



## CROSS OF OTTO AND MATHILDE

Trier (?), after 983

Wood, gold, embossed silver, enamel, filigree,  
gemstones, pearls

INV. 3

The Abbess Mathilde (in office 971/73–1011) probably donated this cross – the oldest of the four Essen crosses – in memory of her brother, Duke Otto of Swabia and Bavaria, who died in 982 while fighting in the Italian campaign of Emperor Otto II. The two siblings are depicted on the enamel plate on the lower beam of the cross.

The modern name of the cross makes reference to this enamel donor portrait. The exceptional enamels on the cross are among the best of the Ottonian period.

Mathilde and Otto are depicted wearing colourful robes with identical patterns, made from precious Byzantine silk, as was customary for costumes at court. The clothing emphasizes the siblings' secular status as members of the ruling family.

Silk was a precious luxury item at this time: until the later Middle Ages, the expensive and elaborate art of silk production was only known in eastern regions, including Byzantium. Silk production had not yet been mastered in what is now Europe.

The Cross of Otto and Mathilde is the oldest surviving example of a cross which is both a gemstone cross (encrusted with precious stones), representing Christ's resurrection, and a representation of the crucifixion, referring to Christ's sacrificial death.

The cross is considered to be a major work of Ottonian goldsmithery