

## Press release

# Start of construction in the Hohenzollern Crypt

**From 1 March 2020, Berlin Cathedral will close the gates to the Hohenzollern Crypt for two extensive construction and renovation projects, which are expected to last until spring 2023. The costs amount to a total of around 18 million EUR, with the Cathedral Parish covering 10%. The projects are supported by the Cornelsen Kulturstiftung, the federal state of Berlin via the joint task "Improvement of the regional infrastructure" (GRW) and the Commissioner for Culture and Media.**

With the two projects for the further development and the tourist infrastructure in the Hohenzollern Crypt, Berlin Cathedral and the private & public sponsors are taking responsibility for the condition of the historic burial ground. "The Cathedral Parish alone cannot manage such a big reconstruction project. We are therefore very grateful for the support", said the chairman of the Cathedral Church Collegium, Dr Stephan Harmening. "Our aim is to use both projects to transform the Hohenzollern Crypt into a dignified place of rest for the dead and an important place of remembrance of German history".

90 persons from the House of Hohenzollern including famous royals such as King Friedrich I, Queen Sophie-Charlotte, Queen Elisabeth Christine and the Great Elector Friedrich-Wilhelm are buried in the Hohenzollern Crypt. "With our projects", explains cathedral architect and project manager Sonja Tubbesing, "we are presenting the Hohenzollern Crypt as the most important dynastic burial site in Germany in a visible and tangible way, equalling the most important crypts in Europe such as the Capuchins' Crypt in Vienna". With its art-historically valuable coffins dating back five centuries, the crypt also represents a unique document of dynastic sepulchral culture in Germany. The Hohenzollern Crypt was opened to the public for the first time on 20th November 1999. In 2019 around 765,000 visitors from Germany and abroad visited the church and the burial place.

## Project 1 – Further development of the Hohenzollern Crypt

Before the Second World War, the original entrance to the Hohenzollern Crypt was through the Memorial Church (Denkmalskirche). In the conversion project, Berlin Cathedral is moving the entrance back near to this historic staircase. In future, visitors will be able to reach the Hohenzollern Crypt directly from the Sermon Church (Predigtkirche) via the north-east staircase. This has not only historical, but also liturgical reasons, explains the executive Cathedral Dean Michael Kösling: "As a church we have here a treasure that touches the existential dimension of humankind. The moment our visitors descend from the bright, colourful Sermon Church into the dark tomb, they will automatically pause for a moment. Such moments of rest, in which we humans are thrown back on ourselves – even if only for seconds – are particularly valuable for everyone".

In the Hohenzollern Crypt, visitors will first enter a new information area. This is a great place to see valuable burial objects, short animated films and an interactive tomb model. Visitors will be able to learn interesting facts about the history of the burial place, the Hohenzollern family and stories about the people buried in the crypt in the new room.

To protect the historically valuable sarcophagi, the Hohenzollern Crypt will now be equipped with air conditioning. In the past, humidity and temperature fluctuations had regularly led to the formation of mould and cracks on the coffins and the paint layers flaking away. The technology also improves the indoor air for visitors.

In addition, a new lighting concept is being developed in close cooperation with the Landesdenkmalamt (Monument Authority). The aim is to emphasise the room's atmosphere as a burial place through the careful use of lighting elements and at the same time to make niches, cross vaults and the entire room architecture visible. Visitors' attention should also be carefully drawn to coffin details of art-historical or historical significance such as fabric coverings, colours, gold plating, relief sculptures and decorations.

With the reconstruction, the Hohenzollern Crypt regains the historic coffin arrangement of a cemetery. The cloister in the middle of the crypt will be removed, and in the future the coffins will once again stand next to each other – similarly to how they were positioned before the war. A new altar and devotional area will be added in the east of the crypt, directly under the altar of the Sermon Church. This altar is clearly visible in Raschdorff's historical architectural drawings from imperial times and is now being realised for the first time.

**Financed by the Commissioner for Culture and Media, the Berlin Cathedral Parish and the Cornelsen Cultural Foundation.**

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## **Project 2 – Infrastructure and accessibility**

Cathedral and Hohenzollern Crypt will be barrier-free accessible from 2023. In the future, a freely usable elevator on the north side of the cathedral will bring people with limited mobility into the cathedral arcades. "We are particularly pleased that the cathedral steps will no longer be an obstacle for anyone after the renovation," says project manager Sonja Tubbesing. From the cathedral arcades, everyone will enter the cathedral via large gateways. In the building itself, an elevator will be installed parallel to the visitors' staircase in the south tower, which will extend from the crypt to the museum floor.

We are also enlarging the sanitary facilities in the basement of Berlin Cathedral and making them barrier-free, as well as the Cathedral Shop and Cathedral Café. In future, both areas will be more spacious, more visitor-friendly and become pleasant places for visitors to spend time after a tour of the cathedral. They are also accessible from the outside to visitors from the Humboldt Forum and the adjacent Museum Island, and complement the tourist attractions at Lustgarten.

**Funding by the federal state of Berlin via the joint task "Improvement of the regional infrastructure" (GRW) and the Berlin Cathedral Parish.**

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## General information on the history of the cathedral crypt

The history of the Hohenzollern Crypt, like the history of the cathedral itself, is characterised by relocations and demolitions. The crypt has its origins in the years following 1536, when Elector Joachim II designated the vaults under the former Dominican Church on Berlin's Schlossplatz as the burial place of his family. Around the year 1542 he transferred the bones of his father and grandfather to the new cathedral crypt.

Approximately 200 years later in the year 1747, Frederick the Great had the Dominican church including the crypt demolished and a new cathedral built at the other side of Lustgarten. (Berlin Cathedral and the Hohenzollern Crypt are still located here today). Between 25th and 31st December 1749, the coffins were transferred from the old to the new burial place, during which time some of the oldest coffins were lost. 51 coffins were reburied; the sarcophagi of the Electors Johann Cicero, Joachim I. and Joachim II. were not. Why these were lost is still a mystery today. Excavations at the Schlossplatz didn't lead to any further explanation either.

The new crypt under the cathedral at Lustgarten regularly suffered flooding during the following decades. During the last rebuilding of the cathedral under Julius Carl Raschdorff at the end of the 19th century, care was therefore taken to build the Hohenzollern Crypt 0.25 metres above the highest known groundwater level.

On 24th May 1944, a bomb hit the dome lantern of Berlin Cathedral and set it and the entire outer dome on fire. As the lantern construction's collapsed under its own weight it subsequently smashed the inner stone dome and fell into the Sermon Church where it smashed through the church floor before finally breaking open the precious coffins in the Hohenzollern Crypt. By the end of the Second World War, 25 percent of the Cathedral had been destroyed. In order for services of worship to be held at all, the Cathedral Parish partitioned off a section of the Hohenzollern Crypt beneath the Memorial Church, which was reasonably intact, and used this so-called 'Tomb Church' as a place of worship.

The reconstruction of the Berlin Cathedral and the Hohenzollern Crypt proved to be extremely difficult in the post-war years. The prospect of demolition, such as that suffered by the Berlin Schloss (Berlin Palace) in 1950, was never excluded. After lengthy and extensive negotiations, the Memorial Church (Denkmalskirche) – the northern wing of the cathedral – and the imperial underpass in the south were finally demolished in 1975. Reconstruction then began, which led to the rededication of Berlin Cathedral in 1993 and the opening of the Hohenzollern Crypt in 1999.