine-Meuse regional history and culture), joined Andreas Schaub (Aachen’s municipal archaeologist since 2006) to produce the majority Carolingian section of the volume, with strong marginalia contributions by Sebastian Ristow (Privatdozent of archaeology, Universität zu Köln).

The volume reads more like a series of encyclopedia entries than a true Gesamtdarstellung, which should be expected from a team project in which sections by Müller, Ley, Pohle, and Schaub are serially juxtaposed. And its strength is understandably in architecture and archaeology, while the literary and historical sources are described but not mined much for their value. Yet the interdisciplinary spirit of the

1 The triple exhibitions of art and architecture entitled »Karl der Große – Charlemagne: Macht, Kunst, Schätze« commemorate the life and legend of Charlemagne on this anniversary in Aachen from 20 June to 21 September 2014: (1) Places of Power in the coronation room of the Town Hall, (2) The Art of Charlemagne in the Charlemagne Centre, and (3) Lost Treasures in the Cathedral Treasury.
enterprise is maintained, with technical aspects of architecture and archaeology predominating however over the comparable corpus of surviving literary sources for this almost 400-year period. The literary and cultural aspects of the Carolingian court are treated in a supplementary fashion by the separate 51-page article on intellectual life during the 40-year period 794-834. Given this format, the volume will prove more useful as a reference work than as a literary read.

But it is a very valuable reference volume in its own right. Though it represents more of a compendium of previous scholarship, there is nothing even comparable as a summation of said scholarship on Carolingian Aachen. Beginning with a listing of available historical sources (imperial annals, biographies, charters, capitularies, literary sources), the opening section provides a standard political history in which Aachen’s distinctive as a permanent residence for the imperial court emerged from an age of perambulatory kingship. The personal preferences of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious weigh heaviest in this transition, though the strategic pull of the empire’s epicenter east and south made Aachen a proper location as well. In time the Aachen Pfalz complex would become the administrative center of the empire, the burial site for Charlemagne, and the coronation site for 30 future monarchs from Otto I (936) to Ferdinand I (1531). Such an historical trajectory assured that the Pfalz would overshadow the vicus in development and importance for many centuries. There follows then an interesting interlude concerning the history of archaeological study in Aachen from Otto III’s opening of Charlemagne’s tomb in 1000 down to the 20th-century travails entailed in moving the city from the periodic projects of the Dombaumeister and Stadtions to a permanent municipal archaeologist in collaboration with the architectural faculty at the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule in 2006. Indeed, this very volume is offered as a testament to the fruitful collaboration of archaeologist and architectural faculty.

The volume continues thereafter with an excursus on Carolingian literary sources, none of which shed much light on Aachen’s municipal history beyond the imperial court. The debate regarding whether or not Charlemagne developed Aachen in imitation of Rome (Roma secunda) is left unresolved, as any analysis of material and literary evidence still requires interpretation of the emperor’s intentions. The narrative moves on from Pippin’s first wintering in Aachen in 765–766 into a consideration of the pre-Carolingian Pfalz and its continuities from the Roman spa town and Merovingian village based on recent archaeological work (such as evidence of late Roman fortifications, Ostrogothic coins, and Merovingian-era graves in the area of the future Marienkirche). Though much still remains to be excavated (especially in the market hill area) it is clear that the Pfalz complex was built up by the Carolingians, but they did not thereby re-establish the villa Aquis from scratch. The lordship structure in Aachen is pure speculation until Charlemagne’s decision to settle down there, when textual references to the villa and the palatia begin to overlap by the late 8th century. From 794–795 onward Charlemagne spent 17 of the next 20 winters (from Christmas to Easter) in Aachen as his settled residence in the heart of the Rhine-Meuse zone. One could say that Aachen enabled a Rhine-Regensburg-Rome radius more conducive to imperial expansion than afforded by an imperial residence in the western Frankish territories. The Pfalz at Aachen soon became
the site for large aristocratic conferences, theological disputations on the trinity and creation, imperial capitularies, and embassies from as far away as Barcelona, Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Baghdad. Much is said here of Abul Abbas, though no mention is made that the elephant does not appear in Abbasid records.

Not until page 83 does the narrative on the Aachen Pfalz break for consideration of the early villa, which is itself embedded in a larger delineation of the royal fiscal and the diocesan parish structure. The »Brevium exempla ad describendas res ecclesiasticas et fiscales« serves us well in describing ecclesiastical and royal properties, but provides next to nothing about the history of the vicus, whose jurisdiction was eventually fragmented by the new immunities granted to the royal abbeys of Burtscheid and Kornelimünster and the royal foundation of St. Adalbert. In sum, very little has been learned about the Carolingian history of the town settlement in Aachen.

Pages 93–273 comprise the masterpiece portion of the volume, as the political narrative breaks off with a massive, extended study of the palace grounds of Aachen. The history, surviving foundations, phases of construction, functions, geometrical designs, prototypes, and creative reconstructions of both the royal palace hall as well as the Marienkirche are thoroughly presented, complete with excellent color and black and white photographs as well as sophisticated diagrams and sketches. The RWTH working group did its best work in this section, and it will serve as an unrivaled summary of what is known about the Carolingian Pfalz and the Marienkirche through 2014.

The remainder of the volume’s sizeable Carolingian portion concludes with a political survey of the era of Louis the Pious and the gradual abandonment of Aachen after 822 in the face of a fragmented empire in which the Pfalz played a diminished role as a border town of the Lotharingian Middle Kingdom. The arrival of the Normans in the 880s brings down the curtain on the political narrative. In summary, readers are presented with four phases in the history of Carolingian Aachen: (1) the emergence of the royal palace from one among many to the preferred permanent royal residence, (2) the era from 806–822 as sedes primae Franciae (according to Nithard) complete with a resident imperial court, (3) decline in importance after 822 given the return to perambulatory kingship and polycentric lordship, and (4) a thoroughgoing geographical and political marginalization of Aachen through the division of the Carolingian empire. Again, Charlemagne and Louis the Pious stand out as the driving forces behind Aachen’s temporary status as the center of the empire, the only lasting compensation for which was the growing myth of the pater Europae fueled by the canons of the Marienkirche and focused on the grave of the great emperor.

Dietrich Lohrmann (retired professor of the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule) completes the volume’s Carolingian contents with his article summarizing the intellectual life of the Carolingian court. Lohrmann follows recent scholarship’s rejection of Bernhard Bischoff’s post-World War II orthodoxy that Charlemagne had rebuilt a new Europe after a time of collapse and did so on the foundation of classical and Christian antiquity essentially through the court school at Aachen. Drawing from the work of
Anglophone scholars Rosamund McKitterick and Donald Bullough, Lohrmann agrees that the forty-year period from Charlemagne to Louis the Pious was far too short to accomplish such a feat, though the collection and copying of manuscripts remains a profound contribution. Reims, Laon, Tours, Auxerre, and St. Gall as the greatest centers of learning were collectively much more important than the Aachen court in the Carolingian Renaissance. There is a lovely excursus at this point on court manuscripts with photos in exquisite color as well as black and white of such gems as Peter the Deacon’s biblical/grammatical commentary, Alcuin’s curriculum, Pliny’s »Natural History«, Lucretius’ »De rerum natura« (giving the lie to Stephen Greenblatt’s »Swerve«), Horace’s »Ars poetica« (the oldest surviving manuscript), and illuminated Gospels. These images alone are sure evidence of Aachen’s key role in the history of the Carolingian Renaissance.

Franz-Reiner Erkens’ necessarily concise yet cogent and clearly focused essay on Aachen’s history between the Carolingian and Staufer dynasties rounds out the volume. Erkens avoids the rhetorical trap of serving as a codicil to a volume so dedicated to the Carolingians, and provides fresh themes for consideration that extend the Aachen story into the Ottonian and Salian eras. He deftly shows how the Ottonians coopted the Carolingian myth for their East Frankish-Saxon-German kingdom, along with the western European tradition of anointment, to bolster the sacral character of Saxon kings as God’s representatives on earth. Indeed, Otto I wore Frankish clothing at his royal coronation in Aachen (Erkens does not mention the historical irony of a Saxon so dressed as the heir of Charlemagne’s eastern realms). Of course the Ottonians were also emphasizing their claim to (lower) Lotharingia in all this Aachen-based ceremonial. Thus, as the Carolingians had coopted Aachen as their personal residence, so too the Ottonians transformed it into a sacred coronation capital of the German kingdom and a launching point for obtaining an imperial coronation in Rome. Critical to this combination of Aachen and Rome was the emerging privilege of the archbishops of Cologne to crown the new monarch in Aachen and bear the imperial office of archchancellor of Italy. Otto III’s brief reign at the turn of the millennium proved to be the crescendo to Ottonian reshaping of Aachen as a sacral topography of kingship: Charlemagne’s tomb was opened for relics, and all royal foundations were confirmed and resourced there. Color photos of Henry II’s ambo in the Marienkirche and Lothar’s cross are reminders of the Salian efforts at sustaining Aachen as an icon of sacral kingship before it ran into the buzz saw of the Investiture Conflict in 1076. As a sign of the disruption, Henry IV was so preoccupied by conflict that he did not return to Aachen until 1087 – and only then to crown his eldest son Conrad. Even an anti-Salian candidate for kingship like Lothar of Supplinburg wound up affirming the 1134 civic seal of Aachen complete with an enthroned Charlemagne, whose function as a Herrschaftszeichen remains fittingly disputed.

It should be quite clear by now that this volume is not a history of the vicus of Aachen but rather of the Pfalz complex there. Indeed it is fair to conclude that Aachen is historically virtually non-existent apart from the empire. Beyond the literary evidence of Ottonian and Salian ideological geography on the one hand, and the ecclesiastical parishes and immunities of the Marienkirche, Burtscheid Abbey, and St. Adalbert on
the other, we know virtually nothing about the daily administration and historical development of Aachen for the entire Ottonian-Salian period, as was the case in the Carolingian era. Yet there was indeed a vicus in Aachen during these centuries, a settlement of merchants and artisans to the north and west of the Pfalz-Marienkirche complex along today’s Jakobstraße-Großkölnstraße axis, whose market area served the needs of the Pfalz and church foundations beyond their own provisions from regional royal and ecclesiastical manors. And the vicus was likely functional during the majority of the Carolingian era, and most surely by the time coin minting recommenced in Aachen in the second quarter of the 11th century. This area would serve as the nucleus for urban development, with a royal Amtmann of some sort (actor, iudex) evidenced by the early 12th century. The royal Schultheiß (sclutetus) functioned as an estate manager (Gutsverwalter) well into the 13th century. Thus it appears that the German king remained the lord of Aachen, though the archbishops of Cologne (as dukes of lower Lotharingia and metropolitans all at once) made logistical use of the city without asserting thereby any claims to oversight authority.

But of communal structures, economic development, and constitutional powers we know nothing at all apart from scattered late 11th-century references to cives and to Henry IV’s mention of a toll in Aachen. So where were their dwellings, workshops, and sales stalls? What sort of urban life existed apart from imperial patronage and economic needs? The urban historian interested in these questions will be disappointed by this volume’s inability to speak to these questions, and can only hope that new archaeological discoveries will finally reveal this early urban history. Hopefully then the next volume in this municipal history series will assess Staufen economic policy regarding the town's development. In either case, this volume will more than suffice as a history of the Aquisgrani palatium though not of the aquis villa or urbs Aquensis. Future research and volumes in this series will no doubt continue the focus on the palace yet with a growing capacity to also focus on the town itself.