Art & Architecture of the Medieval Ages: The Romanesque & Gothic
Factors that led to the boom in construction of Churches in the Medieval ages

• The passing of the first Millennium - People’s fears and anticipation of the end of the world (Second Coming of Christ/Last Judgment/Apocalypse as described in the Book of Revelations) diminished after the world did not end after the year 1000 AD. There was a tremendous relief, joy and celebration resulting in the building of churches.

• Hundreds of churches in France and Italy had been burned down or destroyed during the raids of the barbarians. Churches needed to be rebuilt and needed to be fire-proof. The old wooden roofs were replaced with stone construction.
Romanesque Art & Architecture - 11th Century (1000’s A.D)

Background:

- Christianity triumphed throughout Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, the waves of invasions from Barbarian tribes and Islamic warriors.

- As people wandered across the land on pilgrimages and as a result of the Crusades (wars waged to win back Holy land from the Moslems), they brought various traditions to the art of the Romanesque period that was sacred. People were illiterate (did not learn to read or write). There was no education system. Only those who joined a religious order were taught to read and write.

- Virtually all Romanesque art was sacred, expressive and emotional in style. It was influenced by past traditions of ancient Rome, early Christian and Byzantine art.

- The Catholic Church gained tremendous power in Medieval Europe and began artistic projects to demonstrate its powerful role as political, religious and cultural leader.

- Romanesque art was designed to bring out powerful emotional responses through its stylized emotional style.

- Romanesque art expressed the religious passion of the era. Painting and sculpture were done in a simplified, symbolic style to suggest the importance of people and events of religious importance instead of a highly realistic style. Realism was not their goal. Instead, they wanted to communicate a religious thought or idea.
The use of heavy stone masonry, rounded arches and the basic Basilica floor plan used by the Romans was a key influence on Romanesque architecture.

The symbolic representation of important figures, the non-realistic portrayal of figures, the use of halos for the Holy, and the use of gold, during Early Christian and Byzantine art continued in the Romanesque period.
Vocabulary of Romanesque Architecture:

- **Tympanum:** A semi-circular carved or decorated space over the door of a Romanesque church.

- **Narthex:** A porch or vestibule before the main entrance of a church.
• **Mandorla:** An almond-shape enclosing the figure of the Holy, usually Christ.

• **Transept:** The part of a cross-shaped church that is at right angles to the nave.
• **Nave:** The central section of a church where the congregation assembles.

• **Crossing:** The area of the church where the transept intersects the nave. Sometimes a dome or tower is built over this area.
• **Lantern:** A small dome built atop a larger dome or on a roof to allow light to enter the structure.

![Lantern Diagram]

• **Ambulatory:** A passageway for walking around the apse of a church, usually a continuation of the side aisles.

![Ambulatory Diagram]
• **Apse:** A large semi-circular area of the church at one end that usually contains the altar. Sometimes also at the ends of the transepts.

• **Choir:** The part of the church in which the service is sung, usually in the apse.
• **Aisles**: the long narrow space on each side of the nave of the church, usually between a row of columns and the outer wall.

![Aisle Diagram](image)

• **Cathedra**: The chair or throne of a bishop. The church is then a Cathedral.

![Cathedra Image](image)
• **Campanile**: A bell tower either attached from the church or free-standing nearby.

• **Abbey**: A complex of buildings comprised of a monastery and a church.
• **Cloister:** A covered walkway or ambulatory around an open court or garden. Usually, a colonnade faces the garden, allowing light to enter.

![Image of a cloister]

• **Tracery:** Ornamental stonework in a decorative pattern with a lace-like effect.

![Image of tracery in a Gothic window]
Romanesque Architecture

- The number of Romanesque churches throughout France and Italy that are still standing after more than a thousand years can be attributed to them being built of heavy stone masonry.

- Churches replaced fire-prone wooden roofs with the Roman style Barrel and Groin/Cross Vault systems.

![Romanesque Architecture Diagrams]

St. Madeleine, Vezelay, France, 1104-32
• Church walls needed to be thick and heavy to support the massive weight of the stone roof system.

• Windows were kept to a minimum to prevent weakening the strength of the walls. As a result, the interiors of churches were dark.
• The focus and attention of Romanesque church design was on the interior because it represented the soul - the exterior represented the body. The body was of the earth and corruptible. The soul was of God, heaven and was pure.
• Interior spaces were divided into sections: Nave, Aisles, Transepts, Choir, Ambulatory, etc.

• The interiors were beautifully decorated with gold and marble altar decorations, stone sculptures, fresco painting, and Holy relics, while the exteriors were plain and fortress-like. Pilgrims, in search of salvation made pilgrimages to important shrines (Santiago, Spain, St. Peter’s, Rome, and the Holy Land) to see the relics of saints, which they believed had the power to cure disease, forgive sins, or perform miracles.
# Characteristics of Romanesque Architecture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where:</th>
<th>Western Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When:</td>
<td>1030-1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Building Form:</td>
<td>Churches, castles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan:</td>
<td>Divided spaces, Latin cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support:</td>
<td>Sturdy piers, thick walls, few windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Arch &amp; Vault:</td>
<td>Rounded arches, Barrel/Groin vaults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Decorations:</td>
<td>Stone sculptures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmospheric Effect:</td>
<td>Heavy, Massive, Dark, solemn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Inspiration:</td>
<td>Roman construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal:</td>
<td>To accommodate pilgrims, Fear of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exterior:</td>
<td>Simple, plain, fortress-like</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Castles:

- The design of castles reflected the development and use of new weapons.

- The height of castle walls was increased with the invention of towers on wheels, which served as covered ladders on wheels for soldiers.

- Moats were added when tunnels were dug under walls for protection.

- Castles were built thicker when the cannon and the catapult were designed.

- People crowded inside the walled perimeter for safety, and set up businesses in there. As a result castle walls were expanded to the point where they became fortified towns.

Carcassonne, France, 13th century
Which is Romanesque?
Which is Romanesque?
Which is Romanesque?
Romanesque Sculpture

- Romanesque art was designed to bring out powerful emotional responses through its stylized emotional style.

- Romanesque art expressed the religious passion of the era. Painting and sculpture were done in a simplified, symbolic style to suggest the importance of people and events of religious importance instead of a highly realistic style. Realism was not their goal. Instead, they wanted to communicate a religious thought or idea.

- Due to the illiteracy of the population, the church taught scripture through images in sculpture, painting, and manuscript illuminations.

The subject typically depicted in the tympanum were either *The Last Judgement* or *The Mission of the Apostles.*

The intention was to instill a fear of God and raise the passion in followers to go out and convert non-Christians.
Romanesque Sculpture

- Details are reduced to a minimum.

- The human figure is distorted and elongated for an emotional effect.

- Hideous creatures are grotesquely portrayed to instill fear in the followers by showing them images of what happens to those who stray from church and Catholic doctrine.

- Sculptural figures are attached to columns or walls, not free standing.
Manuscript Illumination

- Fancy letters and decorative illustrations that accompany hand-written biblical scripture.
- Used to aide the illiterate church goers in understanding the scriptures.
Romanesque Painting

- Church painting typically took the form of fresco wall murals. However, painting was kept to a minimum because church interiors were dark and very damp.

- Similar to sculpture, figures are rendered symbolically rather than realistically.

- Important figures are usually larger and placed in a mandorla.

The use of halos to indicate the Holy, and gold are leftovers from the Byzantine period.
Gothic Architecture & Art
12th - 13th Centuries

- Population shifted from the rural country-sides to towns that grew into cities.

- Cathedrals became the cultural and social centres of the growing cities.

- Cathedral schools replaced monasteries as learning centres.

- The new “Gothic” period was a time of fresh ideas and technical knowledge to design bigger, awe-inspiring cathedrals of light and beauty.

- The term “Gothic” was coined by the Renaissance (the period after the Gothic which favoured classical Greek and Roman designs) as being ugly and barbaric.

Chartres Cathedral, France. 1194
“Unity” was stressed in the design of Gothic churches. The interior and exterior were given equal attention to create a single harmonious design.

The Gothic style began as a result of the need to redesign the church of St. Denis in Paris by Abbot Suger.

For Abbot Suger, the old Romanesque style was too dark and heavy, but most importantly, could not allow enough pilgrims visiting the relics and statues in the ambulatory. There was a huge traffic problem.

Abbot Suger wanted more light to bathe the interior, for it represented the presence of God.

The Romanesque design was too divided into parts. He wanted an open design that eliminated the heavy walls and small windows. What emerged was a design style that dominated church design for 400 years.

Chartres Cathedral, France. 1194
Features of the Gothic Style

• The **Flying Buttress** was the structural design feature that took the lateral (sideways) thrust from the weight of the vaulted roof away from the walls of the church. It eliminated the need for thick walls and heavy piers or columns to support the vault. It also allowed for huge stained glass windows to let light flood the church interior.

• **Pointed Arches** replaced rounded arches. They could withstand more stress to allow for taller church designs and more open interior space. Romanesque rounded arches had a 2:1 height to width ratio for structural integrity. The pointed arch had a 3:1 ratio.

• Gothic designs called for the use of **Ribbed Cross Vaults** for added strength, stability and larger windows.
• The use of the flying buttress, the pointed arch, and ribbed vaults allowed for much taller churches giving a sense of verticality. Churches competed to build the tallest church. The taller it was, the closer to heaven, and the more likely it would attract more visitors.

• The Gothic church had 3-5 Portals (door entrances)

• Gothic churches had a Rose Window (Circular stained-glass window) placed over the main portal or at the ends of the transept.

• The interiors of Gothic churches were open unbroken spaces that provided a bright and airy atmosphere.
Amiens Cathedral, France. 1220.
Interior Height: 144 ft.
Cologne Cathedral, Germany. Began in 1248. Took 6 centuries to finish.

The English preferred length or width over height for their designs.

The English took the lace-like tracery and decorative fan-vaulting to a whole new level.
Most Italian Gothic architecture has little in common with the French Gothic style to the north.

Where are the Gothic features seen?
Gothic Sculpture

• The changes in the evolution of sculpture were slow but constant.

• Interest in the classical sculpture of Greece and Rome was renewed.

• The symbolism of Romanesque sculpture gave way to more naturalism and realism. Figures are elongated, drapery is still stylized and flat. Figures appear to be part of the columns. They lack a sense of movement. There is some individualization of the faces. Feet seem to be floating.

• Later, figures are casual, free from their structure and sculpted in the round. Faces are individual, expressing emotions. Drapery is loose and the folds are fully carved. There seems to be real bodies beneath the clothing. Proportions are natural. Their feet reset naturally.
The incredible detail in the Cathedral of Toledo altarpiece was designed by Peti Juan, but carved in wood by artists from Holland, France, Germany and Spain.

The figures illustrate 15 events in the life of Christ and are painted in brilliant colour.

The entire altar is unified by detailed carvings of Gothic spires, needles, platforms and canopies that are covered with gold.
High Altar, Cathedral of Toledo, Spain. 1498-1504. Detail
Tilman Riemenschneider

Claus Sluter, *The Well of Moses*. 1395-1404
Stained Glass

• The use of stained glass reached their peak in the magnificent windows of Gothic structures.

• Reds and blues dominated Gothic colour schemes.

• The windows from the cathedral at Chartres are the best examples of the jewel-like colour created by light passing through it, demonstrating “the presence of God”.

• The imagery helped the illiterate church-goers to understand the teachings of the church and to become familiar with saints, martyrs and their stories.
Interior Sainte Chapelle, Paris. 1243-1248
Late Gothic Painting

- Because stained glass images dominated, painting was kept to a minimum.

- Some altarpieces were painted, but most religious painting was restricted to manuscript illuminations.

- The freed up space behind the altar allowed for large paintings on wood panels painted in egg tempera and fresco.

- Florence, Italy, was soon to become the art capital of the world where some of the best artist would learn their craft.

Giotto, *Lamentation*, 1305-06. Fresco

Giotto revolutionized painting by reviving the art of working from nature. Figures are in active, natural poses: leaning, holding, sitting and bending. They are monumental and solid. The folds suggest weight and mass beneath. Shading creates roundness and natural light coming from above. He does away with the gold background in favour of a natural blue sky and landscape.

Duccio worked and trained in Siena (a short distance from Florence) where the Byzantine tradition was still strong as evident in the gold background.

Faces are individualized. Overlapping figures and the background landscape create depth. There is one light source to create forms of faces and figures, but there are no cast shadows on the ground.
Simone Martini, **The Annunciation**, 1333. Egg tempera and gold on panel.

A pupil of Duccio, Martini made a further break with Byzantine tradition while working for the French king in Naples. He picked up some ideas, techniques and styles from the French gothic painters.

His Annunciation (over 10 ft. wide) shows how the fabric details and precise lines are influences from his contact with French painters.

Being from Florence, da Fabriano was evidently influenced by France. By the end of the 14th century, French and Italian Gothic styles merged in the **International Style**.

His painting shows how its use of rich colours and patterned fabrics skillfully detailed are influences from his contact with French painters. Details are much more realistically rendered - one step from true three-dimensional rendering of the Renaissance.