

The Romanesque Period | H1 Notes

The Times

Much like during 1999, many people believed the world would end on the eve of the new millennium (1000AD), and that **The Day of Judgement** was nigh. To prepare for this possibility, most people reckoned they ought to polish up their souls and such, and so embarked on gruelling **pilgrimages**, (guaranteed to cleanse thy soul & prepare thee for thine immortal life!!!), to places of religious focus like **Santiago de Compostela**, (supposedly the burial place of St James) to prove beyond doubt that they were **devout** enough to merit a place in The Evermore. Pilgrims also visited the many monasteries and dioceses along the way.

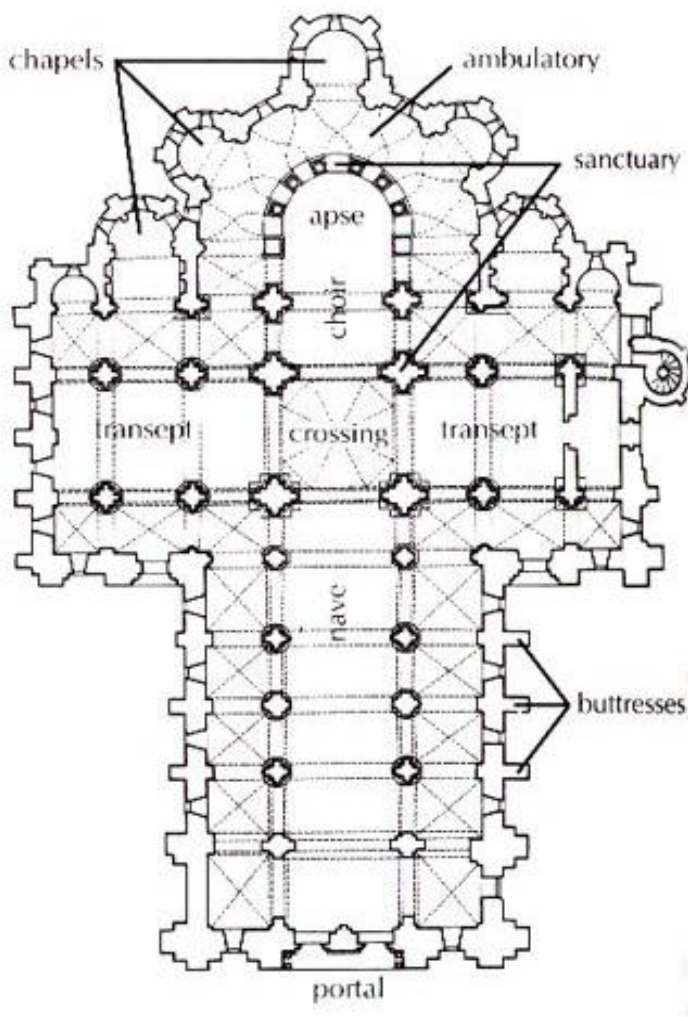
Over time, the high footfall along these many routes brought wealth & status to the towns along the way, and so many smaller cathedrals sprang up around these routes. Places like the Church of **Sainte-Foy** (Saint Faith), in **Conques**, France, were built to house and celebrate the holy **relics** within. (The relics themselves were often in **reliquaries**, special artefacts made to hold these items of special religious significance). The reliquary in the Church of Sainte-Foy is said to hold the remains of, Saint Faith. This made Conques an important stop on the way to Santiago de Compostela. Even after the turn of the millennium, religious pilgrimages remained very popular. Even today, the many routes of the Camino attract thousands of visitors to northern Spain.

The Architecture (Very, very important!!!)

The style of architecture favoured by the builders of these cathedrals was reminiscent of earlier structures built by the **Romans**, (hence the term Romanesque – like the romans), where most of the structures were built with **rounded arches**. A continuous rounded arch, (as a ceiling), known as a **barrel vault**, was fundamental to many of these buildings. Typically, they were **cruciform**, (running East-West, with the **transept** ("arms" of the cross) running North-South).

Below, the plan of a typical cathedral of the time is shown. The intersection of the two **barrel vaults** is known as a **groin vault**. These ceilings were supported by **columns** (round pillars), and **piers** (square or rectangular pillars).

Particular areas within the buildings had special roles. The **nave** is the main area of the church, running from the entrance to the centre of the church. The **side aisles** were separated from the nave by arches, (arcade). The **transept** is perpendicular to the nave, (generally running North-

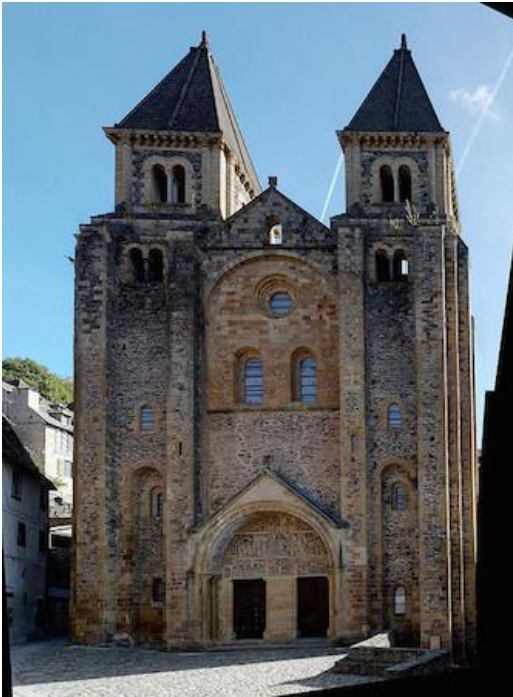


South. **North**, the **darker** side, often represented The **Old Testament** (pre-Jesus), and the **southern** arm, the **brighter** side, usually represented The **New Testament**). The **crossing** is the area where the nave and transept intersect. The **choir** and the **apse** make up the main altar area of the church. Around the main altar area is the **ambulatory**, from which pilgrims could observe the service, and visit the **radiating chapels**, which contained **shrines**, **relics** and **reliquaries**. Often, **buttressing** was needed to **support** the walls, as the heavy stone structure of the roof put immense pressure on the walls.

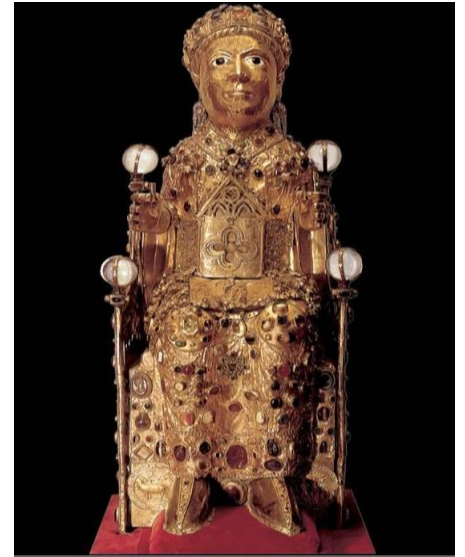
The plan of the Church of Sainte-Foy is shown.

Church of Sainte-Foy

11th Century – Conques, France

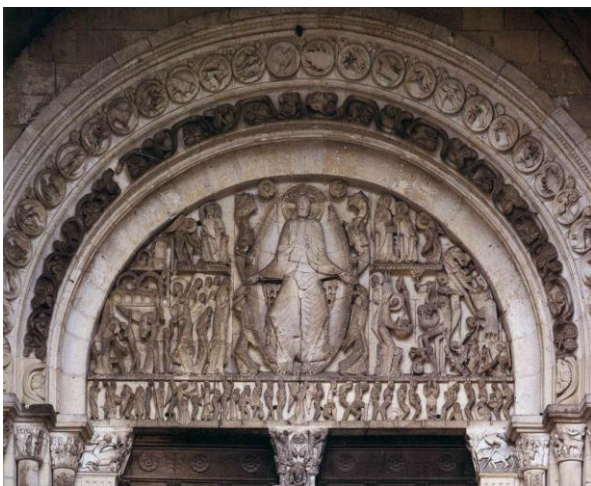


Note the many typical Romanesque features, including **radiating chapels**, buttressing, rounded arches, barrel vaults, crossing, side aisles, high ceiling, dim interior & transept. Shown are the **portal** (doorway), interior, exterior & **reliquary** (said to contain the remains of Saint Faith). Above, plan of the Church of Sainte-Foy. (Supposedly, the reliquary was stolen by the Benedictine monks of the abbey of Conques, in order to attract pilgrims)



The Sculpture

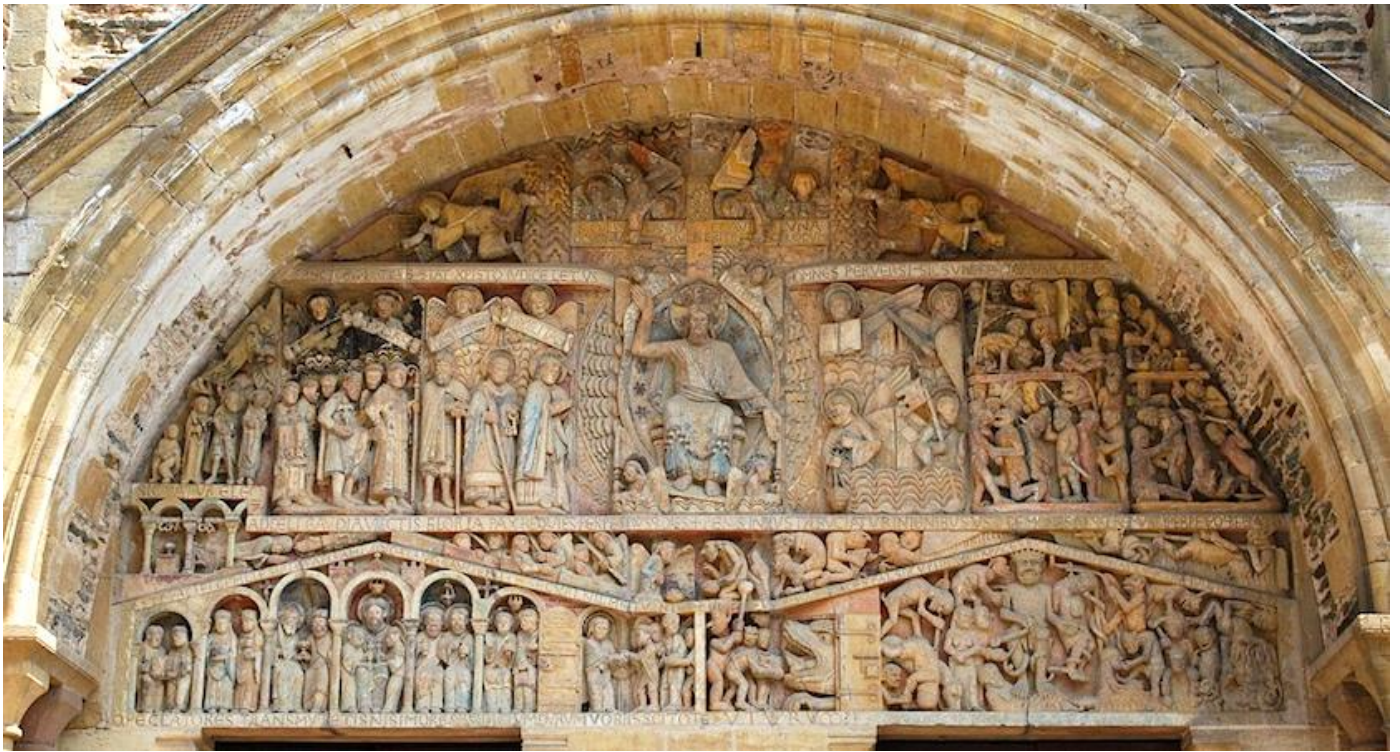
Most Romanesque sculpture is limited to high relief **tympanums**, elaborately decorated **arches** and **capitals**, (therefore is known as **architectural sculpture**). As with the Early Christian High Crosses, most of the subject matter deals with **biblical narratives**, and was used to teach bible stories to the illiterate pilgrims. The **tympanum** is the space over the lintel of a door in an archway. In Romanesque churches, this area is usually highly decorated, often depicting **Judgement Day**, serving as a **warning** and **incentive** to the people entering the church. Below "**The Tympanum of Last Judgement**" at the Church of Sainte-Foy in Conques is more fully described.



The **Cathedral of St. Lazare**, (as in Lazarus, who rose from the dead), also has a historically valuable tympanum (shown left). The **subject matter**, (Doomsday), is the same as in Conques, but what makes the piece so important is that the sculptor has signed it. "**Gislebertus** made this" is inscribed near the base of the piece. This shows that artists were **well respected** at this time.

The Tympanum of Last Judgement

11th Century – Church of Sainte-Foy, Conques, France



Jesus is **central** & **largest** (and therefore most important) figure. Shown in a **mandorla** (like halo, suggests a corona of heavenly illumination, shows holiness). Hand **raised in blessing** (therefore blessing pilgrims etc. as they pass below). Above, angels with horns & trumpets, calling the dead up, announcing **Judgment Day**. Visible above Jesus is large cross.

To Christ's **right**, are those destined for **Heaven**. Note order, calm, serene expressions. Saints etc. signified by their various **symbols**. **Pilgrims** also shown, symbols such as the **scallop shell** of the **Camino** de Santiago de Compostela show their devoutness.

Left, the four **Evangelists** (writers of the Gospels). Further left, shows **sinners**, destined for Hell. Note **chaos**, twisted forms, torment, **demons**.

Below, centre, weighing of souls. Souls sent to Heaven or Hell. Right, **St Peter's Gate**, (gates of Heaven) Note again the order, calm & serene expressions. Saints etc., stand shown with **haloes**.

Above the "**House of Paradise**", to right, **St Faith** kneels before the outstretched **Hand of God**.

Other side of "roof" angels open graves.

Below, centre, right, sinners are fed to the **Mouth of Hell**, monstrous from, clear agony, terror, pain etc. on faces. Further right shows torment of these "lost souls." Demons cavorting etc. in the chaos. Above, demons claim souls.

Thoroughly **horrifying** to the medieval pilgrim. Reinforcing the doctrine of the Church.

Writing Your Answer

Generally, the question will ask give a picture of, or ask for, a Romanesque tympanum, to be illustrated, described and discussed. I find that the Last Judgment tympanum of Conques is generally easy to break down and discuss due to the way it's segmented into different parts. You don't need to draw every little detail. Try separating the picture into zones, then on the day, throw in a handful of **rough details**, labelling everything you can. However, if your heart is 100% set on doing this question, I'd recommend you find out a little about the tympanum of the Cathedral of St Lazare, (just in case of the unlikely scenario that you're given a picture of the one at Conques, and it asks you to discuss another). Typically. The "**and**" will ask you about the architecture (or these two could be reversed, architecture first, tympanum second), in which case it is essential that you discuss rounded arches & barrel vaults, and give a basic summary of the parts of the typical Romanesque church. If you can, try put in a few **quick sketches** of these. You don't need to know the floor plan by heart, just a rough idea of the cruciform plan with a few labels will suffice. Definitely the most important thing in Art History is **LABELS**.

Alternatively, the question could also ask about the reason why all of these elaborate buildings were built, in which case, discuss the pilgrim routes and the wealth they brought.

Sources

- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-america/medieval-europe-islamic-world/a/church-and-reliquary-of-sainte-foy-france>
- <https://www.britannica.com/place/cathedral-of-Saint-Lazare>
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