

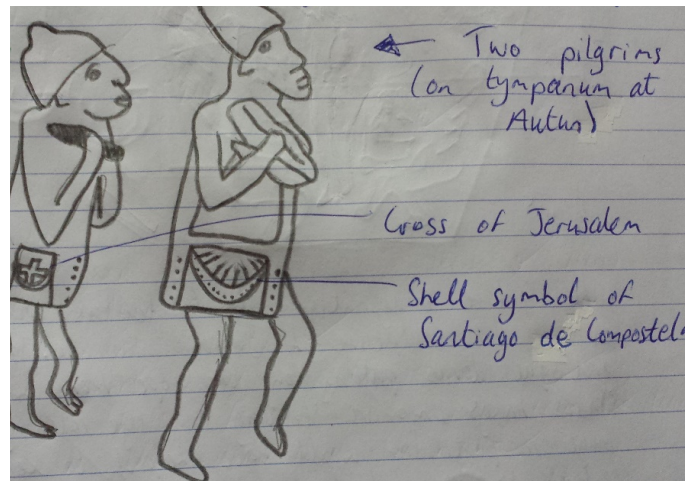
2016 Higher Level Question 8

The artistic imagination and skills of Romanesque sculptors allowed images of life, death, judgement and the afterlife to be central to the churches and cathedrals of the time. Discuss this statement with reference to a named Romanesque church or cathedral you have studied AND briefly describe and discuss the main architectural features of Romanesque architecture. Illustrate your answer.

I have studied the Romanesque Autun Cathedral, situated in Burgundy, Eastern France. It is thought to have been built halfway through the 12th Century, nearing the end of the Romanesque period in churches and cathedrals. It is typical of Romanesque architecture, which had originally become popular in the 11th Century when Christians discovered that the world would not end as they had thought. This was seen as a new chance at life at the time and caused a huge increase in prosperity across Europe, particularly in the churches. Pilgrimage routes were set up and began to draw so many people that the church built more places of worship, one of the most well-known being Cathédrale Saint-Lazare in Autun. This cathedral was famous for its impressive sculptures by the Romanesque sculptor Giselbertus.

Giselbertus – artistic imagination and skill

The artistic imagination and skill of Giselbertus – and all other Romanesque sculptors – were definitely the main factor in allowing images of life, death, judgement and the afterlife to be central to Romanesque churches and cathedrals. Giselbertus's high level of skill can be seen in the tympanum and carved capitals in Autun, most likely learned at Cluny where he trained. The tympanum depicts The Last Judgement and displays all of these central images.



Afterlife

His attention to detail is witnessed in the pilgrims on the tympanum, a small example of which is in the above illustration. In just these two pilgrims we can see the skill of Giselbertus and his knowledge of his subject, including the symbols of pilgrim destinations in his sculpture. These two pilgrims are amongst those souls who were saved and welcomed to heaven on Christ's right (our left). The image of afterlife created here would have been very important to peasants.

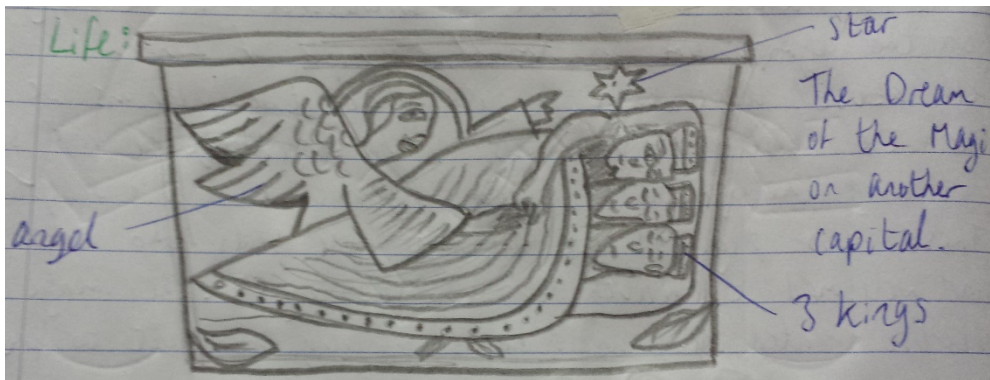


These other souls who have been chosen for Paradise express their gratitude and appear much more peaceful than the sculpture of afterlife in hell on Christ's left.



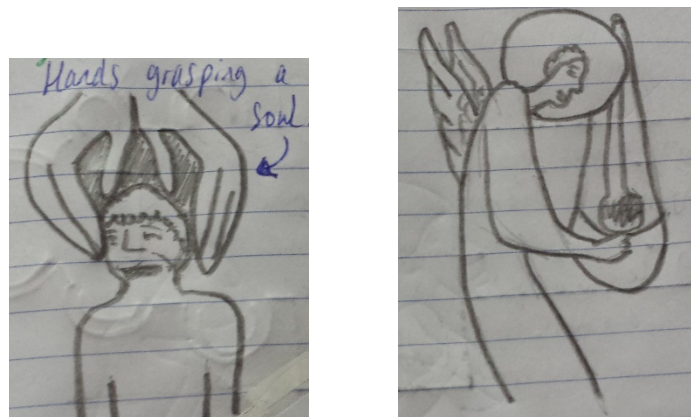
Death

The creative imagination of Giselbertus can be seen in his sculpture of Judas's suicide. The grotesque devils pulling on the rope from which Judas hangs limp are striking and eye-catching. This image in particular would have helped to keep death central to the Cathedral in Autun.



Life

The dream of the Magi is an image of life sculpted on another capital in Autun. It shows an angel pointing to the star and gently waking one of the three kings to show him, a reminder of what led them to Bethlehem and to baby Jesus.



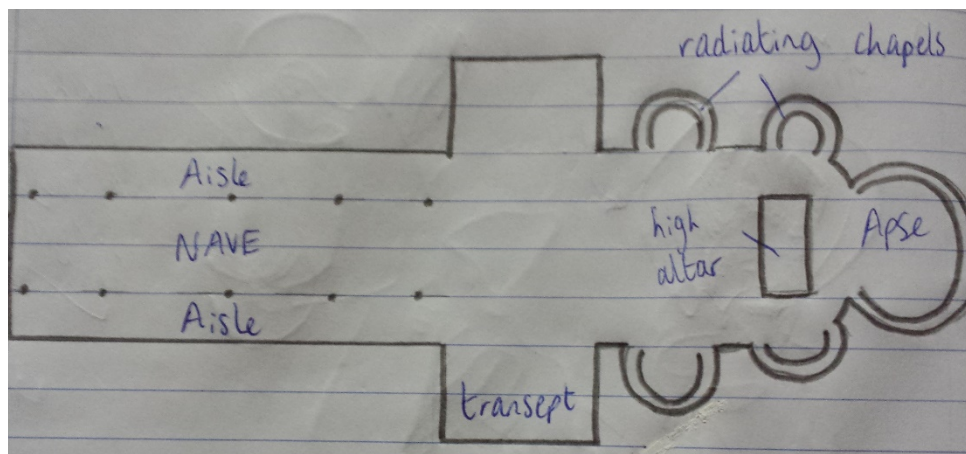
Judgement

The tympanum contains many pieces concerning the judgement of souls. Two such sculptures are the grasping of a soul by two large hands to be taken with the damned and the archangel Michael physically weighing a soul. Giselbertus then shows these souls either being chosen to enter paradise or be thrown into hell after judgement is passed.

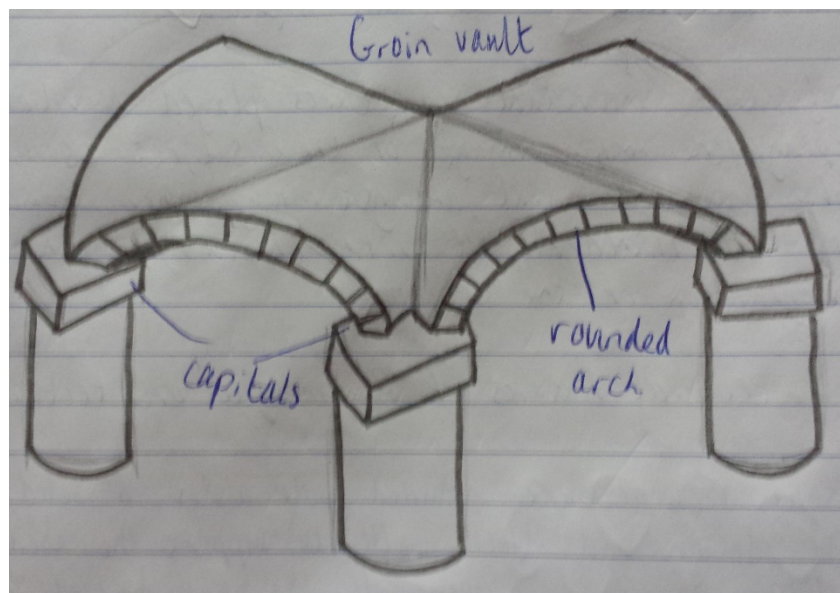
All of these individual sculptures played a vital role in keeping the main image of their subject as a central part of Autun Cathedral, amongst many other Romanesque churches and cathedrals, all with thanks to the skill and imagination of the sculptor.

Main architectural features of Romanesque architecture:

Romanesque architecture included wide aisles, a solid blocky geometric design and thick walls to support the weight of the roof. The roofs were generally high and barrel or groin vaulted, 2-3 metres in thickness filled with a core of rubble.



The cruciform-shaped floor plan contained transepts just before the altar, an apse behind it and radiating chapels around it, which were used to house the precious relics. It was also very common for Romanesque churches to have dark interiors due to small windows.



Rounded arches could be found on most doors and windows. Rounded pillars were topped with capitals, sometimes carved. The pillars and walls were so thick in order to withstand the weight of the stone bearing down on it.