

European - Romanesque & Gothic

Architecture | Sample answer

The establishment of monasteries and the popularity of pilgrim routes contributed to the development of Romanesque architecture. Discuss this statement with reference to one named example of a Romanesque church or cathedral that you have studied. Refer in your answer to construction techniques, structure and layout.

and

Briefly describe and discuss one named example of Romanesque sculpture. Illustrate your answer. (2019 Q8)

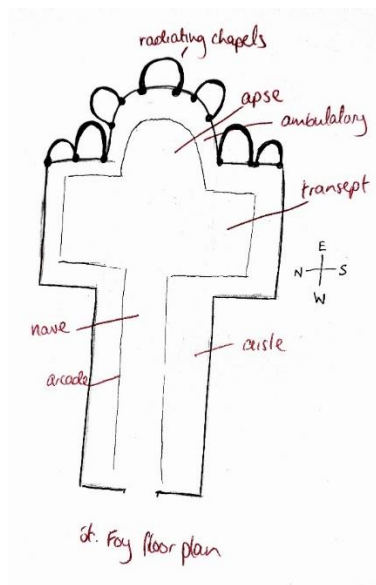
Romanesque means “roman-like”, and was an architectural movement characterised by rounded Roman arches and thick, heavy walls. It was common throughout Europe eleventh and twelfth centuries. One example of Romanesque architecture is St. Foy in Conques, southern France.

Towards the eleventh century, there was widespread existential panic due to the turn of the millennium, and people turned to religion to comfort them in what they thought was the end of the world. When this, of course, didn't happen, there was an emerging feeling of hope and optimism. This, in turn, strengthened the power of the church, and there was a growth in monasticism. Monasteries began housing relics of saints and martyrs brought back to Europe from the crusades. One example of such a relic can be found in the Church of St. Foy- the church is dedicated to St. Foy, and her relics are housed there along with a gold sculpture made in her likeness. In fact, the church is built on top of her tomb.

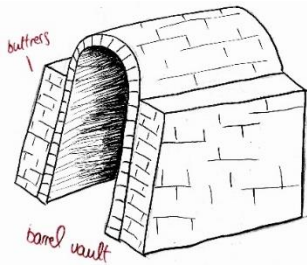
The popularity of relics meant that many dedicated Christians went on long pilgrimages to visit them, believing that relics had healing powers. They created routes between monasteries- “pilgrimage roads”. One of the most popular pilgrimage destinations was Santiago de Compostella

in North Western Spain, which housed the bones of St. James. St. Foy lay along the pilgrimage road for this popular destination, and so it was a popular pit stop for pilgrims. Around this time, large churches were needed to accommodate pilgrims, and St Foy was no exception.

St Foy is one of the earliest examples of Romanesque architecture still standing in Europe- construction began around 1050AD and took 80 years to build. It is very narrow for its height when compared to other Romanesque buildings. The structural layout is typical of a Romanesque floor plan, based on simple rectangular plan of Roman Basilica. Previously rectangular floor plans developed into Latin cross shape to accommodate more people. The nave runs from the entrance portal to the centre of the church. The transept runs north-south perpendicular to the nave. The crossing is space where the transept meets the nave, usually topped with a domed tower. The apse is the main altar area at the eastern arm of the church. The ambulatory is an arcaded area for pilgrims to walk around the main altar. Side aisles are separated from the central nave by a row of arches supported by massive rectangular piers. Radiating chapels are smaller chapels (often holding a relic) situated on either side of the apse.

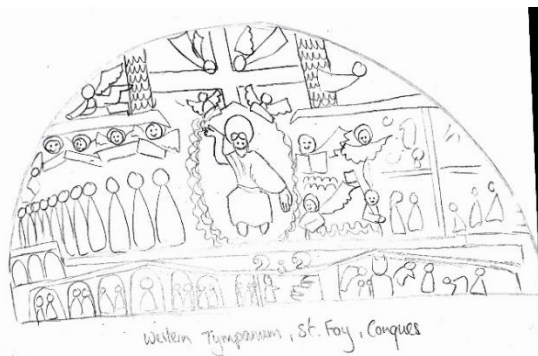


The roof is mostly created using a barrel vault- a long uninterrupted arch forming a semi-circular roof vault over a rectangular space. This is formed using a series of transversal arches resting on the pillars of the nave. The system is repeated in bays. This vaulting over the nave is 22m 10cm in height- very high for its time. This created immense outward pressure on the walls, which had to be counteracted with massive buttresses to strengthen the outside. The walls had very small windows because of this pressure- otherwise, the walls would collapse. In the aisles, there is groin vaulting, formed by an intersection of barrel vaults. This distributes pressure more evenly and gives rise to bigger windows.



The oldest part of the church is the chancel area. An ambulatory is around the East end, and this ambulatory is covered by groin vault. There is a gallery is above ambulatory, and a clerestory is over the gallery- identified by series of pillars and arches (blind arcade). Unlike other churches, St Foy has no clerestory in the nave, it has an arcade and gallery only. Chapels form a crown around the apse, and there is a discreet entrance on the south side which was used by monks.

One of the most striking characteristics of Romanesque sculpture is the unity between it and the architecture- sculpture is almost always directly connected to the building. The main locations for sculpture are capitols, arches and tympana. An example of Romanesque sculpture can be seen in the Western Tympanum in St. Foy. This Tympanum depicts God in the centre, dividing the tympanum in half, with his left arm raised and his right arm pointing downward. It shows an orderly, pleasant heaven on the left and a chaotic Hell on the right. Religious scenes depicting heaven and hell like this were popular for tympana. Their main function was to educate the largely illiterate worshippers on the Bible. God is portrayed as a ruler, a judge and a saviour. The main message of most tympana was pretty simple: if you live a life of sin, you will be punished.



The Western Tympanum in St. Foy shows Mary, Peter and other saints on the left approaching God. There is an angel on the right holding a book, recording all the good and bad deeds. There are two more angels on the right: one holds a lance and the other holds a shield. The lower left section depicts an arcade representing the House of Paradise. In the centre is Abraham comforting two figures who have been saved from hell, and to the left and right are other holy men and women.

A tympanum like this was a tricky feat for a carver, who had to make concepts like heaven and hell seem real to worshippers. There was no major concern about anatomical accuracy or proportion, as errors did not deduct from religious education. They added emotional impact to their work by painting the scenes with various colour schemes borrowed from manuscript paintings, though much of the paint has since worn away.

