

The Gothic Period | H1 Notes

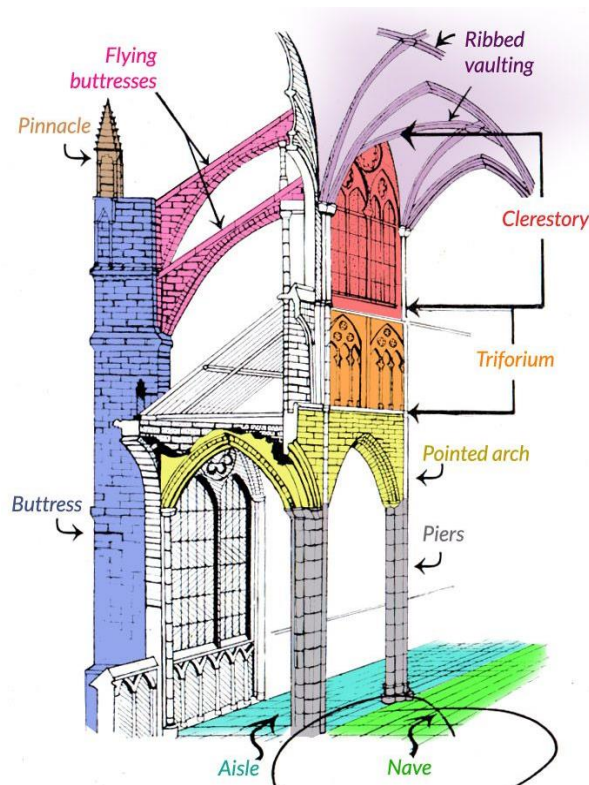
The Times

Following the Romanesque period, European **trade** saw a time of great expansion, and the resulting wealth gave **The Church** (and other **patrons**) the means to fund **monumental**, ornately beautiful cathedrals and basilicas. The size and majesty of the buildings also showed the **wealth** and **power** of The Church. As a result, the ornate style of **Gothic architecture** developed. Generally the Gothic Period is said to be from the **mid-12th** century to the **16th** century. Typically the Gothic Period is associated with France. (See **St Denis** Cathedral, Paris, the “birthplace of Gothic architecture”)

As well as the developments in architecture, **sculpture** and **stained glass** played a greater role in the building and were used to **educate** and tell stories to the illiterate.

The Architecture (Very, very important!!!)

Gothic architecture is mostly based on the **pointed arch**, (the pointed arch distributes weight differently to the rounded arches typical of Romanesque architecture), and **rib vaulting**. Rib vaulting is where thicker **load bearing** stone is used to support the roof, which is made of lighter (non-load bearing) stone, (and so is **reduced in weight**). Using **buttressing**, and these techniques, architects could build **taller** cathedrals with **more windows**. Buttressing is the technique of adding external **half arches** (**flyers**, in pink), to support the walls of the cathedral.



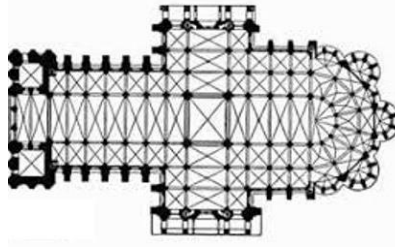
As with the Romanesque Period, particular areas within the buildings had special roles. The **nave** is the main area of the church, running from the entrance to the centre of the church. The **side aisles** were separated from the nave by a row of arches, (the arcade). The **transept** is perpendicular 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**.

Gothic Architecture can be sorted into 3 styles; **Early/Experimental**, **High/Classical** & **Late/Flamboyant**. Opinions differ, some would include **Rayonnant** (As in rays of the sun, seen in the radiating patterns of large High and Late Gothic **rose windows**), as between Classical and Flamboyant, (but so long as you stay consistent during your answer, it's not important whether you chose to include this or not).

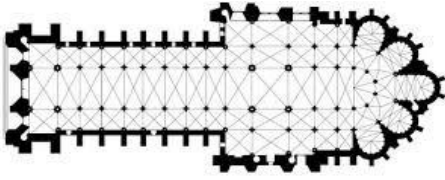
Chartres Cathedral

12th Century – Experimental/Early Gothic – Chartres, France



Existing cathedral was rebuilt after a fire. Original sculpture and **stained glass** survived.

Believed to be **blessed** as a result. This **relic** made it a pilgrimage destination. Short transept, Gothic arches, rib vaulting, shows innovative use of buttressing, allowing for **many windows**.



Reims Cathedral

13th Century – Classical/High Gothic – Reims, France



Highly **decorative** **façade**,

elaborate external statuary.

Three portals & two large towers

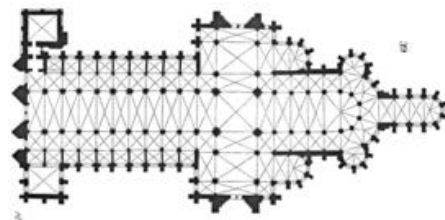
dominate façade. No sculpture

on tympanum, delicate **rose window** instead. Buttressing at

eastern end shown. As building took so long, a **mix of styles** is

visible. Short transept. Western end narrower than eastern.

Statuary was damaged during WW I.



Rouen Cathedral

15th Century – Flamboyant/Late Gothic – Rouen, France

Lavish façade. Plenty of statuary, ornamentation and

intricate window tracery. Elaborate **open stonework**

over portals (typical of Late Gothic). Large **rose**

window over portal. Extended transept. Two towers

over entrance of **contrasting styles** and times. Good

examples of **Rayonnant** style on transept façades.

Featured in famous series of **Monet** paintings.



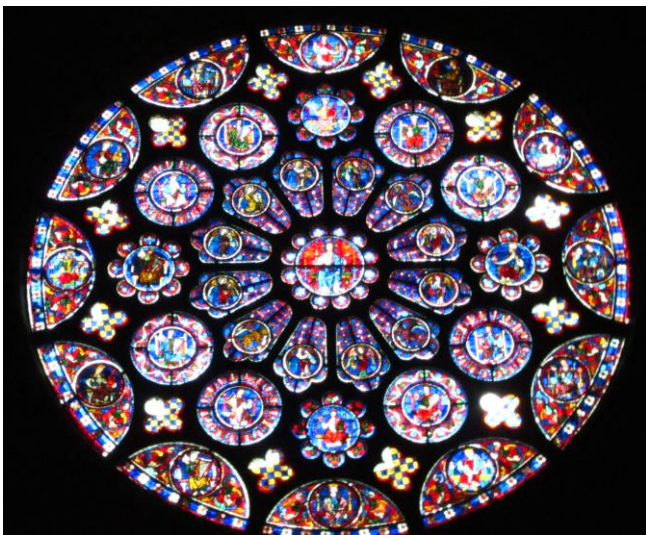
The Stained Glass

Figurative subject matter, tells story to teach illiterate. Reflected views of patron(s). The architecture was used to maximise the amount of stained glass.

Pigments were added to glass (metal oxides etc.). Pieces cut, shaped. Details painted with enamel paint. Fired to bond enamel. Pieces assembled in iron frame & lead strips.

Circular **rose** windows (below), smaller circular **medallion** windows (below in Chartres), tall pointed **lancet** windows (Blue Virgin).

Earlier glass (12th–13th Century), was **vividly coloured**. Stood out in dim interiors. As later architecture (14th Century onwards), made more room for glass, brighter interiors meant colours were muted. Below, earlier rose window in Chartres versus later Sainte–Chapelle Paris, (considered Rayonnant).





The Blue Virgin

12th Century – Experimental/Early Gothic –Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France

Survived the fire that destroyed the original Romanesque Chartres Cathedral. Considered **blessed**. Became pilgrimage **relic**. Enthroned Mary shown in blue as “**Queen of Heaven**.” Also Holy Spirit (as dove over Mary’s head). Child-Man Jesus in lap. Stands out against blue. Censors to either side. Angels etc. surround the pair. Rich ruby red contrasts deep blue.

The Sculpture

Unlike architectural Romanesque sculpture, Gothic sculpture was considered **form of art in its own right**. Sculpture became more **3 dimensional**, often **in the round** rather than just relief. As with stained glass, these sculptures told stories and taught lessons. They were designed to **teach** the stories of The Faith to the **illiterate**. They also provided **decoration**, and **showed the wealth and power** of the Bishop in charge of the cathedral.

The sculpture was both internal and external, as capitals, on buttresses, facades & around doorways. The figures were more realistic, with expressive faces and more relaxed, natural poses.

Portal figures, Chartres Cathedral

12th Century – Early Gothic– Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France



The “**Royal Portal**,” (as the entranceway of the **west** façade (front entrance) is known) shows the development of stiff **architectural** Romanesque sculpture into the more **naturalistic**, almost **free standing** works of later Gothic masters like **Claus Sluter** (see **Well of Moses**).

The portal figures are of the Old Testament. They are vertically distorted **elongated column-statues**. This particular **innovation** is an example of Gothic style. The drapery is stylised rather than realistic, but their gestures are **expressive**, and their expressions



are **realistic** and more **naturalistic** than Romanesque figures. They show the beginnings of Early Gothic style. (Compare these statues to those on the north transept to see how Gothic style develops.)

The Annunciation & Visitation

13th Century – Classical/High Gothic – Reims Cathedral, Reims, France



These four figures decorate the west façade of Reims Cathedral (which is famous for the **quality** of its sculpture). As with Chartres, the sculpture follows the architectural forms of the building.

The **free-standing** sculptures stand **contrapposto** and though they are elongated, are carved in a **naturalistic** style.

They have realistic, expressive faces and personalities. They interact with one another and gesture expressively.

As you look at them, it becomes immediately obvious that the two pairs were carved by different artists. The Annunciation, on the left is carved in a **contemporary** style. The angel has a broad smile and the pairs' gestures and poses look more **natural**. By contrast, the **heavy, exaggerated** drapery of the other figures (The Visitation), looks far more stiff and staged. The style of this pair mimics earlier **Roman** sculpture.

The Well of Moses

14th Century – Flamboyant/Late Gothic – Dijon, France



Claus Sluter was considered the best Medieval sculptor. He designed and made The Well of Moses for the cloisters of a monastery near Dijon. His figures are **realistic** and **expressive**.

The hexagonal base supports the central column and each of the six prophets, (separated by columns).

The figure of each prophet is **naturalistic, expressive** and **realistic**.

Sluter breaks form tradition by having his figures **stand out** from the niche behind them. They have **intense expressions**, their gestures

are emphasised by the **dramatic folds** of their clothing, and the figures are **short**, stolid, of life-like proportions. This epitomises the development of Gothic sculpture. (Compare to Chartres)

On each dividing column stands an **angel**, each with a unique pose and expression. Their wings are outspread as they create a border between the prophets at the base and the **crucifixion** scene (now **missing**), which was on top of the well. Originally, the whole thing was richly **painted**. Traces of the colours remain.

Writing Your Answer

Generally, the question focuses on a particular sculpture or stained glass window, with the “and” part asking about Gothic architecture. Alternatively, these two can be reversed. Sometimes the question will ask you to **compare** pieces, Early and Late Gothic, or Romanesque & Gothic. (In which case, describe each piece in every point you make, but make sure to bring it back to the question and say how they are similar/different). As with Romanesque sculpture, you don’t need to draw every little detail of the piece. So long as you give the basic idea, you’ll get the marks. Don’t forget to label it.

If you’re asked about the architecture it is essential to discuss **pointed arches**, **rib vaulting**, and give a quick and basic summary of the parts of the typical Gothic church. If you can, try put in a few **quick sketches** of these. (You don’t need to know any floor plans by heart, if you want to (when asked about a particular building), you can include a rough idea of the plan with a few labels). As always, the most important thing in Art History is **LABELS**.

Sources

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