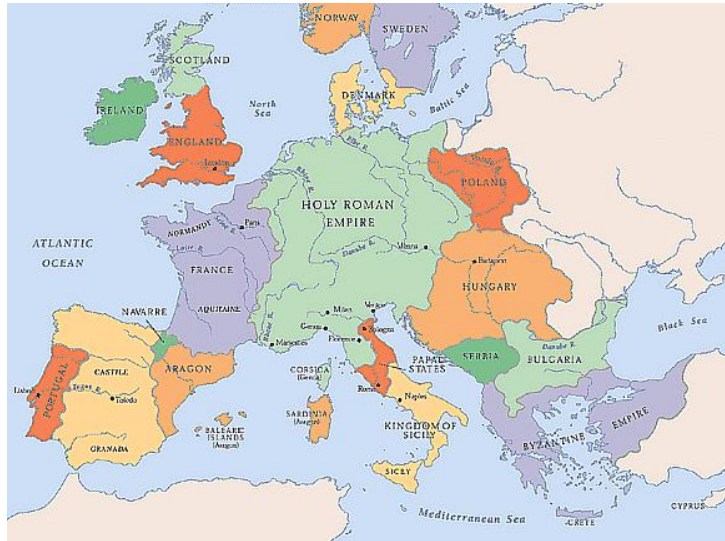


Medieval West, c. 400-1300 CE



Map of Medieval Europe & Byzantine Empire c. 950-1300

During the Medieval Era, the Church was the main patron of the arts, so most of the artwork from this time is religious in nature. Peasants paid taxes to support the church and also went on long pilgrimages to visit the enormous cathedrals. Most people could not read or write, so the artwork inside the cathedrals helped them learn and remember the teachings from the Bible. Looking lifelike or “realistic” was not as important as the symbolism and making sure artwork functioned effectively as a teaching tool.

Early Christian Era

In the early 4th century CE, the Roman Emperor, Constantine, made Christianity the official religion and sponsored the construction of the earliest churches. The design of early churches was based on the traditional plan of a Roman Basilica. Ancient Roman basilicas were not places of worship, they were used as courts of law, or for public lectures. They did not have a “cross” shape layout.



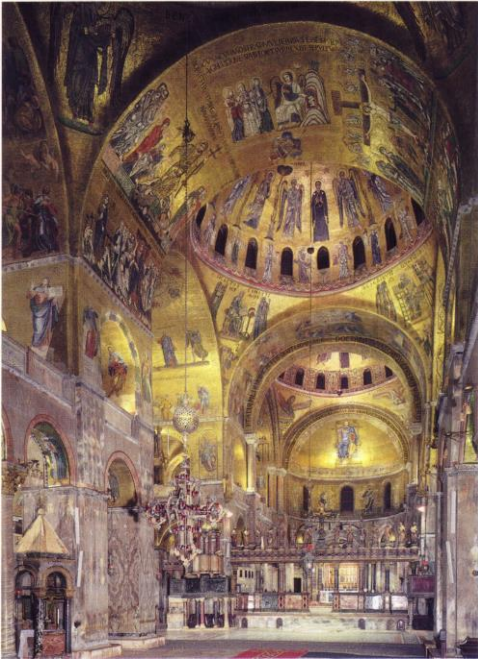
(Interior of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy, dedicated 504 CE)

This is a typical Early Christian church that was dedicated in 504 CE. The design is copied from the layout of original ancient Roman Basilicas. We are looking straight down the nave toward the apse. Early Christian churches have a large rectangular nave, a rounded apse at the end of the nave, one or two narrow side aisles, and a flat ceiling.

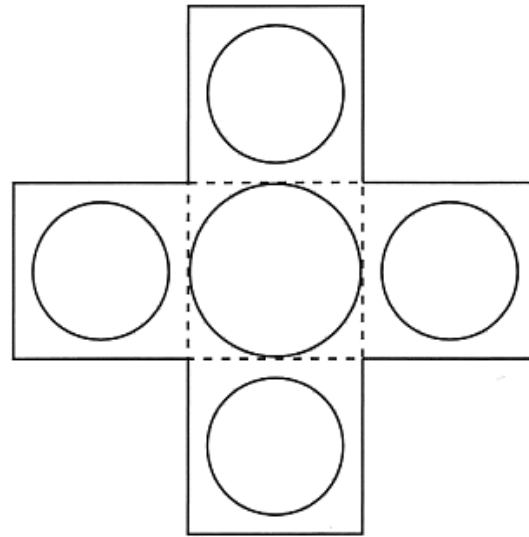
Byzantine

The term “Byzantine” refers to the Eastern Christian Roman Empire and anything identified with Byzantium, its capitol city's original name. People of this time did not identify themselves or their art as “Byzantine.” They considered themselves Romans. They were an extension of the Roman Empire after the capital was moved from Rome to Constantinople (later called Byzantium and even later, Istanbul).

Keep in mind that, while the Byzantine artists are in a different *location*, they are working during the same *time* as the Romanesque and Gothic artists in western Europe.



Interior of Saint Mark's, Venice, Italy, begun 1063



Domed Greek Cross
Saint Mark's, Venice

Byzantine floor plan based on a Greek style cross – all “arms” equal

Imagine that you are a poor peasant living in this time. You live in a small, humble hut and work all day outdoors. Most of your time is spent in very drab, even filthy, surroundings.

Think about what an amazing experience it must have been for the poor masses to enter a Byzantine cathedral or basilica. They must have thought they had been given a glimpse of heaven as they looked at all of the glittering, gold surfaces and heard the singing echoing from the vaults!

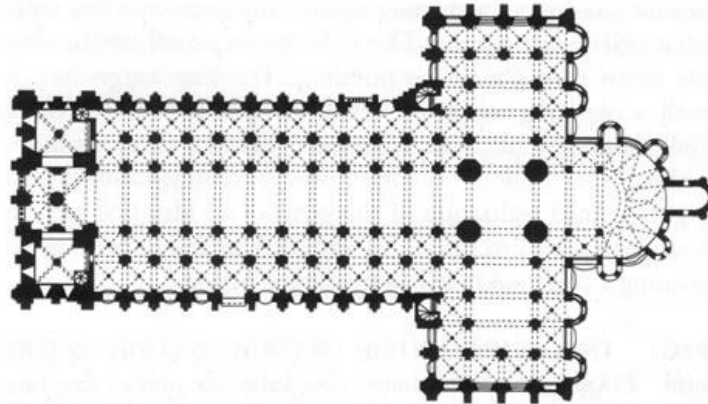
Compared to their counterparts in western Europe, the interiors of Byzantine structures are like the inside of a jewelry box! They are characterized by the use of gold and elaborate mosaics.

Mosaic = a picture or decoration made of small, usually colored pieces of inlaid stone, glass, etc.

Romanesque

Romanesque cathedrals tend to be shorter and darker, with rounded windows and arches. Most Romanesque Cathedrals were built with barrel vaulted stone ceilings. These structures were less prone to fires than the early Christian churches that had flat, wooden ceilings. The barrel vaulting also resembled ancient Roman architecture.

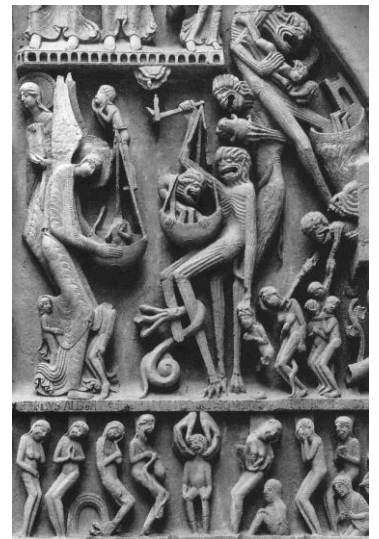
When you think of “**Romanesque**” think “*rounded.*” You can usually tell the difference between the Romanesque style and the later Gothic style by looking at the shape of the arches. Romanesque has rounded arches and Gothic arches are pointed.



Floor plan of Saint Sernin, Toulouse, France

Romanesque churches were being built during the time of the pilgrimages. There was a certain amount of competition to attract travelers on their religious journeys. The structural plan of Romanesque churches is designed to accommodate large numbers of travelers moving through. The design is more well suited for this than it is for congregational worship. The nave is quite small to accommodate gatherings.

- There are multiple side aisles and a very narrow nave. The nave is only about 1/3 of the width.
- Visitors could move through going up one side of the nave, view the sacred relics near the front and exit going back down the aisles on the opposite side.



Gislebertus *The Last Judgment*

Tympanum of the west portal, Cathedral of Saint Lazare, Autun, Burgundy, France c. 1120-35

Themes of original sin and final judgment are frequently shown in Romanesque art. Early Christian, Byzantine, and Gothic structures do not tend to show these themes as much. Gislebertus sculpted this tympanum relief showing the judgment and damnation of the sinful. The detail on the right shows people being pulled out of a line to be weighed, judged, and taken to their eternal destination.

Gothic



Early gothic jamb figures from Chartres Cathedral (France), 1134

Looking at these figures, one would conclude that the sculptor is not very concerned with idealizing the human body or with making sure the figures look life-like.

It would be a mistake to assume that the artist was only capable of creating stiff, puppet-like people. The drapery is very patterned, their legs are super long, and their hands look like Dorito chips with cocktail weenies stuck on the top!

The artist's goal was to communicate an idea or concept.

The figures are not stand-alone works of art. Instead, they are part of the architecture. They represent early founders of the church and as well as kings and queens who supported the church. The physical location of these sculpted figures makes them part of the physical foundation of the actual church structure. Their bodies are purposefully elongated to make them fit in with the architectural columns behind them and blend into the structural foundation of the building.

They represent early founders of the church and they are physically part of the foundation that supports the actual, church building. The symbolism is very direct.



Chartres Cathedral, c. 1134-1220

With the transition from Romanesque style to the Gothic style, architectural details go from being rounded to being pointed. Instead of rounded arches in Romanesque, you'll see pointed, lancet arches the architecture in Gothic structures.

Gothic architects use increasingly more complicated building methods, such as buttressing, to allow them to build higher and to incorporate more windows.

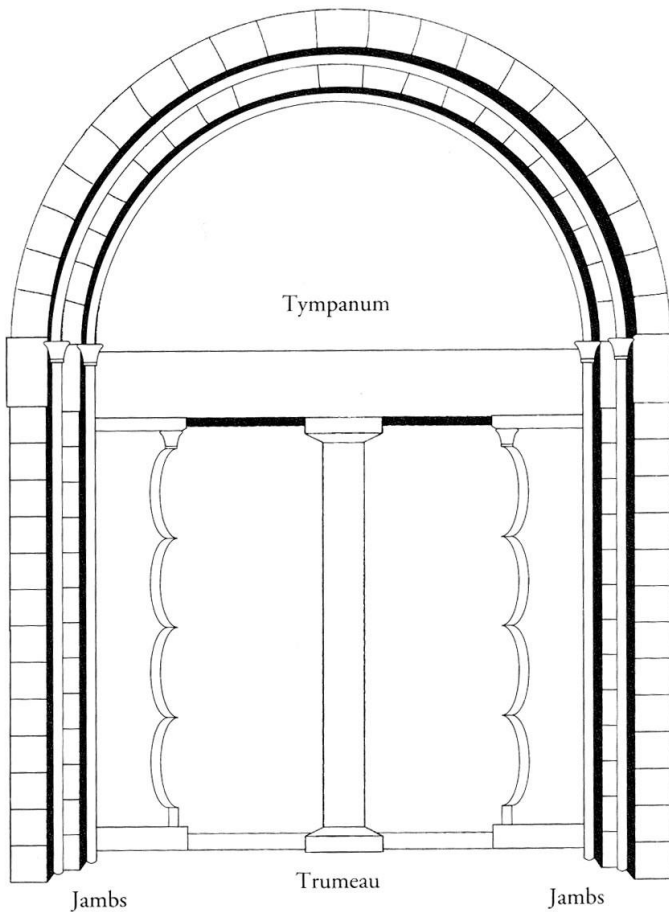
Gothic style includes beautiful stained glass, large rose windows, flying buttresses, and quadrant arch buttressing.

As time progresses you notice architectural details, such as arches and towers, becoming increasingly taller and pointier.

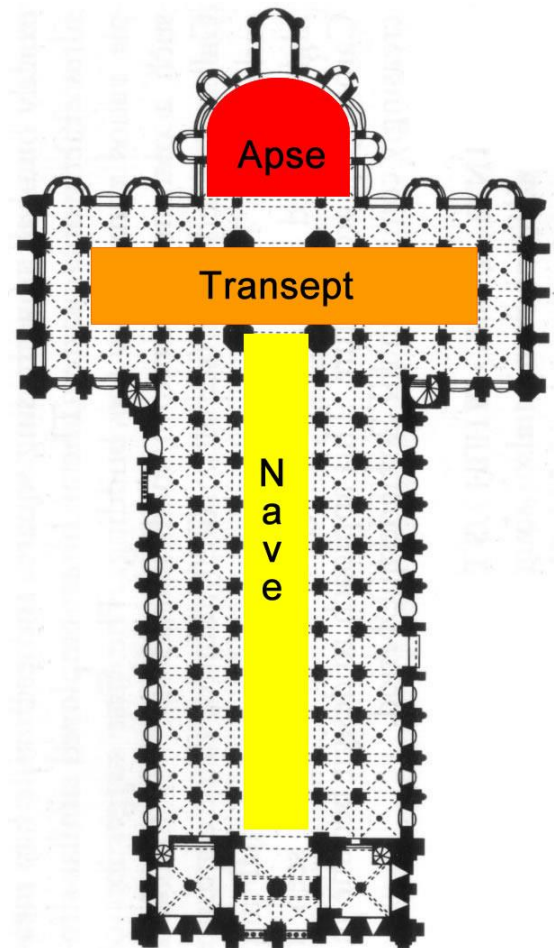
Notice that the two towers of this Gothic cathedral are different. These huge, stone structures took so long to build that the architects and builders could not always keep up with the changing styles and techniques. The north tower at Chartres is over 30 feet taller and was finished over 350 years after the south tower was built!

You can often date different parts of a church based on how tall and pointy they are. The taller and pointer, the later the date!

Romanesque Church Portal



Major parts of the floor plan for a Romanesque or Gothic Church



Tympanum = area above door that is enclosed by an arch

Trumeau = center post in a doorway

Jambs = vertical elements on both sides of a doorway

Apse = a large semicircular recess in a church, typically at the eastern end, and usually containing the altar.

Transept = the two parts forming the arms of the cross shape, projecting at right angles from the nave.

Nave = the main, central part of a church building, intended to accommodate most of the congregation.