



CROSS OF MATHILDE

Essen, ca. 1051–54

Wood, gold, cast, embossed and gilt bronze,
enamel, gemstones, pearls

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The Cross of Mathilde commemorates the Abbess Mathilde (in office 971/73–1011), who is depicted on the rectangular enamel on the lower beam of the cross. The piece was probably made as a companion piece to the older Otto and Mathilde Cross.

The cross was likely made during the reign of the Abbess Theophanu (in office 1039–1058) at a local workshop in Essen. At this time, existing relics in Essen were placed within the cross: they were inscribed and wrapped in precious textiles.

The crucified body of Christ is hollow, and contains the relics of various saints. The precious relic cloths in which they are wrapped are thought to have come from Byzantium, prior to the 11th century.

The bundle in the lower part of the cross consists of purple taffeta, while the bundle in the upper part is made of white linen. The small cavity in the head of the crucified Christ also contains some loose threads and a piece of fabric.

The parchment strips enclosed within the cross were inscribed in Essen in the 10th or 11th century. They bear the names of the saints whose relics are held in the bundles.

These valuable textiles may have come to Essen as gifts or in a form of exchange.